Statistical Indicators of the Impact of National Revolution on the Catholic Church in Mexico, 1910-1967

JAMES W. WILKIE

What has been the impact of the Mexican Revolution on the Catholic Church during the past sixty years? How has a program of national integration conducted under the auspices of "institutionalized" or continuing revolution affected Church power? Has the Mexican populace heeded a governmental call of the 1920s and 1930s to reorient its loyalty from the Church to the state? With nationalization of all church buildings and prohibition of outdoor religious services, has the quality of religious life declined? In recent years do we see the "resurgence of the Catholic Church" in Mexico as some have claimed?[1]

Given the political power of the Catholic Church in Mexico during the colonial era and the renewed strength of the Church under dictator Porfirio Díaz in the latter part of the nineteenth century, after 1910 many revolutionists were ready to curb the Church by seizing its property and by licensing its priests as professional men. This latter act explicitly extended the power of the state over the internal affairs of the Church and, like the former act, led to the Cristero religious war against the Mexican government between 1926 and 1929.[2] An armistice in 1929 did not end Church-state

JAMES W. WILKIE (B.A., University of the Americas; M.A., Ph.D., University of California at Berkeley) is Associate Professor of History at the University of California in Los Angeles. In 1968 he was awarded the Herbert E. Bolton Memorial Prize for his volume, *The Mexican Revolution: Federal Expenditure and Social Change Since 1910* (1967). He is presently preparing, in collaboration with Dr. Lyle C. Brown, a volume to be entitled *United States-Mexican Relations since 1940.* Gratitude for aid in preparation of this article is hereby acknowledged by the author to his research assistants, David Eberle (Ohio State University) and John Super (University of California, Los Angeles).

[1]For example see Richard Pattee, *The Catholic Revival in Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Association for International Peace, 1944); and Norman S. Hayner, *New Patterns in Old Mexico* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), chap. 9, "Resurgence of the Catholic Church." Cf. Frank R. Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964); and "La Iglesia en América Latina; trayectoria del clero político mexicano hacia las elecciones de 1958," *Problemas de Latinoamérica* (Mexico City) 3 (February 1956): 1-134.

[2]See James W. Wilkie, "The Meaning of the Cristero Religious War Against the Mexican Revolution," *A Journal of Church and State* 8 (Spring 1966): 214-233; and James W. Wilkie and Edna Monzón de Wilkie, *México visto en el siglo xx: entrevistas de historia oral* (México, D.F.: Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Económicas, 1969), chap. 5, "Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra, Católico Militante."

difficulties because argument over the nature of state educational programs was to continue into the 1930s.[3] Though many Mexicans followed the banner of an anti-government, lay Catholic, *Sinarquista* movement to end "anarchy" during the late 1930s and early 1940s,[4] observers generally credit President-elect Manuel Avila Camacho with easing Church-state discord shortly after the 1940 election campaign when he announced, "I am a believer." This stance in regard to religion was buttressed by amendment of Mexico's Constituion to shift the emphasis of Mexico's educational program of the 1930s from implanting a "rational concept of the universe" to encouraging increased literacy.[5]

How might we gauge the role of the twentieth century Catholic Church in Mexico prior to and since 1940? Ideally, it would help to know the amount of economic power controlled by the Church as well as the qualitative fervency of the Catholic population. Since it is not possible to obtain figures on such questions, let us turn to some selected statistical indicators which are available but which have been little interpreted.[6] We may begin by examining data on religious affiliation before turning to the share of population in a Catholic country which has been married under Church auspices. Finally, we may infer the quality of religious participation in Church life from the number of priests per inhabitant at various benchmarks in contemporary Mexican history.

I

Table 1 shows that in spite of a national revolution, Mexico has

[3]See Lyle C. Brown, "Mexican Church-State Relations, 1933-1940," *A Journal of Church and State* 6 (Spring 1964): 202-222.

[4]For an introduction to Sinarquismo, see Albert L. Michaels, "Fascism and Sinarquismo: Popular Nationalisms Against the Mexican Revolution," *A Journal of Church and State* 8 (Spring 1966): 234-250.

