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A Catholic Alternative to Revolution: *The Survival of Social Catholicism in Postrevolutionary Mexico*

Alfredo Méndez Medina, writing from Belgium in January 1911, was possessed by the idea that Mexico's social and economic organization required radical change. Méndez Medina, a Mexican Jesuit priest and developing labor activist, had spent just a few years in Europe, sent by his superiors to learn the techniques, strategies, and ideology of Catholic social action. What he saw and experienced there helped shape his vision for Mexico and guided his work upon his return in late 1912. In Europe, the young Méndez Medina observed firsthand the Catholic unions, ministries, and propagandists of L'Action Populaire, an influential French social Catholic institution founded by Gustave Desbuquois, S.J. (1869–1959) in Reims. In a few brief notes, Méndez Medina wrote that Desbuquois's earthy, no-nonsense way of speaking to ordinary workers, and his profound spirituality, had impressed him deeply. To Méndez Medina, Desbuquois appeared to link seamlessly his religious faith, his social commitments, his sense of duty, and his politics.[1]

As did so many others coming from Europe to Mexico, Méndez Medina would shape and tailor his ideas to fit the contours of the Mexican social and cultural landscape, which was rapidly changing at the time due to the course and process of the Mexican Revolution. Yet the social vision spun in Europe by the likes of

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1. Archivo Histórico de la Provincia Mexicana de la Compañía de Jesús (hereafter AHPMCJ), VI, Vida Jesuítas de la Provincia, Personas, Documentos Personales, Alfredo Méndez Medina, D-757; on Desbuquois and L'Action Populaire, see Jean-Marie Mayeur, "Le catholicisme social en France" *Le Mouvement Social* 77 (October-December 1977), pp. 117–119; Paul Droulers, *Politique sociale et christianisme: le Père Desbuquois et l'Action Populaire: debuts—syndicalisme et integristes, 1903–1918* (Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1969).

Father Desbuquois, purchased as whole cloth by Méndez Medina and then resized for a Mexican context, looked much like the Catholic fashions already in production in Mexico. Since the late nineteenth century, numerous European and Latin American Catholics had conceived of a Christian vision for society—"social Catholicism"—a third or middle way between capitalism and socialism.[2] This third way became a pattern for Catholics worldwide. Historian Manuel Ceballos Ramírez argues that in Mexico social Catholicism presented an "alternative project," first to the liberal economic development associated with the long rule of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911) and thereafter to the revolutionary state's plans for national reconstruction (c.1920–1940).[3] Méndez Medina helped design a social Catholic alternative using third-way ideas as a model. To unify and direct the burgeoning Catholic social movement, the Mexican hierarchy founded an institution called the Mexican Social Secretariat (SSM) in 1920 and appointed Méndez Medina its first director.[4] Over the next five years, the Secretariat helped mobilize thousands of workers in competition with state-sponsored unionization drives.

But by 1925 Méndez Medina's Catholic alternative to revolution was unraveling. The Jesuit was fired from his position at the Secretariat and reassigned. State-sponsored anticlericalism became the official policy of the new president, Plutarco Elías Calles (1924–1928). Many social Catholics of the early 1920s became the Cristeros of the late 1920s, waging their epic civil war against the

2. For an insightful overview of the convergences and divergences of social Catholicism in various national contexts, see *The Politics of Religion in an Age of Renewal,* ed. Austen Ivereigh (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2000).

3. Manuel Ceballos Ramírez, "La democracia cristiana en el México liberal: un proyecto alternativo (1867–1929)" (Mexico: Instituto Mexicano de Doctrina Social Cristiana [hereafter IMDOSOC], 1987), pp. 19–26.

4. Méndez Medina and the SSM have been the subject of relatively few studies, given their influence on social Catholicism in Mexico. The most detailed are Robert E. Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church, 1910–1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 26–27, 129; Randall S. Hanson, "'The Day of Ideals': Catholic Social Action in the Age of the Mexican Revolution, 1867–1929" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University–Bloomington, 1994), esp. chapts. 4–8; Peter Lester Reich, *Mexico's Hidden Revolution: The Catholic Church in Law and Politics since 1929* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), chapt. 7; Kristina A. Boylan, "Mexican Social Secretariat (Secretariado Social Mexicano)," in *Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Politics, L-Z,* eds. Roy P. Domenico and Mark Y. Hanley (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006), pp. 375–377; and María Gabriela Aguirre Cristiani, *¿Una historia compartida? Revolución mexicana y catolicismo social, 1913–1924* (Mexico: IMDOSOC, 2008), esp. chapt. 3. For post-1940, see Dennis Michael Hanratty, "Change and Conflict in the Contemporary Mexican Catholic Church" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1980); Carlos Fazio, *Algunos aportes del Secretariado Social Mexicano en la transición a la democracia* (Mexico: Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos, 1997); María Martha Pacheco Hinojosa, "Presencia de la iglesia en la sociedad mexicana (1958–1973). Estudio de dos casos: Secretariado Social Mexicano, Conferencia de Organizaciones Internacionales," (Ph.D. diss., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1997); and Hugo Armando Escontrilla Valdez, "El Secretariado Social Mexicano: orígenes de la autonomía (1965–1973)" (M.A. thesis, Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 2000).

revolutionary state. The Church-state conflict deflated the Catholic social activism of the early 1920s, and during the Cristero Rebellion (1926–1929) the Secretariat functioned only as a shell of its former self, with its leader in European exile. When the guns of *La Cristiada* finally fell silent in June 1929, the Vatican and a temporizing Mexican hierarchy sought to pacify Catholic radicalism. Rome and the new archbishop of Mexico, the Jesuit moderate Pascual Díaz (1929–1936) laid out a new job for the reestablished Secretariat: the organization of Mexican Catholic Action, a hierarchically led lay apostolate that would focus on moralization and religious renewal instead of labor organization and socioeconomic reform. After the organization of Catholic Action in 1929, Mexican Catholicism severed its link with the social movement.[5] In 1931, the new Federal Labor Law denied legal recognition to any professional union with a confessional identity. With that, social Catholicism suffered its death knell, or so the official story goes. However, this article is a revisionist history of social Catholicism in Mexico, which is in truth a story of survival.

This essay focuses on the continuity of Catholic social action in Mexico after the revolution, qualifying the conclusion that the Mexican Church abandoned social action after the Cristero Rebellion.[6] It makes the case that Alfredo Méndez Medina's legacy of social and labor reform persisted in the institution he created, the Mexican Social Secretariat. The present account reveals that even during the 1930s and 1940s—decades thought lacking in social dynamism—female lay activists associated with the Secretariat kept Catholic social ideals alive through educational campaigns that targeted working-class women and a fundraising tour. Then, in 1944, the new archbishop of Mexico, Luis María Martínez (1937–1956) allowed the SSM to separate from Catholic Action, thus fostering a rebirth of Catholic social activism in Mexico. From 1948, under the direction of the brothers Pedro and Manuel Velázquez Hernández, the Secretariat returned to Méndez Medina's goals of organizing workers, creating small savings-and-loan banks, promoting agrarian reform, and disseminating Catholic social doctrine in Mexico.[7]

5. Manuel Ceballos Ramírez, "*Rerum novarum* en México: cuarenta años entre la conciliación y la intransigencia (1891–1931)" *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 49:3 (1987), p. 170.

6. See, for example, Jean Meyer, "Cincuenta años de radicalismo: la Iglesia Católica, la derecha y la izquierda en América Latina," (Mexico: IMDOSOC, 1990), p. 15; Bernardo Barranco V., "Posiciones políticas en la historia de la acción católica mexicana," in *El pensamiento social de los católicos mexicanos,* ed. Roberto Blancarte (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996), pp. 39–70; and Robert E. Curley, "Slouching Toward Bethlehem: Catholics and the Political Sphere in Revolutionary Mexico." (Ph.D. diss. University of Chicago, 2001), pp. 1, 8, 368–369.

7. Pedro Velázquez Hernández wrote an important in-house study of the SSM, *El Secretariado Social Mexicano (25 años de vida)* (Mexico: Secretariado Social Mexicano, 1945). Manuel Velázquez Hernández wrote the most important account of his brother's work; see *Pedro Velázquez H.: apóstol de la justicia* (Mexico: Editorial Jus, 1978).

In short, it was through the SSM that the Church renewed its program of economic development after 1940. Although certainly embattled from 1925 to 1944, the SSM and social Catholicism survived the Cristero Rebellion and the subsequent decade of revolutionary anticlericalism. The institution continued the efforts begun by Méndez Medina and others to make Mexico's social and economic organization benefit the country's working classes. In so doing, the SSM anticipated the liberationist movement of the 1970s and beyond—in its emphasis on solidarity with workers, its long-standing call for remedies to economic inequalities caused by free-market capitalism, its mission to accurately depict Mexico's social reality, and its constant effort to educate and support Catholic activists. Liberation theology in Mexico therefore has an important precursor in the SSM, a point relatively unexplored by historians.[8]

CATHOLIC ACTIVISM IN REVOLUTIONARY MEXICO

Social Catholicism presented the Church's solutions to problems bedeviling contemporary society, including harsh labor conditions, long workdays, unjust salaries, illiteracy, and poverty. The term "social question" became a catch-all for these and other ills associated with urbanization and industrialization. Social Catholics looked with unease on laissez faire market competition, which in their view had atomized contemporary society and eroded solidarity among the classes. They argued that unfettered capitalism had produced the worst kinds of abuses by landlords and industrialists and had fostered in rural peons and urban laborers enmity toward their employers. The amelioration of this situation became a priority for these Catholics, especially after the galvanizing effect of Pope Leo XIII's papal encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891), which advocated the creation of working-class associations, corporately organized, that would give voice to the grievances of laborers. Subsequent encyclicals such as *Graves de communi* (1901) strengthened Pope Leo's contention that Catholics had a duty to participate in civil society and to work within democratic structures toward the common good.

