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TYRANNY IN MEXICO



A STATEMENT issued by the
Archbishops and Bishops
of the American Hierarchy
at their Annual Meeting in
Washington, D. C., Novem-
ber 14-15, 1934.



NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE
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SEVENTY-EIGHT cardinals, archbishops and bishops of the United States, assembled in annual meeting at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C., November 14-15, 1934, issued a vigorous statement deploring anti-Christian tyranny in Mexico and citing the progressive steps in the persecution directed against Catholics and all religion in that country. Calling upon the faithful for a special crusade of prayer for the ending of persecution of the Church in Mexico, the bishops as American citizens requested their fellow citizens to urge that representatives of the United States be guided by true American principles with respect to Mexico—principles that recognize liberty of conscience, of religious worship, of education, of the press, of assembly and petition. The bishops, in concluding their statement, say: "We wish on the part of the entire American public, of our great secular press, a fuller knowledge of the actual conditions in Mexico. All would then more fully realize that we are pleading not only the cause of the Catholic Church but the cause of human freedom and of human liberty for all the nations of the world."—*Reprinted from the December, 1934, issue of Catholic Action, official organ of the National Catholic Welfare Conference.*

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*A Statement by the Archbishops and
Bishops of the United States*

“**I**N 1926, the cardinals, archbishops and bishops of the United States issued in their own names a pastoral letter, protesting against the persecution of the Church in Mexico.

“Since that pastoral was issued, the bishops of Mexico restored public worship in Mexico, under an agreement involving handicaps and restrictions that should never have been imposed. But even that inadequate agreement whereby liberty of worship was promised, the juridical identity of the Church was recognized, and the severity of the laws against the Church and her institutions was to be mitigated, a new policy has repudiated.

“In our pastoral of 1926, we stated what is even more evident today: ‘The present conflict, as one part of a war against religion in Mexico which had its inception almost a century ago, to a greater degree than any preceding it, comes from an attempt at nothing less than the destruction of the Divine Constitution of the Church by reducing her to the status of a state-controlled body, without the right to form, train and educate her own clergy, to have a sufficient number of them for the care of souls, to find means for her sup-

port, to develop works in accord with her mission of charity and enlightenment, and to apply the teachings of the Gospel to the formation of a public conscience. Sad experience, as well as right reason, tells us what would follow the success of such an attempt, and what it would mean to Church as well as to State.'

"We spoke then not only as bishops having primarily with us the care of souls, we spoke also as American citizens. We said then what we repeat with fuller justification. 'We have a duty to speak as Americans attached to the institutions of our country and loving them for the benefits they have conferred upon us all.' Present conditions made it necessary that we should no longer guard silence. War on religion has extended beyond national boundaries through organized propaganda in many countries.

"Beginning systematically at the end of 1931, the priests permitted to minister to the people in Mexico were decreased to such a ridiculously small number as to make of liberty of religious worship a mockery. In the Federal District comprising over one million three hundred thousand Catholics, only twenty-five priests are permitted to minister. Many states have prohibited priests altogether; for example, Tabasco, Zacatecas, Sonora, Chiapas, Vera Cruz, Campeche, Queretaro.

"Without due process of law, church buildings, residences of bishops and of priests, even dwellings owned by others in which bishop or priest may be temporarily living, educational and charitable institutions, have been closed and confiscated. No trial by jury is permitted in case of any appeal.

“Catholic citizens are denied the right of assembly and the right of freedom of the press.

“Any religious society is denied the right of corporate legal existence.

“To hear the duly executed and duly presented petition of citizens is refused.

“The right of franchise is denied a clergyman simply because he is a clergyman.

“Any and every Church is denied the right to hold property or the right to present a petition for the redress of grievances.

“Any and every Church is denied the right to possess endowments.

“The right of any Church to have a seminary or a preparatory school for the training of candidates for the ministry is denied.