[5]For a bibliographical guide to the problems of the 1930s, see James W. Wilkie and Albert L. Michaels, eds., *Revolution in Mexico: Years of Upheaval, 1910-1940* (New York: Knopf, 1969), pp. 282-297. A study of particular interest is David L. Raby's "Los maestros rurales y los conflictos sociales de México (1931-1940)," *Historia Mexicana* 18 (October-December 1968): 190-227.

[6]School enrollment by private and public institution is excluded as an indicator from this analysis not only because the shortage and quality of public educational facilities often make private education a necessity, but also because the government regulates programs of study. See J. Lloyd Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), p. 413; and Richard B. McCormack, "Attitude Towards Religious Matters in Mexican School History Textbooks," *Americas* 15 (January 1959): 235-247.

TABLE 1

Population According to Religious Affiliation, 1900-1960
(Total = 100.0 Per Cent)

	1900	1910	1921	1930	1940	1950	1960
Total[a]	13,607	15,160	14,335	16,553	19,654	25,791	34,923
Catholic	99.4	99.2	97.1	97.8	96.6	98.2	96.5
Protestant	.4	.5	.5	.8	.9	1.3	1.7
Jewish	b	b	b	b	.1	.1	.3
Other	b	b	.2	.3	.2	.4	.4
None	.1	.2	.8	1.1	2.2	c	.5
Unknown	.1	.1	1.4	b	b	c	.6

[a]In thousands of persons included in national population censuses

[b]Negligible

[c]Included in Other

Source: México, Dirección General de Estadística: *Resumen del censo,* 1930, p. 150; *Anuario estadístico,* 1955-1956, pp. 43-44, and 1960-1961, p. 39.

remained overwhelmingly Catholic. The percentage of population declaring Catholic affiliation virtually remained the same between 1900 and 1910. In 1921 this figure fell under 99 to about 97 per cent, but if "unknown affiliation" is calculated as being Catholic, then in 1921 the Catholic population was over 98 per cent. Even after the Cristero War (a three-year period when priests were on strike), the Catholic figure remained almost 98 per cent. While the effects of Church-state struggle over socialist education saw the percentage of Catholics fall to 96.6 in 1940, this figure in 1950 rebounded to over 98 per cent. By 1960 this amount was again about that of 1940, but because of Protestant and Jewish inroads rather than gains by those professing no religion. It is interesting to note that in 1940 over 2 per cent claimed to have no religion, and one could surmise that the sexual and socialistic education programs of the 1930s had greater impact on Catholic belief than the armed confrontation of the 1920s. Also, after increasing in 1921, 1930, and 1940, the percentage of those without religion fell to an insignificant amount in 1950 and 1960, a phenomenon perhaps related to the end of government hostility toward the Church after 1940.

If the above figures are indicative of Church strength, then the Revolution has failed to gain at the expense of the Church. Alternatively, we might hypothesize that nominal believers have inflated figures on Catholic religious affiliation. Therefore we must turn to other data for an examination of the quality of religious participation.

II

Fervency of Catholic belief in Mexico may be tested against the way in which the Mexican populace enters into formal marriage. If the Mexican populace is as highly religious as the above figures indicate, then we might expect that in years of national population census over 96 per cent of all marriages would be sanctioned by the Church. As Table 2 shows, however, the percentage for years when data are available since 1930 indicates that only about 80 per cent of all formal marriages are approved by the Church, with the percentage declining slightly since 1930.[7]

[7]Though data do not distinguish between Catholic and non-Catholic Church marriages, the latter are deducted here according to the following method. Since sources in Tables 1 and 2 reveal that about 28 per cent of the total population (all ages) was formally married in the four census years, we may assume that about the same percentage of non-Catholics in all age groups were so married and this percentage is deducted from the "Church" category in Tables 2 and 3. As Table 1 shows, non-Catholics have constituted only a small portion of the Mexican population.

TABLE 2

Catholic Church-Sanctioned Marriage of Persons as a Share of Persons Formally Married, 1930-1960

	1930	1940	1950	1960
Total (census)[a]	4,479	5,395	7,192	9,838
By Church[b]	82.9	79.7	78.4	77.2

[a] In thousands of persons; includes marriages conducted only by civil authorities, only by Church, and combined civil and Church marriages.