In addition to these and other papal encyclicals, European ideological and theological currents imported to Latin America at the turn of the century further encouraged Catholic social reform efforts. Mexican Catholic activists metabolized a European theology known as integralism. Born from neo-Thomism, integralism united religiosity, politics, social work, and civic activism: "the rosary [was] inseparable from the militancy of the syndicate."[9] At its root, inte-

8. Two doctoral dissertations briefly discuss this point; see Hanson, "Day of Ideals," and Hanratty, "Change and Conflict."

9. Jean Meyer, "El catolicismo social en México hasta 1913" (Mexico: IMDOSOC, 1992), p. 11.

gralism developed in reaction to secularization. Whereas the state desired to privatize and marginalize religion, Catholic integralists sought, in the words of Pope Pius X (1903–1914), to "restore all things in Christ," including politics and socioeconomic organization.[10] Accordingly, social Catholics like Méndez Medina felt the Church had to lead unionization efforts lest socialist or other non-Christian movements do so instead. Papal encyclicals and integralism gave more specific direction to the lay and clerical efforts at social reform already under way in Mexico.[11]

Behind the facade of the integralists' engagement with modern society, however, lay a deep-seated rejection of it, especially modern "errors" such as liberalism, revolution, socialism, and communism. Catholic militants of the era, influenced by nineteenth-century European ultramontanism,[12] were often referred to as "intransigents" because of their unwavering opposition to secular movements. In spite of this, Catholic intransigence was itself in flux by the first decade of the twentieth century. Many social Catholic movements in Europe and Latin America eschewed the profoundly conservative—even monarchist—late-nineteenth century variety of intransigence that a priori opposed democratic governance. In Mexico, social Catholics at the vanguard embraced democracy, albeit with reservations; they remained opposed to unchecked economic liberalism, state-led secularization, and what many felt to be the "socialistic" vision propounded by later revolutionaries. The National Catholic Party (PCN [1911]) became the political platform for the social Catholic vision, which PCN adherents termed "Christian democracy."[13] But unlike the more secular postwar Christian Democratic parties in Europe and Latin America, the PCN and other similar "Christian democratic" organizations maintained a distinct confessional identity.[14] The PCN urged the faithful to channel their love for Christ and civic devotion into political action: Catholics should vote and work toward establishing the "Reign of Christ" over society. Mexican lay activists

10. The phrase comes from Pius X's 1903 encyclical *E supremi.*

11. María Luisa Aspe Armella, *La formación social y política de los católicos mexicanos: la Acción Católica Mexicana y la Unión Nacional de Estudiantes Católicos, 1929–1958* (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2007), pp. 24–25, 93 n. 1; Jean-Marie Mayeur, "Los partidos católicos y demócratas-cristianos, un intento de definición" (Mexico: IMDOSOC, 1987); Jean Meyer, *Historia de los cristianos en América Latina, siglos XIX y XX,* trans. Tomás Segovia (Mexico: Editorial Vuelta, 1989), pp. 101–102; Roberto Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia Católica en México* (Mexico: El Colegio Mexiquense and Fondo de Cultúra Económica, 1992), pp. 11–27; Blancarte, "Iglesia y estado en México: seis décadas de acomodo y de conciliación imposible" (Mexico: IMDOSOC, 1990).

12. Literally "beyond the mountains," ultramontanism historically referred to the Holy See's power outside Italy, but it came to signify the centralized and heavily structured nineteenth- and twentieth-century papacy.

13. Laura O'Dogherty Madrazo, *De urnas y sotanas: el Partido Católico Nacional en Jalisco* (Mexico: Conaculta, 2001), pp. 77–114.

14. Ceballos Ramírez, "La democracia," pp. 10–11.

supported this effort by promoting the use of electoral democracy to establish laws that recognized the moral authority of the Church. In consequence, inherent contradictions existed within the social Catholic movement in Mexico: intransigent-integralism embodied both a constructive project of social renewal based on Christian principles and a militant opposition to the secular state.[15]

By the early twentieth century, intransigent-integralism characterized the Catholic movement in Mexico. Clergy trained in Europe reinforced it; papal encyclicals like *Rerum novarum* fed it; Jesuit educators nurtured it; and international youth organizations confirmed it.[16] The Mexican social Catholics of the era transcend easy classification: they cannot be dismissed simply as counterrevolutionaries allied to the old regime and hostile to national reconstruction.[17] On the contrary, recent scholarship confirms that social Catholics presented an "alternative project" to revolutionary state formation; although often in conflict with secular and revolutionary visions for Mexico, social Catholicism nonetheless offered a constructive path for national integration.[18] Social Catholics therefore deserve to be considered part of Mexico's larger "revolutionary society," which ached for change, reform, and social transformation.[19] We might describe the Mexican social Catholic movement as an alternative to the 1910 Revolution, arising from the same conditions yet crucially directed by Catholic principles that led it away from revolutionary strategies, methods, and allegiances.[20]

The Catholic alternative advanced and further defined itself as the negative socioeconomic effects of Porfirian development policies worsened after 1900. Over the course of the next decade, Mexican Catholics held national gatherings, formed new associations, and mobilized existing ones to fight secular educational, ideological, and labor policies.[21] Competition with ideological rivals

15. Blancarte, *Historia*, p. 24

16. José Oscar Beozzo, "The Church and the Liberal States," in *The Church in Latin America, 1492–1992,* ed. Enrique Dussel (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), pp. 117–137; John Lynch, "The Catholic Church in Latin America, 1830–1930," in *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Vol. IV, c. 1870–1930,* ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 527–595.

17. For this classic perspective, see for example Frank Tannenbaum, *Peace by Revolution: An Interpretation of Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), esp. chapt. 6, "The Defeat of the Church"; Ernest Gruening, *Mexico and Its Heritage* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1942), pp. 273–286.

18. For a well-researched example, see Aguirre Cristiani, *Una historia.*

19. Hanson, "Day of Ideals," p. 119.

20. Donald J. Mabry orginally coined the phrase in his book *Mexico's Acción Nacional: A Catholic Alternative to Revolution* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1973).

21. Robert Curley argues that 1910 can be seen as an important date for the consolidation of social Catholicism in Mexico; "Slouching," pp. 11–12. An important pre-history has been traced to this political mobilization as well: see Ceballos Ramírez, *El catolicismo social, un tercero en discordia,* Rerum novarum, *la cuestión social y la movilización de los católicos mexicanos (1891–1911)* (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1991);

(economic liberalism and socialism) and the Europeanization of the Mexican Church initiated in the late nineteenth century helped rally urban lay Catholics and their clerical supporters.[22] Social Catholics held national congresses on social issues, agrarian conferences, and "social weeks" to address the social question in Mexico. These offered a Christian response to the social and political predicaments linked to the Porfiriato, which included labor unrest, expropriation of land by haciendas, and the problem of indigenous integration.

To give these gatherings a more enduring form, a multitude of Catholic organizations were founded after 1909.[23] Catholic social mobilization, having become more public in the years before the 1910 Revolution, had even greater potential for politicization by 1920, especially as the Church competed with the developing revolutionary state for hearts and minds.[24] The social Catholic movement of the 1910s briefly co-existed with Francisco I. Madero's democratic regime, but Catholic support for Victoriano Huerta's coup d'état and the subsequent anticlerical backlash under Venustiano Carranza inflamed the existing Church-state antagonism. In this context of competition and activism, the Mexican episcopate established the Mexican Social Secretariat to reorganize the Catholic movement.[25] Archbishop of Mexico José Mora y del Río chose the 43-year-old Méndez Medina to direct the SSM, which soon became the umbrella institution for Church-led social activism. Méndez Medina's vision, made operational through the Secretariat and its lay collaborators, would define the Catholic alternative to revolution in Mexico after 1920.

ALFREDO MÉNDEZ MEDINA: SOCIAL FORMATION AND VISION

Born January 29, 1877, in Villanueva, Zacatecas, Alfredo Méndez Medina entered the Seminario Conciliar in 1891, the same year Pope Leo XIII's famous social encyclical was published. His religious formation was probably influenced by the strong clerical Catholicism long established in the country's center-west region. He experienced a personal tragedy in the death of his mother less than a year before he entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1899, and in those first probationary years he kept an intimate spiritual diary dedicated to the Virgin Mary;

Meyer, "El catolicismo social en México," pp. 8–22; and Randall S. Hanson, "The Day of Ideals: Catholic Social Action in the Age of the Mexican Revolution, 1867–1929" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University-Bloomington, 1994).

22. Hanson, "Day of Ideals," p. 153.

23. Ibid., p. 195.

24. Alan Knight, "Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico, 1910–1940," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 74:3 (August 1994), pp. 393–444.

