

Martyrs of San Joaquin. Historical context of Mexico

The so-called Mexican Revolution initiated in 1910 had provoked a series of factions or groups that fought in different parts of the country for different causes, according to their peculiar ways of understanding the same Revolution.

After several struggles, interventions and negotiations, in 1917 the Mexican Constitution was written and proclaimed, which, even with many amendments throughout the century, remains in force until today. This Constitution did not recognize the Catholic Church as a legal entity (it declared it legally non-existent), it limited the civic and political rights of the clergy and, contradictorily, legislated about religious freedom, religious education, etc. However, for a few years, its application was not rigorous.

In November 1924, Plutarco Elías Calles assumed the Presidency of the Republic, swearing to enforce the Constitution. Although he did not comply with his oath in other aspects, he did comply with the “Law on Worship”, indicating in the Penal Code disproportionate punishments for violators. This, known as the Calles’ Law, was practically a blatant persecution of the Catholic Church as revenge for not having submitted to all the provisions of his government.

Before its application, there were reactions from the faithful and the Church hierarchy. Pope Pius XI wrote his encyclical *Iniquis afflictisque* (December 1, 1926) in which he condemned the "perverse use of public authority" because it "deprives common rights and punishes the exercise of the priestly ministry with severe penalties, as if it were a crime.

With the support of more than two million signatures, the cancellation of the reform of the Calles’ Law was requested, a boycott of the Government was declared, several peaceful protests were held, etc., but to no avail. On July 31, 1926, the said Law would come into effect. To it would be added the particular laws of the states of the federation, sometimes even more infringing on freedom.

Faced with the futility of their efforts, the Mexican Bishops issued a collective pastoral letter in which they informed of the suspension of worship, as a form of protest against the submission of the Church to a State that did not recognize Catholicism. After July 31, 1926, temples were to remain under the custody of parish councils, but the Ministry of Internal Affairs went further and demanded the municipal authorities to close

and seal the buildings annexed to the temples. In numerous cases, true desecration of the places of worship and sacred objects took place.

The people of Mexico, mostly Catholics, felt attacked in the deepest part of their faith and culture. The State had intruded into the most sacred part of their lives. Faced with this, peasants from states such as Zacatecas, Michoacán, Durango, Jalisco, Guanajuato, etc., began their own grassroots defence, but as the aggressions continued, it turned into an open rebellion against the government.

This rebellion, known as the *Cristiada*, had begun as a spontaneous popular movement, which would later be coordinated and supported from the organizational point of view by the LDLR (Liga Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa - League for the Defence of Religious Freedom), with the purpose of fighting for the defence of civic rights and to reconquer religious freedom and the other freedoms derived from it.

The *Cristiada* and the repression of the Government produced thousands of deaths on both sides. The *Cristeros* had significant victories and the popular support of the faithful. The hierarchy of the Church, without explicitly approving the armed movement, sympathized with it since legal and peaceful resources had been exhausted in the face of the intransigence of the Government. Some bishops allowed priests to serve as chaplains for the *Cristiada* if they requested it. This armed movement lasted approximately from the end of 1926 until 1929, although another type of resistance to repression and religious persecution was prolonged some years later, according to the circumstances of the different states of the Republic.

Officially, on June 21, 1930, the *Cristero* movement came to an end by means of arrangements made between the Government and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This pact consisted of leaving the anti-clerical articles of the Constitution as unfeasible, although they remained intact, it was verbally promised that they would not be applied. The sad reality, until the end of the 30's, was none other than the non-compliance, on the part of the Government, of those verbal agreements. Having laid down their arms in obedience to the Bishops, hundreds of them were later massacred in a treacherous manner.

In this way, the Catholic Church in Mexico was subjected to persecutory laws until the reform of the aforementioned constitutional articles in 1992. It was in this environment, and in its most critical stage (1927), in which the supreme testimony of the Martyrs of San Joaquin occurred.