[b] Marriage only by Church or by Church as well as civil authorities (since legal marriage must be recorded with the civil registry, Church marriages may also be sanctioned by the government). Percentages are deflated to exclude an estimated small share of persons married in non-Catholic churches by respective census year as follows: 1.2, 1.2, 1.8, and 2.3 per cent. See note 7

Source: México, Dirección General de Estadística, *Resumen del censo,* 1930, pp. 50, 51; 1940, pp. 5, 6; 1950, p. 48; 1960, p. 112.

If we could say that about 80 per cent of the Mexican populace has been firmly committed to Catholic practices, we might conclude that the Church has continued to hold a relatively strong position in Mexican society. But since many Mexicans have entered into marriage outside of sanctioned Church norms by marrying only with civil ceremony or by forming households in free union without benefit of any ceremony, the Church's position needs to be assessed in terms of its influence on marital status as a whole. Table 3 shows that the Church-sanctioned marriage has remained at about 64 per cent since 1930, the first year for which such census data are available. Though free union marriages steadily decreased from almost one quarter of the population in 1930 to about 16 per cent in 1960, the share of marriages performed only by civil authorities generally gained at Church expense.

It is interesting to note that the level of divorce has not exceeded 1 per cent in Table 3 and that in addition it has remained low in relation to population censused over age 14. Whereas in 1960, 2.3 per cent of the U.S. population over age 14 was divorced (an increase from .7 per cent in 1920), in Mexico the 1960 proportion was .5 per cent (down in 1930, 1940, and 1950 from 1.5 per cent in 1921).[8]

[8]For sources see Table 2 and *U.S. Book of Facts, Statistics, and Information for 1969* (New York: Essandess, 1969), p. 32. Since census figures for both countries include persons who have been divorced and remarried, it is helpful to look at the divorce rate per thousand persons in the Mexican and U.S. populations. In 1930, 1940, 1950, and 1960 the respective rates registered with authorities were .1, .2, .3, .4 and 1.6, 2.0, 2.6, 2.2. Sources for divorce rates are ibid., p. 62; *The Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present* (Stamford, Conn.: Fairfield Publishers, [1965]), p. 30; and the following publications by Mexico's Dirección General de Estadística: *Anuario estadístico, 1938*, p. 31; 1942, p. 149; 1954, p. 83; 1962-1963, p. 71. The Mexican federal civil code, which generally serves as the model for the Mexican states, specifies the following grounds for divorce, either by mutual consent (a reason for divorce in itself) or by demand of either of the spouses: adultery; the fact that the wife gives birth to a child conceived before the marriage; the proposal of the husband to prostitute his wife; incitation or violence exerted by one spouse upon the other; immoral acts for the purpose of corrupting children; chronic or incurable disease; incurable impotence or mental derangement; abandonment of the home; presumed death; cruelty, threats or grave insults by one spouse against the other; non-support; calumnious accusation made by one spouse against the other; infamous non-political crime; habits of gambling, drunkenness or use of drugs; commission of a major criminal act by one spouse against the person or property of the other. See *The Civil Code for the Federal District and Territories of Mexico*, trans. Otto Schoenrich (New York: Baker, Voorhis & Co., 1950), pp. 61-69. According to Ernest Gruening *(Mexico and Its Heritage* [New York: Century Co., 1928], p. 625), though the Civil Code of 1884 provided for divorce, it "adhered to the canon law which proclaimed the indissolubility of marriage. What was known as 'divorce' in that code was merely a legalized separation under which remarriage was forbidden."

TABLE 3
Catholic Church-Sanctioned Marriage of Persons as a Share of Sanctioned and Unsanctioned Personal Marital Status, 1930-1960
(Total = 100.0 Per Cent)

	1930	1940	1950	1960
Total (census)[a]	5,884	7,047	9,055	11,809
Divorced[b]	.8	.6	.8	1.0
Free Union Marriage[b]	23.1	22.9	19.8	15.7
Only Civil Marriage[b]	12.1	14.6	15.7	17.1
By Church[c]	63.1	61.0	62.3	64.3

[a] In thousands of persons

[b] Unsanctioned by Church

[c] Sanctioned by Church; includes marriages conducted only by Church as well as by Church and by civil authorities. Percentages are deflated to exclude an estimated small share of persons married in non-Catholic churches by respective census year as follows: .9, .9, 1.4, and 1.9 per cent. See note 7.