25. Velázquez, *El Secretariado*, pp. 8–13.

the first words he wrote were: "the Mother of God is my Mother."[26] Méndez Medina's travels in Europe during the first decade of the twentieth century awakened a keen social awareness. In 1901 he finished his novitiate and took his vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The following year he went to Spain to study, as was common for Mexican Jesuits of the era. He would recall that the writings of a Belgian Jesuit, John Van der Aa, hit him like "a bolt of lightning," convincing him that economic liberalism was a key factor contributing to social disintegration in the nineteenth century.[27]

Méndez Medina's interest in social Catholicism grew quickly as he completed courses under Luis Chalbaud Errazquín, S.J., and read the latest journals dedicated to Church social doctrine.[28] Tomás Ipiña, Jesuit superior of the Mexican Province, recognized the young man's aptitude and passion and requested that he be sent to France and Belgium to study European social Catholic movements firsthand. Between 1910 and 1912, the Mexican Jesuit traveled to Holland, Germany, and England to attend Catholic social congresses. After his ordination in the summer of 1910, Méndez Medina visited Desbuquois at L'Action Populaire. He attended lectures on agrarian studies given by Etienne Martin Saint-Léon in Paris and took sociology classes from Arthur Vermeersch, S.J., at the Catholic Institute in Louvain, Belgium, well known for neo-Thomist studies. There he completed a doctorate.[29]

In January 1911, Méndez Medina wrote on the social question in Mexico, emphasizing that class harmony would return to society if Church-inspired values guided economic practices, civil institutions, and state machinery. Like European Catholic intellectuals, Méndez Medina described his vision of a restored Christian social order using the body as metaphor. He argued that a peaceful society must be "organically formed" by "members" working in harmony with the "head." Whereas in the medieval era the Church had functioned as the "head" and guilds had been the "members," Méndez Medina did not advocate a return to a medieval polity. He recognized that industrialization had changed the nature of work, and believed modern trade unions should replace guilds in connecting individuals with each other and to society at large. He argued: "This is thus the time for Catholics to present an integral and complete project, not simply charitable protection [for workers] but professional organi-

26. AHPMCJ, VI, Vida Jesuítas de la Provincia, Personas, Documentos Personales, Alfredo Méndez Medina, D-758; Emeterio Valverde Téllez, *Bio-bibliografía eclesiática mexicana (1821–1943),* Vol. 3, Sacerdotes (Mexico: Editorial Jus, 1949), pp. 279–282.

27. Aguirre Cristiani, *Una historia*, p. 120.

28. Ibid., p. 123.

29. Valverde Téllez, *Bio-bibliografía*, p. 280.

zation."[30] For him, the answer to Mexico's social problems lay in the creation of Catholic trade unions that had the power to negotiate fair wages and just labor conditions with factory owners. This conviction put Méndez Medina on the progressive end of Mexican social Catholics, many of whom continued to promote only traditional mutualist societies and charitable organizations. In essence, Méndez Medina propounded a Catholic-inspired corporatism, wherein vocational and functional groups would reset the bent and broken limbs of the body social. After Méndez Medina's return to Mexico in December 1912, Archbishop Mora y del Río invited him to speak at the Second Grand Workers Diet held in Zamora in January 1913.

The archbishop had trained in social Catholicism at the Jesuit-run Pius Latin American College in Rome, which in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced a generation of socially aware priests who went on to hold prominent positions in the Mexican hierarchy and spearhead social Catholic activism within their dioceses.[31] They built "canonically structured associations," lay groups active in social and religious renewal yet firmly under the thumb of the hierarchy.[32] On the whole, they supported expanding the influence of regional and diocesan associations to the national sphere, but tension always existed between the authority of a bishop over his diocese and the actions of national groups led by lay Catholics and priests such as Méndez Medina. When the Jesuit returned to Mexico, he met with various groups involved in social action, including students at Jesuit-run schools (see Figure 1). He soon discovered that Catholic efforts to organize workers had already begun, with some success. For example, at the First Workers Diet held in Mexico City in 1911, Salvador Moreno Arriaga, a layman, and Father José María Troncoso oversaw the creation of the Confederation of Catholic Workers Circles (CCCO). Moreno Arriaga and Troncoso claimed in early 1913 that they had affiliated 50 workers' circles throughout the country, accounting for 14,500 individuals.[33] Méndez Medina thus had to contend with both a hierarchy loath to relinquish its control over lay groups and national organizations already in the process of organizing social Catholic works, as he attempted to redirect the social Catholic movement away from parish-based workers' study groups and toward the creation of national Catholic trade unions.

30. Méndez Medina to Ipiña, January 7, 1911, in AHPMCJ, VI, Vida Jesuítas de la Provincia, Personas, Documentos Personales, Alfredo Méndez Medina, D-757.

31. Lisa Marie Edwards, "Latin American Seminary Reform: Modernization and the Preservation of the Catholic Church," *The Catholic Historical Review* 95:2 (April 2009), pp. 261–282.

32. Edward Wright-Rios, *Revolutions in Mexican Catholicism: Reform and Revelation in Oaxaca, 1887–1934* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 47.

33. Hanson, "Day of Ideals," p. 132.

Figure 1.

Alfredo Méndez Medina (seated, center), with Students from the Jesuit-Run Colegio de Mascarones, Mexico City, August 2, 1913. Source: Archivo Histórico de la Provincia Mexicana de la Compañía de Jesús (AHPMCJ), VI, Vida Jesuitas, Méndez Medina, Cosas personales, D-758.

Méndez Medina's presentation at the January 1913 Diet in Zamora stood out for its unequivocal call for the unionization of Mexico's Catholic workers. It also contained a systematic program of social Catholic "demands." Among these were a minimum wage, female and child labor laws, the development of inalienable homesteads, health and injury insurance, labor arbitration boards, a system of worker profit-sharing, trade unions for middle-class workers and women, corporate representation for workers, agrarian reform, the establishment of mandatory Sunday rest, the ability of joint associations of workers and owners to set wages, the regulation of the Mexican stock market, and the creation of a progressive income tax.[34] Many of these provisions had been a part of the National Catholic Party's program and thus were not completely new to leading social Catholics in the country.[35] Yet, Méndez Medina's bold articula-

34. Alfredo Méndez Medina, *La cuestion social en méxico: orientaciones* (Mexico: El Cruzado, 1913), pp. 30–33; Hanson, "Day of Ideals," pp. 132–133.

35. O'Dogherty Madrazo, *De urnas*, pp. 77–114.

tion of these progressive demands catapulted him to celebrity status within the movement. Soon after, however, his efforts met resistance from bishops and lay leaders who perceived his activities as a challenge to their authority.

Salvador Moreno Arriaga of the CCCO immediately felt threatened by Méndez Medina's unionization of workers in Mexico City during 1913, but the Jesuit contended that he had simply facilitated the proposals of lay activists seeking his assistance. In this way, he helped Manuel de la Peza and José Villela establish the Centro de Estudios León XIII in early 1913; he also supported lay efforts to start further study circles; to create a professional union of engineers, lawyers, and doctors; and to present draft social legislation to Mexico City's Chamber of Deputies. To Moreno Arriaga and his supporters in the hierarchy, Méndez Medina was moving too fast, and Bishop Othón Núñez sent a series of complaints to the Jesuit leadership in Mexico. The affair left Méndez Medina feeling abandoned by his superiors. Although Archbishop Mora y del Río always remained supportive of Méndez Medina, he did not intervene on his behalf, which only compounded his disappointment.[36] As national events in Mexico deteriorated after the assassination of President Madero in early 1913, the Jesuit community began to disperse, especially as civil war and violence against the Church increased during 1914. Perhaps conveniently, Méndez Medina was sent to El Salvador for six years, where he taught in the Seminario Conciliar at San Salvador and took an active role in disseminating the social doctrine in public conferences.[37]

FLORESCENCE OF THE MEXICAN SOCIAL SECRETARIAT, 1920–1925

When peace and a considerable measure of stability returned to Mexico between 1917 and 1920, the episcopate once again set its sights on renewing

36. Méndez Medina to Jesuit Provincial Marcelo Renaud, December 12, 1913, in AHPMCJ, VI, Vida Jesuítas de la Provincia, Personas, Documentos Personales, Alfredo Méndez Medina, D-757.

37. The Jesuits figured prominently in nineteenth- and twentieth-century conflict between Church and state in El Salvador. Liberal-conservative power squabbles and a treaty with Guatemala led to the order's expulsion in 1872. Thus, the arrival of Méndez Medina and his five fellow Jesuits in August 1914 signified the restoration of the Society of Jesus in El Salvador. In 1915, President Carlos Meléndez sought to expel the Jesuits once again, but did not follow through on his threats. An interesting letter from a Salvadoran woman to Méndez Medina, dated November 22, 1916, thanks the Jesuit for his participation in a recent conference on social action held at the cathedral in San Salvador, where President Meléndez had been in attendance. According to the source, Méndez Medina's measured participation in the event gratified the president and apparently helped to temper his views about the Jesuits in his country; see AHPMCJ, VI, Vida Jesuitas de la Provincia, Personas, Documentos Personales, Correspondencia del P. Alfredo Méndez Medina, D-786; José Gutiérrez Casillas, S.J., *Jesuitas en México durante el siglo XX* (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa S.A., 1981), pp. 100-101. For background on the complex interplay of Church-state conflict and popular rebellion in El Salvador, see Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago, "Holding the City Hostage: Popular Sectors and Elites in San Miguel, El Salvador, 1875," *The Americas* 68:1 (July 2011), pp. 82–85.