“Schools in which native citizens may be trained for the priesthood are outlawed. Any foreign-born clergyman is forbidden to serve in Mexico. Therefore, according to present policies neither a native nor a foreign-born clergy is permissible in Mexico.

“Secular papers with any policy favorable to religion are prohibited from criticizing any acts of the government or the government officials.

“Journals and publications are suppressed at will; the use of the mail is denied them.

“Citizens in Mexico are denied those inalienable rights which the Constitution of the United States asserts belongs to every man.

“The liberty of education is denied. It is maintained that the State must possess the mind of the child.

“Bishops, priests, nuns and lay citizens who desire to have the privilege of religious life must exile themselves.

“Liberty of religious worship, of education, of speech and of the press are denied all who live in Mexico.

“We need not repeat that we protest with our whole heart and soul against this anti-Christian tyranny, and again call upon all the faithful in our country to pray that such a reign may cease, and to do everything in their power by word and by act to make the fact of such tyranny known.

“No upholder of the rights of man and of liberty of conscience can view complacently the exercise of such tyranny, even though it be in a country other than our own. They who suffer in Mexico, they who suffer in exile, are our fellow faithful, all members of our beloved Church, which is one Body. The Church in our country, the Church throughout the world, suffers with the suffering Church in Mexico. We implore the faithful to pray most earnestly, to offer their self-denials and their special acts of devotion for the ending of the persecution of the Church in Mexico. We ask them to make themselves apostles proclaiming to the world the iniquity and the tyranny that mutilate and despoil the Body of Christ.

“And again, as American citizens we present our plea that justice may be done, that all our fellow Americans may make themselves advocates of that common justice for man, which is the security of every man and every nation.

“We sincerely deplore the evident indifference on the part of many to the life and worth of those principles upon which our American Republic is founded. We cannot, we would not wish to impose those principles as political principles upon any other nation. But to us they are as true outside as inside the physical territory of our country. Propaganda in this country that would weaken our principles is abhorrent to us. Compromise at home or abroad on the part of any of our fellow-citizens with regard to those principles is, to us, most reprehensible.

“As we declared in our pastoral of 1926, our own country cannot view with indifference the persecution of religion, the exiling of its citizens by a neighboring country. We need not say we would wish most earnestly to live on terms of peace with every nation. We wish to say again, as we said in 1926: ‘What we have written is no call on the faithful here or elsewhere to purely human action. It is no interposition of our influence either as bishops or as citizens to reach those who possess political power anywhere on earth, and least of all in our own country, to the end that they should intervene with armed force in the internal affairs of Mexico for the protection of the Church.’

“We wish for Mexico prosperity in its national life, in its economic and social life. We wish it the more honestly when we ask primarily a fidelity to the fundamental rights of liberty of conscience, freedom of religious worship, freedom of education, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly and petition.

“We respectfully request our fellow-citizens to ad-

vocate that these principles be ever the guide for our American representatives. The full consequences of the persecution of the Church and of Catholics in Mexico can scarcely be foreseen at the present time. They cannot but eventually be very grave. Those who must flee from their own country into ours bring with them a problem to which we cannot be indifferent. It is not without significance that in the present turmoil of the world and distress of nations, the basic truths of religion from which has sprung the stability of nations are flouted and denied by those who seek absolutism in government. The struggle, therefore, which arises from the persecution of the Church in Mexico today is an illustration of a crisis which may have far-reaching consequences.

“No man’s voice should sound an uncertain note. We cannot but deplore the expressions unwittingly offered, at times, of sympathy with and support of governments and policies which are absolutely at variance with our own American principles. They give color to the boast of the supporters of tyrannical policies, that the influence of our American Government is favorable to such policies. We do not believe, for a moment, that it is. It could not be. We would wish on the part of the entire American public, of our great secular press, a fuller knowledge of the actual conditions in Mexico. All would then more fully realize that we are pleading not only the cause of the Catholic Church, but the cause of human freedom and human liberty for all the nations of the world.”