Source: See Table 2.

Mexico's high figure for 1921 was without doubt related to enactment of more liberal divorce legislation between 1914 and 1917. During the era of violent revolution, pressure built up to legalize absolute divorce, and after the great disruption of society wrought by extensive military combat, a number of persons were anxious to take advantage of the new legislation. A decrease in the importance of the divorced percentage may reflect remarriage as well as avoidance of divorce, which is unsanctioned by the Church and carries greater public stigma in a Catholic-oriented society than the more covert free union or extramarital affair.

Regardless of these speculations, some observers might well insist that Catholic influence over marital status has more to do with custom than with the quality of Catholic belief. Thus the number of inhabitants per priest may tell us more about the nature of service which the Church is able to provide.

III

If priests are in abundance in relation to the demands and needs of national populace, we may suppose that instruction and practice in religious activities may proceed with greater intensity. Conversely, when the ratio of inhabitants per priest grows, possibility for nominal Catholicism increases apace. Thus, if Catholic affiliation or marriage are to be anything more than custom, often the continued presence of a priest is necessary to strengthen belief and encourage accepted ritual.

Ratio of priests to total inhabitants of Mexico in different years is given in Table 4.[9] Between 1910 and 1967 the ratio increased from 3,398 to 5,765 persons per priest. From 1910 to 1926 the number of priests seemed to have been unaffected either positively or negatively by the confusion of revolutionary upheaval, and the ratio of priests to inhabitants remained the same because population only barely

[9]Readers should note that the ratio of inhabitants to priests is meaningless in itself, but it does show that the Church may have lost ground in relation to its ability to minister to the populace. Though one might argue that with increased mobility priests can now reach more people than they could on muleback in 1910, such a factor has probably been offset by the fact that personal relationships are becoming more difficult for the priest with a rapidly expanding number of persons to serve. Though the data do not tell us how many priests actually have been in contact with the populace rather than conducting administrative or other affairs of the Church, we may view figures in Table 4 as revealing the relative strength of the Church bureaucracy in Mexico, including personnel needed to make the Church function.

TABLE 4

Priests in the Mexican Population,
Selected Years, 1910-1967.

Year	Priests (Number)	Population (Thousands)	Number of Inhabitants Per Priest
1910	4,461	15,160	3,398
1926	4,493	15,468	3,443
1940	3,863	19,654	5,088
1953	5,261	28,053	5,332
1967	7,922	45,671	5,765

Source for Priests: 1910: [Moisés González Navarro], *Estadísticas sociales del porfiriato,1877-1910* (México, D.F.: Dirección General de Estadística, 1956), p. 19. 1926: Alberto María Carreño, *Pages of Mexican History* (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Victoria, 1936), pp. 361-362. 1940: Alfredo Galindo Mendoza, *Apuntes geográficos y estadísticos de la Iglesia Católica en México* (México, D.F.: Administración de la Revista "La Cruz," 1945), pp. 22, 32ff. 1953: Thomas K. Burch and Donald J. Burton, comps. and William J. Gibbons, ed., *Basic Ecclesiastical Statistics for Latin America,* 1954 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: World Horizons Reports, 1955), pp. 48-53. 1967: *Annuario Pontificio, 1968* (Vaticano: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1968), passim.

Source for Population: Mexican government census data and estimates given in México, Dirección General de Estadística, *Compendio estadísticos,* 1954, pp. 34-35; Miguel Chavira Olivos, *Proyecciones demográficas de la República Mexicana: población* (2 vols.; México, D.F.: Dirección General de Estadística, 1966-1968), 2: 67ff; and James W. Wilkie, *The Mexican Revolution: Federal Expenditure and Social Change Since 1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), Appendix K.

exceeded the 1910 total by 1926. Subsequent conflict between the Church and state, however, drastically affected clerical numbers.