Catholic social activism. Several lay organizations, notably the Knights of Columbus, the Association of Catholic Ladies (later called the Union of Mexican Catholic Ladies, or UDCM), and the Young Men's Catholic Association (ACJM), had continued their work during the period of armed conflict.[38] By 1920, the majority of the clergy had returned to their dioceses, and Catholic social associations rapidly regrouped. Members of the Mexican hierarchy strategized about how to unify the movement. In 1919, a short-lived Confederation of Catholic Associations floundered.[39] However, concerned laymen and priests such as Leopoldo Villela and Lucio G. Villanueva, S.J., proposed the creation of a social secretariat, and during celebrations of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Coronation of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico City the episcopate agreed.[40]

Any qualms about the choice of Méndez Medina as the first director of the Secretariat went unrecorded. His education and interest in social problems spoke for themselves: no other Mexican priest had Méndez Medina's unique mix of top-notch training, charisma, and intelligence. These factors made him a sensible candidate, despite his previous conflict with Bishop Núñez. On receiving the news of his appointment, Méndez Medina immediately began planning. He explicitly used the Belgian social secretariat, founded in 1904 by the Dominican Georges Rutten, as his model. The Mexican Social Secretariat, like its European counterpart, was thus conceived as a permanent institution assuring the continuity of the social movement: it would provide technical assistance to affiliated associations, help train and equip elite propagandists, and act as a central clearinghouse for the diffusion of the Church's social doctrine.[41] According to Méndez Medina, the Secretariat's mission would be to "lend in an effective, systematic, and ordered manner the services that social works need to resist the course of socialism."[42] Yet, as had happened in 1912 and 1913, Méndez Medina met opposition from prominent bishops, each with his own ideas of how the movement should be run.

An anecdote recounted by Méndez Medina describes an early run-in. While walking around the Salesian college in Guadalajara a few days after Christmas 1920, Méndez Medina encountered three bishops, all social Catholics and power brokers within the hierarchy: Orozco y Jiménez of Guadalajara, Othón

38. Hanson, "Day of Ideals," pp. 140–141.

39. "Estatutos Generales de la Confederación de Asociaciones Católicas de México," in Archivo del Secretariado Social Mexicano (hereafter ASSM), Antecedentes, Correspondencia I, 1902–1919.

40. Aguirre Cristiani, *Una historia*, pp. 118, 124 n. 14.

41. Velázquez, *El Secretariado*, pp. 7–8.

42. Méndez Medina to R.P. General Wlodimiro Ledóchowsky, S.J., August 26, 1921, in Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (hereafter ARSI), Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1920–1921, 1005-IX, 6, ann. I.

Núñez of Zamora, and Miguel de la Mora of Zacatecas, later bishop of San Luis Potosí. Given that Núñez had opposed Méndez Medina in 1913, the chance meeting had the potential to be uncomfortable for both men; Méndez Medina had certainly not forgotten the affair, as his writings clearly show. Núñez greeted him warmly however, which initially surprised the Jesuit:

> "Ay! padre Méndez, if only we had followed the plan of labor organization that you proposed to us at the Diet of Zamora, our luck would have turned out quite differently," Núñez opened.[43]
>
> "Most Illustrious Señor, that can't be helped, we'll do now what little we can," replied Méndez Medina.
>
> "And who do you think is responsible for what happened?" queried Núñez.
>
> Then, making sure to smile and reply as sweetly as he could, Méndez Medina responded simply: "Your Illustrious Lordship is one of them."
>
> After an awkward pause, Núñez lightened the moment, giving Méndez Medina a friendly slap on the arm and saying: "What jokes you tell, my Reverend Father Méndez."[44]

The incident reveals Méndez Medina's tenuous relationship with the hierarchy. And although the Jesuit wrote that Núñez later became a decided backer of the Secretariat, friction remained between Méndez Medina and members of the Mexican episcopate who felt that the leadership of Catholic social action should ultimately rest with the bishops, not an annoyingly forceful Jesuit priest.

Despite the potential for conflict, Méndez Medina initiated his efforts immediately. Before opening the offices of the SSM, he embarked on a two-year tour of Mexico, visiting at least 13 states and 50 cities. He participated in social weeks and conferences; held public debates in Mexico City that included Luis Morones, leader of the state-sponsored Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM); and helped organize study circles and orient leaders in the social doctrine.[45] Méndez Medina made these efforts to lay the foundation for

43. Othón Núñez's statement refers to the fact that in 1913 Church and state efforts at unionization were both relatively underdeveloped. By 1920 the situation had changed, especially with the establishment of state-led labor organizations like the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers, founded in 1918.

44. This anecdote and the dialogue here reproduced are found in an untitled document written by Méndez Medina in AHPMCJ, VI, Vida Jesuítas de la Provincia, Personas, Documentos Personales, Alfredo Méndez Medina, D-757.

45. Joel Sevilla, "¿Qué es el Secretariado Social Mexicano?" *La Paz Social*, Tomo I, March 1923, pp. 7–14; ASSM, Episcopado I (November 1919-December 1924), Mora y del Río to Mexican Episcopate, December 1922, in ASSM, Episcopado I (November 1919–December 1924).

the development of Catholic trade unions; he believed firmly in bringing the social message to the people, convincing workers that the Church had a plan for social reorganization. Before his journey, Méndez Medina participated in the Curso Social Agrícola Zapopano in January 1921. Setting the tone for the weeklong meetings, he urged openness, dialogue, and analytical study of Mexico's social problems, calling for action because the "enemies" of the Church had already begun to attract workers.[46] His comments acknowledged the challenge from secular unions, which lent a greater sense of urgency to Catholic syndicalism.[47]

In December 1922, Méndez Medina officially opened the offices of the Secretariat at 9 Motolinía in Mexico City. Operations were split into four branches: male affairs, female affairs, finance, and commerce.[48] Rafael Dávila Vilchis, a priest who worked for the SSM, served as the first ecclesiastical advisor to the Archdiocesan Confederation of Workers (CAT), established in Mexico City in June 1922.[49] A host of lay Catholics directed much of the Secretariat's work. Notably, a female activist named Sofía del Valle acted as official liaison between the SSM and the UDCM, hosted small gatherings for women to explain the basic principles of Catholic syndicalism, and directed a night school for female members of the Mexico City-based Professional Union of Catholic Employees.[50] Together with the president of the UDCM, Elena Lascurain de Silva, del Valle endeavored to direct the association's activities toward socioeconomic action.[51] Catholic lawyers such as José Villela, Mariano Alcocer, and Toribio Esquivel wrote numerous articles for the Secretariat's official publication, *La Paz Social*, while Manuel de la Peza assisted with financial matters. De la Peza had been a leader of the Knights of Columbus and helped to strengthen its ties with the Secretariat. Luis Bustos, the current president of the Knights, also worked with the institution. The outspoken young leader of the ACJM, René Capistrán Garza, facilitated links between the youth organization and the Secretariat. Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra, who had experience running rural savings-and-loan cooperatives, collaborated as well.[52] While Méndez Medina and his coterie of social activists took charge of the technical

46. *Curso Social Agrícola Zapopano: desarrollado en Guadalajara, con ocasión de la pontificia coronación de la imagen de Nstra. Sra. de Zapopan, en enero de 1921* (Mexico: Renacimiento, 1921), pp. 17–20 (special thanks to Robert Curley for providing a digital version of Méndez Medina's presentation at this event).

47. "Catholic syndicalism" was a term often used by activists to refer to the organization of professional trade unions with a confessional identity.

48. *El Universal*, December 14, 1922; clipping included in AHPMCJ, VIII, Escritos de SJs de la P.M., Alfredo Méndez Medina; Hanson, "Day of Ideals," p. 338.

49. Hanson, "Day of Ideals," p. 356.

50. Ibid, p. 358.

51. Méndez Medina to Miguel Miranda, September 25, 1925, in ASSM, Correspondencia III, 1925.

52. Hanson, "Day of Ideals," pp. 345–346.

direction of the Secretariat, a separate committee of laymen directed its financial affairs and oversaw donations to the SSM, which ranged from offerings of 10 to 20 pesos a month to one-time donations of 300 pesos, from various Mexican dioceses. In addition, the Mexican petroleum company El Águila gave 100 pesos a month.[53]

The Secretariat offices were a hub for social Catholic activities: from here the SSM offered technical direction to the Catholic social movement, and Méndez Medina gave advice on everything from the formation of cooperatives to the specifics of regulating trade union membership.[54] The Secretariat established a resource library in its Mexico City offices that disseminated publications written by Méndez Medina and others. One short primer, entitled *Manual de formación sindical* (1922), provided a basic orientation in the theory and practice of Catholic unionization; an appendix even contained sample union statutes that could be adapted for a variety of organizations. Other notable publications included an edited and expanded version of *La cuestión social en México*, Méndez Medina's discourse from the Diet of Zamora, and a small pamphlet entitled *Al margen de la cuestión agraria* (1923), which promoted the reform of Mexico's rural labor system. The Secretariat's in-house publication, *La Paz Social*, initiated in 1923, reached a circulation of 2,000.

Méndez Medina participated in a host of Catholic conferences, most importantly as an advisor to the National Congress of Catholic Workers, which took place in Guadalajara in April 1922 and resulted in the foundation of the National Catholic Confederation of Labor (CNCT). Catholic labor activists hoped to use the event as an opportunity to attract independent unions that had rejected CROM affiliation, but the confessional aspect of Catholic trade unions posed a potential obstacle to attracting nonaligned groups. During the congress, a split occurred over which course to take: one group believed firmly that Catholic unions had to maintain their distinctly Catholic identity, while others successfully advocated a compromise "loose confessionalism" that would allow independent unions to affiliate on a two-tiered system.[55] First-tier unions would be considered Catholic and have an ecclesiastical assistant. Second-tier groups could affiliate without being strictly confessional, provided they did not admit socialists, respected Catholic principles, and named respected individuals to

53. ASSM, Cuentas, 1923.

54. J. Trinidad Martínez to Méndez Medina, July 14, 1923, in ASSM, Correspondencia II, 1922–1924; Hanson, "Day of Ideals," p. 338.

