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MEXICO
AND THE
CATHOLIC CHURCH

by

JOSEPH LEWIS

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EDITORIAL FOREWORD

IT IS common knowledge that, ever since the successful establishment of the Republic of Mexico during the administrations of Presidents Obregon, Calles, and Cardanes, there has been a terrific conflict between the Government and the Roman Catholic Church.

The crisis has been severe. Blood has been spilled in actual insurrection by the Church and its followers.

If for no other reason, the religious crisis in Mexico has held the nationwide attention of our country. It was, therefore, decided that a public debate be held on the subject so that the question could be presented by men who were competent to discuss the question, and who could be considered representative of the opposing forces.

Through the courtesy of Mr. S. Theodore Granik, the facilities of the "Forum Hour" on Radio Station W O R, on Sunday, July 7, 1935, were offered.

The subject selected for the debate was:

"Is Mexico's Religious Policy Justified?"

The affirmative was supported by Mr. Joseph Lewis, President of the Freethinkers of America.

The negative was taken by Hon. William J. Boylan, Member of the House of Representatives of the United States from the State of New York.

The publishers must offer an apology to readers of

this pamphlet. In printing a debate it is but common courtesy to publish the addresses of *both* speakers. Unfortunately, in this instance, Congressman Boylan declined to permit the inclusion of his address. A copy of his address may be had by writing to him.

Yet, even though Congressman Boylan's address is missing, it is felt that those who read Mr. Lewis's presentation as contained here will be satisfied that they have obtained every fundamental point of the subject—especially since the public vote, as received by the officials of W O R, stood nearly two to one in favor of Mr. Lewis.

*Radio Address Delivered by Mr. Joseph Lewis,
President of the Freethinkers of America,
Over Station WOR Sunday, July 7, 1935,
on the Question:*

“IS MEXICO’S RELIGIOUS POLICY JUSTIFIED”

I CONSIDER it a great privilege to defend the Mexican people in their present religious controversy with the Catholic Church.

From the facts in my possession, coupled with indisputable records from the pages of history, not only do I justify the Mexican people in curbing the activities of the church, I also believe the firm stand they have taken was necessary to their security and peace.

In debating an important question of this kind it would be an act of cowardice on my part if I failed to speak the truth which the facts demand.

Where human liberty and human life are involved, I do not consider any institution too sacred to be exposed. Nor do I believe that the ends of justice can be achieved by remaining silent upon a subject, merely because a religious institution is involved.

No wrong can be too old or too venerable to be attacked.

And he who decides a case, though he may decide rightly, if he has not heard both sides of the question has not done justice.

In my opinion, there is no question of religious liberty involved in this controversy.

If this were a question of religious freedom, I would plead with all the power and strength that I

possess not only for the Catholic Church, but for any church; and not only for any church, but for any individual.

I do not believe that religious liberty depends upon arguments.

It is a fundamental human right.

Although I believe that religion has been a retarding influence upon the intellectual and social life of the human race I would not, for a single moment, deprive any person of the right to worship or to hold any religious opinion he desires.

This right, however, belongs equally to the person who does not worship and who is free from any religious beliefs whatsoever.

But religion, to an even greater degree than charity, covers a multitude of sins.

When a religious organization aligns itself with the forces of reaction it cannot cry "Intolerance" and "Persecution" if it meets the forces of progress.

Catholicism is not the native religion of the Mexican.

It is foreign and alien to his nature.

It was not until the year 1521, that an emissary of the Pope planted his flag upon Mexican soil.

Shortly thereafter, the simple faith of the Aztecs was destroyed.

All of their sacred literature and religious symbols were consumed in flames, and the population baptised en masse into Catholic Christianity.

From that day began the exploitation of a people, almost unparalleled in history.

In addition to being robbed of their possessions, they were forced to adopt this alien religion at the point of the sword.

So abject did they become that not only their lands, but even their domestic animals, had to be blessed by the Church—for pay.

And on November 4, 1571, there was established in Mexico, under the dominant rule of the Catholic Church, the most hateful institution that ever existed upon this earth,—The Inquisition.