Given the governmental state-by-state limitation in 1926 of the number of clergy permitted to function (in Puebla, for example, the legal limit on the number of clergymen for that state was set at 256 where 512 had served), and given a decision in 1926 by President Plutarco Elías Calles to enforce various articles of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 (185 foreign priests were deported and 73 convents were closed along with 42 churches),[10] Mexican priests suspended all religious services between 31 July 1926 and 27 June 1929. During this period, lay Catholics fought the government in a guerrilla war until an armistice was reached. New friction between the Church and state during the 1930s did not permit the Church to recover its former position in society; and by 1935, only 322 priests were permitted by law to serve throughout the republic.[11] In spite of continuing struggle over such matters as control of education and seizure of many church buildings for use as libraries or for other public purposes, by 1940 the Catholic Church had 3,863 priests serving the faithful.

During this period of adversity, the ratio of Mexicans per priest increased from about 3,400 to over 5,000 persons; meanwhile, the number of priests declined 14 per cent although total population gained by about double that amount. This meant that by 1940 Mexico's priests, who virtually had to try to serve the entire Mexican populace, were hard pressed to maintain religious quality—especially when compared to priests in the United States, who served only a minority of the population and who enjoyed a ratio of 620 Catholics for each priest.[12]

Between 1940 and 1967 the number of priests in Mexico increased only 105 per cent while the country's population increased 132 per cent. What were the factors which, in spite of improved Church-state relations, impeded the growth of clergymen to meet population changes? On the one hand, we might look to historical factors by which the Church cumulatively lost ground during the 1920s and

---

[10]Wilfred H. Callcott, *Liberalism in Mexico, 1857-1929* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1931), pp. 367-369.

[11]Alberto María Carreño, *Pages of Mexican History* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Victoria, 1936), p. 362.

[12]Alfredo Galindo Mendoza, *Apuntes geográficos y estadísticos de la Iglesia Católica en México* (México, D.F.: Administración de la Revista "La Cruz," 1945), p. 22.

1930s when the clergy were under attack and seminaries were closed by government edict. On the other hand, failure of the Church to maintain a higher rate of growth of priests may be traced in part to its perception of the problem of increase in population.

Population figures in Table 4 have been prepared by the Mexican government and are considerably higher than population estimates by the Church. In 1953 and 1967 the Church estimated national population to be 25,995,000 and 39,816,020 respectively. If Church figures are used to calculate the ratio of priests to inhabitants, reduced ratios are obtained. According to Church estimates, in 1953 the ratio was 4,941 persons per priest, compared to 5,332 given in Table 4. Whereas government population data yield a ratio of 5,765 for 1967, Church figures give a ratio of 5,026.[13] In other words, for the year 1967 the Church conceives of the ratio as approaching the magnitude of the problem which, according to Table 4, was reached about 1940. Though we cannot be sure of population estimates for the 1960s until the national census of 1970 has been administered, we know on the basis of the 1960 census that the governmental estimate for 1953 used in Table 4 was accurate within 193,000. Since the Church estimate was off by 2,058,000, we may suspect that the Mexican Catholic clergy takes an unduely optimistic view of the population situation and of their own ability to serve Mexico's people. In 1967 the difference between government and Church estimates of population amounted to 739 persons per priest, a considerable number of people.

In addition to historical problems and questionable optimism concerning the impact of population growth in relation to the number of clergy, we may suspect that the Church faces a problem in finding priests who in this modern age of comforts look forward to enduring relative social and cultural deprivation in rural areas of Mexico. In order to examine such a supposition it is important to examine the distribution of priests in a regional sample.