55. The phrase is taken from Robert E. Curley, "Work and Religion in Post-Revolutionary Mexico," to be included in *A Plebiscite of Martyrs: Political Catholicism in Revolutionary Mexico, 1900–1926* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, forthcoming), chapt. 6.

leadership positions.[56] Méndez Medina played a key role in brokering, or at the very least facilitating, this compromise.[57]

Between 1920 and 1925, Méndez Medina and the Mexican Social Secretariat sponsored social weeks and gatherings as the Jesuit toured Mexico. The SSM established a savings-and-loan bank called the Cajas de Ahorro León XIII, which made small, low-interest loans to workers. Many lay Catholics and priests wrote to the offices of the SSM asking for technical direction and advice on establishing study circles and professional organizations. Lay activists working with the Secretariat assisted Catholic social organizations in promoting unionization. In Mexico City, Méndez Medina oversaw the first social action course for priests, which endeavored to train ecclesiastical assistants in the Church's social doctrine.[58] The CNCT it helped to establish had an affiliated membership of approximately 80,000 workers.[59] Publications such as *La Paz Social* in Mexico City and *El Archivo Social* and *El Obrero* in Guadalajara disseminated the social doctrine and advocated unionization. Méndez Medina and Archbishop Ruiz y Flores were the principal authors of the *Carta pastoral colectiva sobre la acción católica en asuntos sociales* (*Collective Pastoral Letter on Catholic Action on Social Issues*), published in the name of the Mexican hierarchy in 1923.[60] He had reached the apogee of his influence in the social movement.

THE DECLINE OF MEXICO'S SOCIAL CATHOLIC ALTERNATIVE, 1925–1944

Despite Méndez Medina's success in helping to organize the CNCT and hosting scores of labor conferences around Mexico, his Jesuit superiors decided that a secular priest should direct the SSM. As Ceballos Ramírez contends, this decision stemmed from a shift in the Society's social policy after the election of Wlodimiro Ledóchowsky as Jesuit General.[61] In instructions dated December

56. Manuel Ceballos Ramírez, "El sindicalismo católico en México, 1919–1931," *Historia Mexicana* 35:4 (1986), pp. 644–653, 643 n. 52.

57. Curley, "Work," chapt. 6.

58. Aguirre Cristiani, p. 217.

59. Curley, "Work," p. 7.

60. Aguirre Cristiani, pp. 201–205.

61. Ceballos Ramírez, "El sindicalismo católico," p. 664 n.102. In addition to Ceballos Ramírez, several historians have speculated as to the motivations behind his reassignment. Randall Hanson contends that, although the decision came from within the Jesuit order, it was President Obregón's pressure on the Mexican Provincial, Camilo Crivelli, that led to Méndez Medina's removal. As he has it, Crivelli "sacrificed" Méndez Medina for the safety of the Jesuits in Mexico (Hanson, "Day of Ideals," pp. 416–421). María Gabriela Aguirre Cristiani points out that Méndez Medina's conflicts with his Mexican Jesuit superiors, as well as with the archbishop of Guadalajara, Francisco Orozco y Jiménez, presented more immediate reasons for his reassignment (Aguirre Cristiani, *Una historia*, pp. 170–172, 172 n. 79). Documents from the Jesuit Archive in

25, 1916, the Society of Jesus articulated that socioeconomic ministries, which included the management of "worldly" affairs (money and property), should be directed by competent laymen or diocesan priests when possible or convenient. Ledóchowsky explicitly reminded Méndez Medina of these instructions in letters dated October 1921 and March 1923.[62] From new documents recently made available at the Jesuit archive in Rome, it appears that Méndez Medina's appointment by the Mexican bishops was made without prior consultation with the Jesuit order, but due to his qualifications the selection was accepted under the condition that he train a successor from among the secular clergy.[63] An exasperated letter to Ledóchowsky from the new Mexican Jesuit provincial, Camilo Crivelli, supports this interpretation: "The Bishops had fallen into the same error as before with Fr. Méndez Medina, that is, by appointing a person without consulting the [Society]."[64] This forces us to reconsider Méndez Medina's role in the SSM: his leadership was provisional, and it was assumed that he would eventually turn the Secretariat over to the secular clergy.

As early as February 1924, Crivelli began strategizing with leaders of the Mexican Province for Méndez Medina's removal.[65] Méndez Medina himself was involved in these discussions and apparently even viewed the news as positive, as his departure would allow him more time to devote to giving conferences on the social doctrine. However, when it became clear over the course of several months in 1924 that he would not have time to train a successor nor be allowed to stay on in an advisory capacity, conflict between Méndez Medina and Crivelli increased. Crivelli wrote that Méndez Medina held an unacceptable level of autonomy and power in his role as director of the SSM and had consistently displayed an insubordinate attitude toward authorities who did not share his views, such as the apostolic delegate and Archbishop Orozco y Jiménez. Acknowledging that Méndez Medina seemed to have great success in his ministries, Crivelli nonetheless commented that various individuals he interviewed did not really understand just what it was that the Secretariat was trying to accomplish. Méndez Medina's supposed "megalomania" also received at least one men-

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Rome tend to confirm Ceballos Ramírez's general theory that the impetus for Méndez Medina's removal initially came from within the Jesuit order, rather than from the Mexican hierarchy. To be sure, however, Aguirre Cristiani's argument regarding conflicts of authority provides contributing factors in the dismissal. Little evidence supports Hanson's contention that Obregón pressured Crivelli into removing Méndez Medina.

62. Ledóchowsky to Méndez Medina, October 14, 1921, and Ledóchowsky to Méndez Medina, March 13, 1923, in AHPMCJ, VI, Vida Jesuitas de la Provincia, Personas, Documentos Personales, Correspondencia del P. Alfredo Méndez Medina, D-786.

63. Camilo Crivelli to Ledóchowsky, May 22, 1924, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1007-I, 10.

64. Camilo Crivelli to Ledóchowsky, March 20, 1925, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1007-VII, 8.

65. Camilo Crivelli to Ledóchowsky, February 8, 1924, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1007-I, 1.

tion.[66] These factors moved Crivelli to push for a more rapid dismissal of Méndez Medina, which as he reported to Ledóchowsky, had been accepted by the Mexican bishops.

The Province leadership first wanted to send Méndez Medina to the Jesuit residence at Orizaba in Veracruz because it was thought he might do some good in an area they felt was greatly influenced by socialism.[67] For unexplained reasons, the leadership instead transferred him to a Society residence in León, Guanajuato.[68] When Méndez Medina found out that he was to leave Mexico City before having trained his successor, he sought the support of Archbishop Mora y del Río. The archbishop persuaded Crivelli to allow Méndez Medina to stay until the new director returned from a trip to Europe, but in a surprising turn of events, Méndez Medina was forced to leave Mexico City under a cloud in May 1925.

Accusations of misconduct by Méndez Medina toward an unnamed woman working at the Secretariat were made in several reports to Rome. Crivelli wrote:

> When I visited the building where [Méndez Medina] managed the social Secretariat, I noticed he enjoyed great familiarity with a young woman, who, as I had often heard from him, helped him greatly. I warned the Superior that he should investigate this and watch out for it most diligently. However nothing has been discovered.[69]

The matter did not end there. Crivelli reported that after his visit a specific accusation was leveled against Méndez Medina regarding the young woman. It is unclear from the documentation whether this charge originated with the woman in question or from within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Moreover, scant information exists as to the nature of the accusation. In a conversation with Crivelli, Méndez Medina proclaimed "that he was completely innocent, and that there had been an error in the [accusation by the] Curia, and that it related to the hysterical woman, who had wrongly construed what he had said to her in confession."[70] The matter came before the provisor of the Metropolitan Curia of the archdiocese of Mexico City, an official in charge of discipline. The provisor privately told Crivelli: "I am convinced that Fr. M. Medina is guilty and

66. Camilo Crivelli to Ledóchowsky, September 14, 1924, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1007-I, 20; Camilo Crivelli to Ledóchowsky, February 24, 1925, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1007-VII, 4.

67. Camilo Crivelli to Ledóchowsky, February 8, 1924, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1007-I, 1.

68. Camilo Crivelli to Ledóchowsky, May 1, 1925, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1007-VII, 12.

69. Camilo Crivelli to Ledóchowsky, February 24, 1925, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1007-VII, 4.

70. Ibid.

that he committed a serious sin (or error) with regard to his words in the act of sacramental confession."[71] Archbishop Mora y del Río agreed with Crivelli that it was better for Méndez Medina to leave Mexico City, although he later wrote: "I have examined the case of R. P. Méndez Medina and I find him innocent of the indictment that has been made."[72] Despite Méndez Medina's insistence that he was innocent, and despite the archbishop's support, Crivelli believed it was necessary for Méndez Medina to leave Mexico City and to quickly discharge his duties in the Secretariat. Méndez Medina departed in early May for León, writing the Mexican hierarchy a heartfelt letter explaining that his most important mission as director of the SSM had been to organize the working classes as a basis for creating greater social peace in Mexico.[73]

Needless to say, much care should guide the interpretation of the accusation against Méndez Medina. The charge against him fell under the category "solicitation": while confessing a young woman, he was accused of making an improper statement, perhaps of a sexual nature. Evidence for this comes from a report by the Jesuit secretary of the Mexican Province, Alejandro Villaseñor:

> It is truly sad to see how often our people are accused of the sin of solicitation before the ecclesiastical Tribunal, or are alleged by the Provincial Superiors to have serious imprudence in our behavior with women. After the case of Fathers Méndez Medina and Maya, a new occasion for scandal and proof of our pain is Fr. [José] Méndez Verduzco, who exchanged kisses on more than one occasion with girls of a College of Nuns whose confession he would hear every week.[74]

The mention of Méndez Medina's case reveals that this sort of impropriety was not uncommon. Interestingly, Villaseñor adds: "I should tell you of news of the case of Fr. Méndez Medina, that he spoke with the ecclesiastical Judge and was absolved from all suspension; either because he finally was found innocent, or, and this seems to me more likely, moved by pity he granted him indulgence."[75]

Méndez Medina's impropriety appears limited to words he uttered to a woman in the confessional, as opposed to a more serious indiscretion of a physical nature. However, his Jesuit superiors felt the charges against him were sufficient

71. Camilo Crivelli to Ledóchowsky, April 15, 1925, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1007-VII, 10.

72. José Mora y del Río to Camilo Crivelli, April 18, 1925, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1007-VII, 12, Ann. II.