The palace of the Inquisition in Mexico City is now the National School of Medicine.

On April 11, 1649, one hundred and twenty seven persons were burned to death for violating the laws prohibiting religious liberty.

The Mexican people in their fight against tyranny, corruption and exploitation, found that it was first necessary to break the strangle-hold that the Catholic Church had upon their lives.

No government could exist in Mexico, until the present successful revolution, which offered the slightest semblance of freedom and equality to its people as long as the Catholic Church possessed the resources, controlled the education, and dictated the policies of the nation.

Four hundred years of uninterrupted rule gave the Catholic Church absolute dominance over fifteen million Mexicans.

No word of mine, no argument that I could advance, could so pertinently tell the story of this dominance and its degradation better than the facts of history itself.

The progress of a nation is determined by the welfare of its people.

What did these four hundred years of absolute domination by the Catholic Church do for the Mexican people?

What was their condition before the revolution of 1857?

It was one of subjection and abject poverty.

What was their average in intelligence? It was one of the lowest on the American continent. 85% were illiterate.

What was their standard of living?

Hardly better than that of slaves.

What was their per capita wealth?

The Church either owned or controlled nearly 90% of this immensely valuable land.

No country in the world had become so pauperized through the avarice of the church. It became known as the "paradise of religious orders".

What was their political situation?

They were vassals of the Church.

Did they possess religious freedom?

How could they? The laws under which they lived for over three hundred years expressly prescribed the Roman Catholic religion, and proscribed all others.

The first Mexican constitution, adopted in 1824, under the domination of the Catholic Church, specifically provided that "The religion of the Mexican nation is and shall perpetually be Roman Catholic—and forbids the exercise of any other."

This is not the first time that the Catholic Church has maintained that the Mexican people have been unfriendly to it.

When the constitution of 1857 was formed, Pope Pius IX denounced it in scathing terms and pronounced the anathema of the Church upon it.

When General Plutarco Elias Calles was President and sought to enforce the reformed constitution of 1917, based upon the Constitution of 1857, not only

were there loud cries of "persecution", but an edict of excommunication was threatened against the people.

And what happened?

The Government of Mexico insisted upon the observance of its laws.

And what was the result?

In 1926 the present Pope placed an interdict upon the people, and the Catholic Church in its entirety went on strike.

For three years it refused to participate in the religious exercises of the Mexican people.

And it was my prediction then, and I think subsequent events have verified it, that those three years proved to be three years of momentous importance in the intellectual and political life of the Republic.

During this period the Mexican government laid the substantial foundation for a new social order, bringing to the enslaved Mexican people the first ray of light of political and social freedom that has brightened their dark horizon during more than four centuries.

While the three-year strike of the Catholic Church lasted, other religious organizations continued to function, and when services were resumed, the hierarchy discovered that it had lost thousands of its communicants.

Laws satisfactory to other religions should certainly be good enough for Catholicism.

Mexicans are not the only people who have found it necessary during the past centuries to curb the power of the Catholic Church.

France, Italy, Spain, Germany and England found it necessary, for the stability of their government and

for the welfare of their people not only to curb but, in some instances, to expel the church.

The pages of history speak for themselves.

The religiously deluded youth who assassinated President-elect Alvaro Obregon wore under his shirt, over his heart, a picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe when he committed this dastardly deed.

Today, a Mother Superior is serving a sentence of life imprisonment for her participation in this crime. In a solemn religious ceremony she blessed the pistol that fired the fatal shot.

Evidence raises the suspicion that the Catholic Church supported the reprehensible and traitorous Huerta in his campaign of conspiracy against the Mexican people, which ended in the assassination of their beloved President—Francisco Madero.

Even if the clergy had nothing to do with the murder of Madero directly, they rejoiced at his death.

For two days, following his burial, services of celebration were held in their churches throughout the land.

What would our government do if a church persistently violated our laws, flouted our efforts to establish a system of secular education, and was suspiciously associated with the assassination of our presidents?