IV

Seven regions are represented by an eight-state sample for which a

[13]The *Annuario Pontivicio, 1968* (Vaticano: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1968), *passim*, gives the population in Mexico as 39,816,020 persons. Government population figures are from Miguel Chavira Olivos, *Proyecciones demográficas de la República Mexicana: población*, 2 vols. (México, D.F.: Dirección General de Estadística, 1966-1968), 1: 67ff.

profile of 1953 is presented in Table 5. The regions are geo-social areas of Mexico developed with regard to an Index of Poverty or social modernization.[14] On the basis of social indicators, in 1960 the Federal District, a region in its own right, was in the most advantageous position. In descending order, the following regions (and sample states) showed less characteristics of social modernization: North (Chihuahua), West (Nayarit), Gulf (Yucatán), West Central (Guanajuato-Michoacán), East Central (San Luis Potosí), South (Chiapas). Choice of the states was dictated by a need to present governmental entities with boundaries similar to ecclesiastical units in order that consistent time series could be developed for each region with regard to mixed governmental and Church sources for number of priests given in Table 4. In the case of West Central Mexico, dioceses overlap state boundaries and it is necessary to present Guanajuato and Michoacán as one unit. With slight discrepancies, states chosen incorporate dioceses with close proximity, except for Nayarit for which diocese boundaries have been adjusted to exclude Jalisco.

Data in Table 5 represent 39.5 per cent of Mexico's priests, almost 37 per cent of the population, and about 28 per cent of the country's territory. Thus the sample should concisely show us the position of the Church in various regions of Mexico. It is interesting to note that about 15 per cent of the priests were located in the Federal District and about 16 per cent in the Catholic stronghold and Cristero states of Guanajuato and Michoacán.

Ratio of population to priests in the sample states for Mexico's seven regions given in Table 6 portray some extremes which make up the average national ratios presented in Table 4. In 1910 the Federal District had the most favorable standing compared to cited sample states, being almost five times better off in the average case load per priest than Chiapas. By 1926 the Chiapas ratio was much worse among the sample states, reaching increasing imbalance in relation to the national average until after 1953 when an influx of priests reduced the ratio from about 28,000 to 20,000.

Though these latter totals may seem incredible, the situation in the state of Tabasco also has been difficult. In 1925 Tabasco's government decreed that a priest could not practice unless he were

[14]James W. Wilkie, *The Mexican Revolution: Federal Expenditure and Social Change Since 1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), part 2.

TABLE 5

Share of Mexican Priests, Population and Area in Sample States, 1953 (Total = 100.0 Per Cent)

	Priests	Population	Area
Total Mexico	5,261	28,052,513	1,972,547 km^2
Per Cent Sample	*39.5*	*36.5*	*27.8*
Federal District	14.9	12.8	.1
Guanajuato-Mich.	15.9	10.4	4.6
San Luis Potosí	2.7	3.3	3.2
Chihuahua	1.9	3.3	12.5
Yucatán	2.2	2.0	2.2
Chiapas	.7	3.5	3.8
Nayarit	1.2	1.2	1.4

Source: Priests and population are calculated from Tables 4 and 6; area is from México, Dirección General de Estadística, *Anuario estadístico compendiado, 1966*, p. 13.

TABLE 6

Sample of Inhabitants per Priest in Seven Regions of Mexico

	Federal District	Guanajuato-Michoacán[a]	San Luis Potosí[b]	Chihuahua[c]	Yucatán	Chiapas[d]	Nayarit[e]
A. Priests							
1910	454	914	141	73	111	57	77
1926	400	820	100	50	50	30	90
1940	631[f]	700	103	60	71	27	69[g]
1953	782	838	143	101	113	35	65[g]
1967	1,004	1,207	201	188	149	72	107[g]
B. Inhabitants (Thousands)							
1910	721	2,074	628	406	340	439	171
1926[h]	1,068	1,918	513	447	372	476	166
1940	1,758	2,228	679	624	418	680	217
1953	3,597	2,931	918	928	551	987	326
1967	6,815	4,522	1,355	1,678	775	1,470	532
C. Inhabitants per Priest							
1910	1,588	2,269	4,534	5,562	3,063	7,702	2,221
1926	2,670	2,339	5,130	8,940	7,440	15,867	1,844
1940	2,786	3,183	6,592	10,400	5,887	25,185	3,145
1953	4,600	3,498	6,420	9,188	4,876	28,200	5,015
1967	6,788	3,746	6,741	8,926	5,201	20,417	4,972