73. Méndez Medina to Mexican Episcopate, May 8, 1925, in AHPMCJ, VI, Vida Jesuitas de la Provincia, Personas, Documentos Personales, Correspondencia del P. Alfredo Méndez Medina, D-786.

74. Alejandro Villaseñor to Ledóchowsky, January 12, 1925, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1007-X, 21.

75. Ibid.

cause for his rapid transfer out of Mexico City, no doubt to minimize potential scandal. The affair materialized after the decision had already been made to remove him from the SSM and was not a major factor in his dismissal. No other accusation against him appears to exist at the Jesuit archives in either Rome or Mexico City, and certainly many lay Catholic women and men held him, his conduct, and his social ministries in very high regard.[76] Reporting this affair would perhaps allow a fuller and more complex picture of Méndez Medina to emerge, as a hero of social action nevertheless faced with the same temptations confronted by priests throughout the history of the Church.

After Méndez Medina's removal, the bishops chose Miguel Darío Miranda, a non-Jesuit, to succeed him. Miranda was an attractive candidate because, like Méndez Medina, he had studied social Catholicism in Europe. He was also a secular priest, meaning he answered directly to the Mexican hierarchy, and his appointment ensured that the mission of the SSM would be guided by its vision. With the new director in place, many of the Secretariat's ministries continued successfully. These included a small-scale savings-and-loan bank, courses on the Church's social doctrine, and the coordination of the Association of Young Women Catholics (JCFM), founded in 1926 as a counterpart to the UDCM for unmarried women under the age of 35. In contrast to Méndez Medina, Miranda focused on consolidating the social Catholic movement instead of expanding it; he trained lay leaders and priests in the social doctrine, but failed to create and organize new labor unions.[77] As a result, the SSM's momentum slowed almost immediately.

Like other Catholic organizations, the SSM suffered government persecution between 1926 and 1929. Police raided its Mexico City offices twice, destroying much of the organization's archives and briefly detaining Miranda, his staff, and several others. Most importantly, civil authorities confiscated the deposits of the savings bank. In 1928, with no money left for social ministries and under the continuing threat of police crackdowns, Miranda left for Europe, hoping to raise funds and reestablish the SSM abroad. He obtained letters of introduction from the apostolic delegate in Washington and from Bishop Pascual Díaz, then in exile in the United States.[78] In Rome, Miranda presented to Vatican secretary of state Pietro Gasparri (1914–1930) a résumé of the SSM's ministries. He also requested money to resurrect the organization. Gasparri put Miranda in touch with Jesuits at the University of Milan, who gave the Mexican priest tech-

76. His personal files hold many letters of appreciation; see AHPMCJ, VI, Vida Jesuítas de la Provincia, Personas, Documentos Personales, Alfredo Méndez Medina, D-758.

77. Hanson, "Day of Ideals," p. 429.

78. Velázquez, *El Secretariado*, pp. 35–36.

nical support and lodging during his fundraising travels in Europe. Moreover, Gasparri approved a $10,000 donation for the SSM's reorganization, with the goal of officially establishing Acción Católica Mexicana (ACM). The Vatican put the Mexican episcopate in charge of the money, to be distributed to the SSM when conditions in Mexico improved. After the June 1929 *arreglos* ended the Cristero Rebellion, Archbishop Díaz moved quickly to establish Acción Católica, using Miranda and the SSM to oversee the process.[79] The work of organizing [the lay apostolate] directed the SSM away from Church-led syndicalism, a trajectory in keeping with Rome's policy at the time, and later articulated in the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* (1931).[80]

The establishment of Acción Católica initiated major changes to Catholic activism in Mexico. ACM reconfigured the existing Catholic associations into four branches, as mandated by international Catholic Action norms.[81] By December 1929, statutes had been drawn up for four fundamental associations of Acción Católica: the Union of Mexican Catholics (UCM), for married men or singles over 35 years of age; the Union of Mexican Catholic Women (UFCM), for married women or singles over 35 years of age; the Young Men's Catholic Association (ACJM), for unmarried men under 35 years of age; and the Association of Young Women Catholics (JCFM), for unmarried women under 35 years of age.[82] Díaz certainly saw Acción Católica as important in pacifying militant Catholic activists. With Vatican support, he endeavored to rebrand groups like the ACJM, which had fought during the Cristiada, with new statutes: after 1929, the ACJM's charter no longer contained political language.[83]

The Mexican hierarchy did not create Acción Católica from scratch; Rome had consistently promoted Catholic Action along these lines since the mid-1920s.[84]

79. P. Fumasoni-Biondi to Borgongini Duca, May 11, 1928, f. 10r, and ciphered telegram from Card. Gasparri to Pietro Fumasoni-Biondi, September, 11 1928, f. 26r, in Archivio Segreto Vaticano (hereafter ASV), Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari (hereafter AES), Messico, pos. 523, fasc. 238, 1928–1929; Massimo de Giuseppe, "Cattolici messicani in Italia: l'incontro tra Dario Miranda e Padre Gemelli negli anni della *Lucha Estado-Iglesia*," *Contemporanea* 9:3 (July 2006), pp. 477–490.

80. Paul Misner, "Catholic Labor and Catholic Action: The Italian Context of *Quadragesimo Anno*," *Catholic Historical Review* 90:4 (2004), pp. 650–674.

81. Examples of these guidelines include papal encyclicals (*Ubi Arcano Dei*, 1922; *Quas Primas*, 1925; *Non Abbiamo Bisogno*; 1931) and manuals (Luis Civardi, *Manual de la Acción Católica*, Santiago, 1934); Aspe Armella, *La formación*, pp. 156–160.

82. Elwood Rufus Gotshall Jr., "Catholicism and Catholic Action in Mexico, 1929–1941: A Church's Response to a Revolutionary Society and the Politics of the Modern Age" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1970), p. 50.

83. Reich, *Mexico's Hidden Revolution*, p. 98; *Estatutos Generales de la Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana*, 1929, ff. 66r-80r, in ASV, AES, Messico, IV per., 1929–1947, pos. 538, fasc. 256; Aspe Armella, *La formación*, pp. 232–233.

84. Kristina A. Boylan, "Mexican Catholic Women's Activism, 1929–1940" (D.Phil., thesis, University of Oxford, 2000), chapt. 1.

In the 1930s, the Vatican saw Acción Católica not just as the answer to Mexico's conflict, but also to the worldwide pandemics of secularization, the social question, socialism, reactionary liberal capitalism, communism, Protestantism, and fascism. For the Holy See, the situation in Mexico merely exemplified the worst ills of the modern world.[85] As a result, the Vatican pushed back when lay activists claimed that Mexico's context exempted Catholics there from embracing Catholic Action. After the 1929 modus vivendi, Rome rejected all political or violent strategies for dealing with the Mexican state. The Congregation of Ecclesiastical Affairs (AES), the policy-making body of the Vatican secretariat of state, met on December 30, 1931, to decide how to instruct apostolic delegate Msgr. Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores regarding armed resistance and Archbishop Díaz's proposal to form a political party.[86] Only Cardinal Tommaso Pio Boggiani suggested that the Church continue to resist Mexican anticlerical laws openly. The majority of cardinals sided with Cardinal Gasparri in pursuing continued moderation as far as possible. Pius XI approved the recommendations of Gasparri and newly appointed Vatican secretary of state Eugenio Pacelli, which advocated Catholic Action, endorsed nonviolent strategies of resistance, and promoted separation between the Church and political parties.

The papal instructions were addressed specifically to Msgr. Ruiz and arrived in Mexico in January 1932. On armed resistance, Pacelli wrote that solutions were certainly needed to solve the religious crisis, but stressed that "in choosing these remedies do not consider armed defense, which, even apart from other considerations, would have no possibility of success."[87] This was the clearest statement to date from the Vatican on the unacceptability of armed defense of the Church in Mexico, and Rome's policy on armed resistance did not deviate throughout the decade. Also significant was the clear distinction between Catholic Action and politics. Catholic Action was to act as the religious and social training ground where the laity learned how to defend religion. Then, outside the auspices of the Church, individual Catholics were to use this training for the good of civil society. The instructions clearly reiterated the Vatican's approach to politics as expressed in the early 1920s. The difference was that "Catholic action" had, from a vague concept characterizing a broad spectrum of activities (even including Catholic syndicalism), now become institutional Catholic Action—Rome had more clearly enunciated the relationship between the religious, the social, the civic, and the political than in past encyclicals and letters to Mexico. These instructions and their implementation by the Mexican hierarchy throughout the

85. "Azione Cattolica e Lega per la Difesa," in ASV, AES, Messico, 1929-1947, pos 538, fasc. 257.