I think the attitude of the Mexican people, in this crisis, is one of great restraint and lenity.

It is only when the Catholic Church becomes an instrument of political intrigue that the Mexican people insist that its priests be silenced, and its subversive activities halted.

If an individual is known to be an habitual criminal

greater precautions are used to protect society from him.

A defiant, meddling, domineering and conspiring religious institution can easily become Public Enemy Number 1.

Thomas Jefferson must have had Mexico in mind when he said:

“In every country and in every age the priest has been hostile to liberty, he is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own.”

Mexico is now living under a constitution which compares very favorably with, and in some respects, is admirably in advance of our own.

The Mexican constitution, like our own, provides for the secular education of its children, and for the rights of conscience in matters of religious belief.

We cannot object to another country's flattering us by its imitation of our laws, especially if those laws are the fundamental basis of *our* government.

Our constitution says:

“That Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

And the present Mexican constitution, concerning the same subject reads:

“That Congress shall not enact any law establishing or forbidding any religion whatsoever.”

It is these provisions of the Mexican constitution to which the Catholic Church takes exception.

It wants to repudiate this constitution for the one which provides for the existence of the “Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion as the national religion, without toleration of any other.”

It also wants the statutes revived providing for the "Benefit of Clergy."

But the Mexican people, like the peoples in other enlightened countries, insist that the temporal power of the church shall no longer prevail in their country, and they insist that the church confine its activities and functions solely and exclusively to matters of a religious nature.

The church as a divine institution belongs to the same category as the belief in the flatness of the earth.

The days of theocracies are over. Religion cannot dictate to free governments.

Neither individuals nor religious institutions can complain of the laws under which they live if, because of their persistent violation of those laws, freedom is denied to them.

With a well organized and well oiled machinery of propaganda the religious problem in various countries could be stimulated and magnified to such menacing proportions that it would embroil the entire world in one of those bitter and devastating religious wars which have stained the pages of history with blood.

Religious intrigue has, on more than one occasion, precipitated bloodshed, and unless we are willing to take heed of the past it will do so again.

Almost every government in the world has had its religious problem, and if the United States were to interfere in each and every one of these countries every time a religious dispute arose, our country would be meddling with the internal affairs of almost every nation on the face of the globe.

We ourselves are not without our racial and religious problems.

Let us make sure that our house is in order before we seek to arrange the affairs of others.

The American people believe that the religious situation in Mexico, is purely a problem which concerns them and them alone, and it is our intention to let them solve it.

Secretary of State Hull has just issued an official communication, in which he states that the government of the United States does not intend to interfere with the religious affairs of Mexico.

He gives as his reason for this action that not a single complaint has been received by him from an American living in Mexico, whose religious liberty has been abridged to the slightest degree.

The enlightened people of the United States want to live in peace and harmony with the rest of the peoples of the world, and with no greater degree of good will does this apply than to the people of our sister Republic below the Rio Grande.

Courts of equity were formed for the purpose of administering justice, but one of the cardinal principles of these courts is that those who seek redress shall come to them with clean hands.

Can the Catholic Church in Mexico do that?

Has it been free from the crimes which it now charges Mexico with perpetrating against her?

It is a matter of historical record that the Mexican people have been far more liberal with the Church, than the Church has been with them.

The present political leaders of Mexico are men of the highest ideals who have dedicated themselves to the cause of freedom, and I am confident that future generations will honor General Calles, President Cardanes, and other Mexican leaders, with the same devo-

tion that we honor George Washington and the Revolutionary Fathers.

To enjoy the fruits of a Revolution is quite a different thing from enduring the suffering and hardship of living through one.

I cannot conclude this defense of the Mexican people in their present religious controversy more appropriately, than by firmly and emphatically stating that there is a greater degree of religious liberty in Mexico today than there was at any time during the four hundred years of its domination by the Catholic Church.

*Additional copies of this pamphlet may be obtained for 10c per copy.
6 copies, 50c. 15 copies, \$1.00 Bundles of 35 copies, \$2.00.*

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