[a]Includes dioceses of León, Morelia, Apatzingán, Tacámbaro, Zamora; state boundaries are similar.
[b]Includes dioceses of San Luis Potosí and Valles.
[c]Includes dioceses of Chihuahua and Juárez as well as Tarahumara Apostolic Vicariate.
[d]Includes dioceses of San Cristóbal and Tapachula; some difference in state boundaries.
[e]Includes dioceses of Tepic and Prelacy Nullius of Jesús María del Nayar; diocese boundary adjusted to exclude Jalisco.
[f]Apparently not much affected by boundary change after 1930.
[g]Adjusted 1953 and 1967 by excluding 17 per cent of priests in Jalisco, as in 1940.
[h]Inhabitants estimated at mid-point of 1921-1930 population census figures.

Sources: See Table 4.

married; and though the hostile state regime was replaced during 1935, the diocese had only 8 priests in 1940, 22 in 1953, and 49 in 1967. Even using Church population figures, the ratio for the respective benchmark years was 38,814, 16,273, and 12,245.[15] Given successful lay Catholic efforts to topple the Tabasco government, it is surprising that after thirty years the Church has not done more to establish its position in that diocese. Perhaps destruction of churches and persecution of clerics was so thoroughgoing over a ten-year period, however, that the Church has not felt it worthwhile to staff the area with adequate personnel. Or perhaps given the Church's problem in such states as Chiapas and Chihuahua, efforts might better be expended in other locales. Among the sample states, an influx of priests into Yucatán as well as Chiapas and Chihuahua has been evident in recent years, but the clerical personnel problem in all areas is more critical than it was in 1910.

Though we can not tell from the way data are presented whether or not the Church is basically urban oriented with its placement of priests, we can see that by 1967 Church strength (measured in terms of the least inhabitants per priest) was greatest in the West, the traditional Catholic bastion. Except for Chiapas, on the basis of the sample, Church strength does not appear to have been related to standing of states in regional levels of poverty.

V

In light of the foregoing review of statistical indicators, what conclusions present themselves for our consideration? First, government policies of institutional revolution do not seem to have had much effect on the percentage of the population claiming Catholic affiliation. It is important to note, in fact, that the populace appears to have accepted the Church for spiritual guidance and the official party of the Mexican Revolution for political leadership without questioning consistency in such a stance. In relation to the years presented in Table 4, the official party won presidential election victories with the following percentages of the vote: 99.3 in 1911, 84.1 in 1924, 93.6 in 1929, 74.3 in 1952, and 89.0 in 1964.[16]

---

[15]See sources in Table 4 and data in *Annuario Pontificio, 1968.*
[16]See Wilkie, *The Mexican Revolution*, p. 180.

Though the quality of this backing has been questioned,[17] as the quality of Catholic affiliation has been questioned here, the Mexican government probably holds power on the basis of wide acceptance of its leadership.

Second, on the one hand, high percentage of population backing Church and state (two old foes struggling to influence Mexican society) might appear to augur poorly for development of a political culture in which informed and discriminating citizens opt for a wide variety of choices without monolithically accepting positions. On the other hand, the fact that Mexicans are committed to back both the Church and the state could indicate the development of a modern system in which competing loyalties reduce tensions and permit political and social stability. In this latter case, the populace has overlapping interests which do not permit the National Action Party (the leading opposition party) to capitalize politically on its Catholic-oriented values.[18]

Breakdown of a détente between the Church and state during the 1920s may be traced to an attempt by each of the institutions to test the limits of its sphere of action. The Church's position was not monolithic, and in the struggle between hardline Cristeros and moderates, the former group temporarily won a strong hand.[19] With Church groups split, leftists within the government could forge ahead with state control over education during the 1930s. Interestingly enough, struggle among Mexican Catholic groups today involves a bitter controversy over the nature of Vatican-sponsored reform within the Church itself. Conservative Mexican Catholics, for example, successfully initiated a Vatican ban in 1965 prohibiting the use of psychoanalysis at a Benedictine monastery in Cuernavaca headed by Father Grégoire Lemercier; and they won a Vatican ban in 1969 forbidding the enrollment of priests and nuns in the "radical" Intercultural Documentation Center (CIDOC) headed by Monsignor Ivan Illich. Many conservatives are of the opinion that CIDOC, also located in Cuernavaca, is a seedbed of heresy and revolutionary

[17]See James W. Wilkie, "New Approaches in Contemporary Mexican Historical Research," a paper delivered to the Third Meeting of Historians of Mexico and the United States, Oaxtepec, Morelos, Mexico, 4 November 1969.