86. Unpaginated meeting minutes, in ASV, AES, Rapporti Sessioni, S. Congregazioni, 1931, 86, 1346.

87. Pacelli to Ruiz y Flores, January 1, 1932, 1, in Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de México (hereafter AHAM), Pascual Díaz Barreto, caja 44, exp. 15.

1930s helped diminish the earlier dynamism of social action, albeit slowly and disproportionately among Catholic elites in hispanicized urban centers.

Many Mexican Catholics, especially Jesuits, met Pacelli's instructions with disbelief. Alfredo Méndez Medina complained to his Jesuit superiors about policies enforced by Díaz and Ruiz y Flores, even asking to be transferred to Peru, a country with a growing social Catholic movement. "If [Mexican Catholics] speak poorly of [Msgr. Ruiz] and his partner [Archbishop Díaz]," he wrote, "disgracefully there is pretext for it in their mistaken conduct and little tact with the faithful."[88] In another letter he referred to Miguel Darío Miranda, his successor at the SSM, as a "dictator." These attitudes did not go unnoticed by his superiors: one report to Rome mentioned Méndez Medina as being among the murmurers in the province, who spread dissension with their criticisms of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.[89]

The work of organizing Catholic unions in the early 1930s quickly fell into disarray, as both the ecclesiastical hierarchy and new government legislation squeezed the confessional labor movement. First, the promulgation of the Federal Labor Law denied legal recognition to confessional unions. At the same time, SSM director Miranda recommended to the CNCT National Assembly that it should present itself as a professional, but non-confessional, union. He wrote:

> My proposal [to the CNCT] was rejected, as the workers distrusted me and could not understand the spirit of this strategy. Sadly, they did not know how to read the signs of the time and in the end decided to openly proclaim a confessional character to the [CNCT]. With that they sealed the death of the Confederation as a labor union.[90]

The CNCT's refusal to become a non-confessional organization and its subsequent loss of legal status, coupled with the SSM's new role as the administrative mechanism for the development of Acción Católica, caused Catholic social activism to fall apart in the 1930s. When Miranda was elected bishop of Tulancingo in 1937, Father Rafael Dávila Vilchis, a long-time member of the Secretariat's leadership team, continued as director.[91] Yet, in 1944 the Mexican episcopate separated the SSM from Acción Católica. This event, along with the

88. Letter from Alfredo Méndez Medina, April 5, 1930, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1010-V, 5.

89. Letter from Alfredo Méndez Medina, June 21, 1930, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1010-V, 10; Raymundus Martínez Silva S.J. to Ledóchowski, S.J., January 1931, in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Epistolae, 1010-X, 5.

90. Francisco María Aguilera González, *Cardenal Miguel Darío Miranda: el hombre, el cristiano, el obispo* (Mexico: IMDOSOC, 2005), p. 146.

91. Ibid., p. 167.

work of Father Pedro Velázquez Hernández, reawakened the social activities of the institution.

Social Vision: Sofía del Valle and the Velázquez Brothers

While Vatican leaders, Mexican bishops, and leading lay activists bickered over the identity of the Catholic movement, social activism continued to a large degree thanks to the women of Acción Católica.[92] The work and career of Sofía del Valle illustrates this well: as noted earlier, she worked with Méndez Medina and the SSM in the 1920s to organize working women. After the Cristero Rebellion, she helped keep the SSM afloat financially. As religious conflict smoldered in Mexico, del Valle went on a lecture tour of the United States, visited parts of Canada, and traveled to Spain and Italy between May 1934 and June 1937.[93] Hosted by the Catholic Daughters of America, she spoke about the Mexican situation in colleges and churches across the country. She gave several radio interviews, met numerous members of the American hierarchy, and conferred with John J. Burke, one of the principal churchmen involved in negotiations to end the Cristero Rebellion. When del Valle visited the Vatican in 1937, she met with Msgr. Giuseppe Pizzardo, secretary of the Congregation of Ecclesiastical Affairs, and enlightened the prelate on aspects of Catholic Action in Mexico. During her tour, she raised more than $8,000, which was distributed between the SSM, the JCFM, and the Advanced Institute for Feminine Culture, where she participated as an instructor (see Figure 2).[94]

On returning to Mexico, del Valle continued to work with the female branches of Acción Católica. The work of del Valle and others certainly paid off, as these were the only branches that experienced significant growth during the 1930s. By 1940, the UFCM counted 149,514 members, and the JCFM had 102,491 adherents in 1942.[95] Although much of this activity focused on education, religious devotion, and moralization campaigns, the 1938 general assembly of the UFCM announced plans to focus on peasants, blue- and white-collar workers, and working professionals.[96] The social activities of the SSM did not disappear

92. Kristina A. Boylan, "Gendering the Faith and Altering the Nation: Mexican Catholic Women's Activism, 1917–1940," in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico,* eds. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughn, and Gabriela Cano (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 199–222; Patience A. Schell, "Of the Sublime Mission of Mothers of Families: The Union of Mexican Catholic Ladies in Revolutionary Mexico," in *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910–1953,* eds. Patience A. Schell and Stephanie Mitchell (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), pp. 99–123.

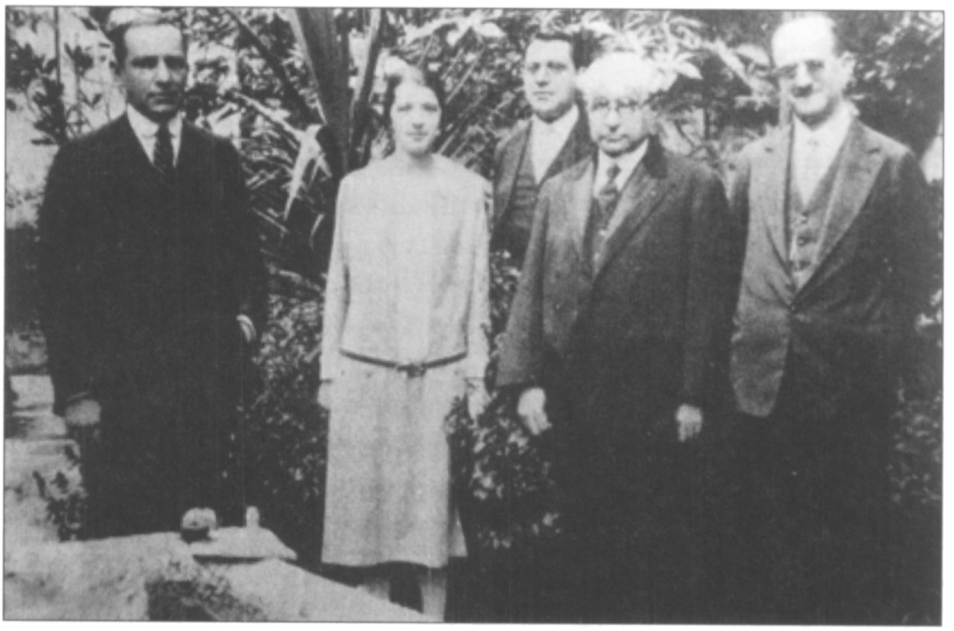
93. "Sofia del Valle," in ASV, Arch. Deleg. Stati Uniti, appendice Messico, fasc. 28.

94. Ibid.

95. Boylan, "Gendering," p. 210.

96. Ibid., p. 211.

FIGURE 2.



Teachers at the Advanced Institute for Feminine Culture: (*left to right*) Father Luis Gómez, Sofía del Valle, Father Rafael Dávila Vilchis, Father García Gutiérrez, and Father Saavedra. Source: Francisco María Aguilera González, *Cardenal Miguel Darío Miranda: el hombre, el cristiano, el obispo* (Mexico: Instituto Mexicano de Doctrina Social Cristiana [IMDOSOC] 2005), p. 158.

during the 1930s. Women activists such as Sofía del Valle provided the Secretariat a measure of institutional continuity. She helped secure funds to keep the financially strapped organization going in rough times and persisted in ministering to working-class women.

Under a new archbishop, Luis María Martínez, social action was reborn after the separation of the SSM from Acción Católica. The archbishop envisioned a return to *lo social* within the SSM, which explicitly meant reviving outreach toward Mexico's working classes. The amelioration of Church-state relations under President Lázaro Cárdenas after 1938 further facilitated this vision. At the SSM, new priests, notably Pedro Velázquez Hernández and his younger brother Manuel, guided the social mission. Pedro Velázquez had studied at the Pius Latin American College in Rome, which ingratiated him with the Mexican hierarchy, yet he shared Méndez Medina's social vision of organizing, equipping, and encouraging Mexico's working classes (see Figure 3). However,

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Figure 3.

Pedro Velázquez, with Parishioners from Mexico City, 1940. Source: Manuel Velázquez Hernández, *Pedro Velázquez H.: apóstol de la justicia* (Mexico: Editorial Jus, 1978), p. xii.

Velázquez adapted the SSM's mission in order to limit conflicts with the state and the Mexican hierarchy.

Pedro Velázquez laid the foundation for this new social focus with several influential studies of Mexico's economic and social reality. His 1946 volume *Miseria de México. ¡Tierra desconocida!* presented Mexico's working poor in vivid terms; his pamphlet *Formación Social: grado elemental* demonstrated how to apply Church social doctrine to everyday life. He participated in the II Seminario Interamericano Católico de Estudios Sociales in Havana (see Figure 4), and at a conference in Costa Rica in 1946 he met Cardinal Joseph Cardjin, to whom he promised to promote the Young Catholic Workers (JOC), an important lay apostolate founded by the renowned social reformer. The Mexican hierarchy rejected the formation of the JOC in the 1940s, but by the 1960s the association was permitted to organize and quickly flourished.[97] As Church-state

97. M. Velázquez, *Pedro*, pp. 28, 45; José Aparecido Gomes Moreira, "Para una historia de la Juventud Obrera Católica (1959–1985)," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 49:3 (1987), pp. 205–222.