[18]Cf. Robert E. Scott, *Mexican Government in Transition*, 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964); and Scott, "Mexico, the Established Revolution," in Lucian Pye and Sidney Verba, eds., *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 330-395.

[19]See note 2 above.

political activity. Though this latter ban apparently has been modified to permit attendance by the clergy under certain restrictions, Mexican Catholics remain much divided over prospects for innovation in the Church.[20]

Finally, the real long-run threat to the Church would *not* appear to come from Mexico's national revolution but from the rapid growth of population. In this regard, the Church's stand against population control would appear to be self-defeating unless it can more rapidly expand the priesthood.[21] Since the Church in Mexico has consistently underestimated population growth and the problem of maintaining a qualitatively low ratio of inhabitants per priest, it would appear that internal contradictions may force a crisis in Church affairs that the state could not have accomplished.

External problems have no doubt complicated the Church's position in that the state's prohibition on outdoor religious ceremonies has inhibited mass rallies which might compensate for a rising ratio of persons per priest. Though this provision of the law is not always as strictly enforced as in the past, one may question the quality of religious participation developed in massive ceremony. Nor has the nationalization of church buildings hurt the Church. Though some buildings were converted for government use, since the late 1930s churches have been only nominally under government control. In effect, they are managed by the Church; and since many are visited only periodically by traveling priests, the problem would not seem to be how to fit people into temples, but how to staff them with priests.

Given the shortage of priests and the growth of Mexico's population, perhaps it is surprising that the Church has not faced more problems. Even nominal Catholicism does not appear to have been greatly weakened, and by 1960 the rate of Church-sanctioned marriages had not been greatly affected by the lack of priests.

In view of the problem of the shortage of priests, commentators

---

[20]For information concerning problems in Cuernavaca, see Joaquín Sáenz y Arriaga, *Cuernavaca y el progresismo religioso en México* (México, D.F.: n.p., 1967); *New York Times*, 23 January 1969; *Los Angeles Times*, 30 March 1969; *Latin America Airmail*, 18 April 1969; *Saturday Review*, 19 July 1969, pp. 14-19; and *Time*, 29 August 1969, p. 48.

[21]The Church's problems of internal morale and efforts to change the nature of the priesthood are beyond the scope of this paper. For an indication of the scope of the Mexican debate and conditions, see note 20 above; also, see Rutilio Ramos, Isidoro Alonso, and Domingo Garre, *La Iglesia en México: estructuras eclesiásticas* (Madrid: Estudios Socio-Religiosos Latino Americanos, 1963).

were of different minds about a campaign pronouncement in 1969 by Luis Echevarría Alvarez, the official party candidate for the Mexican presidency (1970-1976). Though some observers felt that Echevarría's dramatic statement against population control[22] was meant to appeal to conservative Catholics who fear such activity, others speculated that perhaps Echevarría realized that an expanding population would severly test the Church. Since unchecked population growth also will test the government's ability to maintain necessary services, the latter view sounds weak indeed; the principle, however, remains true.[23]

In short, government-sponsored revolution in health standards since 1910 may well prove to be more important in impact on the Church than revolution in ideological and political terms. As Mexico's population expands ever more rapidly, the Church must expand its clerical manpower or face a very real challenge to religious quality. Since the Church has lost much ground in the past decades, and since it apparently is not aware of the significance of the population problem, it may well face further loss of influence by default.

---

[22] *El Día*, 6 November 1969.

[23] A third view claimed that Echevarría was catering to left-wing, ultra-nationalists, who maintain that Mexico must abstain from birth control in order to gain a population base which can exist politically and economically independent from the United States.