FIGURE 4.

At the II Seminario Interamericano Católico de Estudios Sociales, Havana, January 1946: Pedro Velázquez Hernández (*standing, far left*) with Bishops Fernando Ruiz Solórzano (Yucatán), Octaviano Márquez (Puebla), and Miguel Darío Miranda (Tulancingo). Source: Manuel Velázquez Hernández, *Pedro Velázquez H.: apóstol de la justicia* (Mexico: Editorial Jus, 1978), p. xiv.

tensions eased, the Mexican episcopate became more open to promoting working-class organizations, especially after the election of Miguel Miranda (1956–1977) as archbishop of Mexico.

The 1950s saw the development of a "permanent team" at the SSM. Manuel Velázquez and Carlos Talavera began their ministry at the institution after completing a program in social leadership at the University of Saint Francis Xavier in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Velázquez and Talavera worked extensively to implement the principles of cooperativism they learned in Canada, adapting them to the Mexican cultural landscape. Perhaps the decade's most important development was the promotion of the first *Cajas Populares*.[98] Like Méndez Medina's Cajas de Ahorro León XIII in the 1920s, the Cajas Populares became one of the

98. Hanratty, "Change and Conflict," pp. 87–91; M. Velázquez, *Pedro*, p. 49.

most enduring ministries of the Secretariat. The SSM helped establish the first Cajas, essentially small credit and lending institutions, in Mexico City. They were not just credit unions, but also promoted adult education, the dissemination of the social doctrine, and the training of workers and volunteers. In later years their slogan would be "*En manos del pueblo*" ("In the people's hands"), referring to the goal of giving the working classes greater access to low-interest loans and affordable lines of credit. Pedro and Manuel Velázquez and the SSM team remained as technical advisors to the Cajas Populares, but the movement soon became self-sustaining and autonomous, and lay leaders such as Florencio Elguía Villaseñor continued promoting the Cajas through the 1980s and 1990s. In 1999, for example, 490,000 members participated in 364 local Cajas, with active accounts of $403,918 (USD). In that year alone, nearly half that amount was turned into loans at affordable interest rates to Caja members.[99]

Pedro Velázquez and the SSM did meet with resistance from the Mexican hierarchy when their printed literature commented on Catholic political action, which the bishops feared would reawaken Church-state animosity. Former SSM director Archbishop Miranda frowned on books like *Iniciación a la vida política* and sent Velázquez to Europe after the negative reaction of the Mexican press. At the suggestion of the apostolic delegate, Velázquez was also temporarily relieved of the directorship of the SSM in early 1957, although he continued as de facto leader until his reinstatement a few months later. The sojourn in Europe only furthered his social education; accompanied by Msgr. Sergio Méndez Arceo, a friend from the Latin American College and future bishop of Cuernavaca, he visited several social Catholic ministries in Europe (see Figure 5). Méndez Arceo's own commitment to liberationist policies eventually led to his forced early retirement, but he remained linked with the SSM.[100]

The Cuban Revolution caused Mexican Catholics to fear a rising socialist tide in Latin America. When Velázquez spoke to approximately 50,000 people at the Basilica of Guadalupe in 1961, the crowd began shouting anti-communist slogans. Yet Velázquez, as his brother Manuel later wrote, "always fought against vociferous and cheap anticommunism and proposed that the only true remedy against communism was the practice of social justice."[101] To Pedro Velázquez and the members of the SSM, the social doctrine of the Church held practical

99. Informe 1956, in ASSM, SSM Episcopado Informes, 1924–1970; Miguel Cardozo, *Una quinta oportunidad: cinco décadas de cajas populares* (León, Gto: Confederación Mexicana de Cajas Populares, 2001), p. 20; M. Velázquez, *Las cajas populares y la utopia del Padre Velázquez* (San Luis Potosi: Confederación Mexicana de Cajas Populares, 1991); M. Velázquez, *Pedro*, pp. 49, 51.

100. M. Velázquez, *Pedro*, pp. 52–57; Robert Sean Mackin, "The Red Bishop of Cuernavaca: Rethinking Gill's Religious Competition Model," *Sociology of Religion* 64:4 (Winter 2003), pp. 499–514.

101. M. Velázquez, *Pedro*, p. 58.

FIGURE 5.

Pedro Velázquez Hernández (*seated, center*) and Msgr. Sergio Méndez Arceo (*at his right*) While Students of the Pius Latin American College in Rome, *c.* 1937. Source: Manuel Velázquez Hernández, *Pedro Velázquez H.: apóstol de la justicia* (Mexico: Editorial Jus, 1978), p. ix.

solutions to the problems exposed by the socialist critique of capitalist society, solutions Velázquez was ready to implement. The twin ideals of development (*desarrollo*) and integration (*integración*), articulated by the encyclical *Mater et magistra* (1961), profoundly influenced the SSM in the 1960s. Velázquez responded to the pontifical document by increasing the institution's focus on dissemination of the Catholic social doctrine, developing a network of diocesan social secretariats. A 1965 report to the episcopate mentioned 17 social and labor organizations supported by the SSM, and between August 1966 and December 1968 the SSM produced 99 publications—*folletos*, *libros*, and *artículos*—on the Catholic social doctrine. Velázquez and the SSM also took a leading role in the Latin American conferences held after the Second Vatican Council. He attended the Primer Encuentro Episcopal Latinoamericano de Pastoral de Conjunto in Ecuador and the X Asamblea Extraordinaria del CELAM in Argentina, which studied the relationships among the Church, development, and integration in Latin America. In 1968, Velázquez participated in the assembly of bishops convened in Medellín to apply the conclusions of the Second Vatican Council to Latin America as a whole. Back in Mexico, the SSM pressured

the episcopate to make a statement in response to the 1968 student movement and the Tlatelolco massacre.[102]

Unfortunately, Velázquez's activities were curtailed by his sudden death in December 1968. Remarkably, Méndez Medina had passed away only a few days before, on November 30, at the age of 91. Although he never again participated in the work of the SSM directly after his forced retirement, the Jesuit had remained extremely active. As one of the most outspoken supporters of the Cristero cause, he advised the League for the Defense of Religious Liberty, a Catholic civic association organized before the outbreak of the revolt. He moved back to Mexico City while fighting raged in the countryside, and even spoke at the funeral of slain priest Miguel Agustín Pro, S.J.[103] After the Church-state modus vivendi, Méndez Medina continued ministering in various Jesuit residences and promoting the social doctrine where and when he could. In 1935, he published *El pequeño credito agrícola y el problema agrario en México*, which promoted credit cooperatives as an important means of solving rural poverty and anticipated much of the work of the Cajas Populares in subsequent decades. In the mid-1940s he gave a series of lectures on social action at the short-lived Montezuma Seminary in New Mexico. Méndez Medina was eventually appointed superior of the Jesuit residences in Puebla and later Mexico City. In the 1950s and 1960s, he led spiritual retreats, wrote book reviews for periodicals, advised lay activists on socioeconomic projects, and had a profound influence on a younger generation of Jesuits. "You have transmitted your spirit to the next generation," wrote Xavier Scheifler, S.J., to Méndez Medina while studying social action in Louvain, Belgium.[104] In 1957, Méndez Medina was appointed director of the Center for Information and Social Action, covering Mexico and Central America. Although church politics, national tumult, and perhaps his own failures kept him from fully developing his Catholic alternative to revolution, Méndez Medina's social vision lived on through the SSM.

After the unexpected loss of Pedro Velázquez in 1968, his younger brother Manuel quickly took leadership. The following April, the SSM voted to officially align the Secretariat with the conclusions of the Medellín conference, which by 1979 would be encapsulated in the now-famous phrase "the preferential option for the poor."[105] This phrase was a belated acknowledgement of activities and passions that had been central concerns for the SSM since its

102. Ibid, pp. 59, 61–74; ASSM, "Informe," April 1968-January 1969.

103. "Algunos datos sobre la muerte del P. Miguel Agustín Pro, S.J.," in ARSI, Provincia Mexicana, Negotia Specialia, 1408.

104. Xavier Scheifler, S.J., to Méndez Medina, January 22, 1957, in AHPMCJ, VI, Vida Jesuitas de la Provincia, Personas, Documentos Personales, Correspondencia del P. Alfredo Méndez Medina, D-786.

105. Hanratty, "Change and Conflict," pp. 146–152.

inception. Randall S. Hanson notes the similarities in the social project of the SSM and the liberationists: both criticized capitalism, advocated for the rights of the working class, and sought to sensitize the population to Catholicism's answers to societal problems. However, adherents of liberation theology also demonstrated a greater concern for the poor in general, not just workers. They abandoned the strict neo-Thomism of earlier generations and sought guidance from fresh interpretations of the Gospels in the Latin American context. Moreover, they were more open to using Marxism as a model for social critique than were social Catholics of previous generations.[106]

The SSM's adherence to liberation theology increased tensions with the Mexican episcopate, as the Secretariat criticized the abuses of the administration of President Luis Echeverría (1970–1976). Archbishop Miranda promoted a less radical form of social action within the hierarchy, and Rafael Dávila Vilchis likewise continued to promote moderate social action within the archdiocese of Mexico as its cathedral dean. In 1972, Miranda and the Mexican episcopate agreed to allow the SSM to continue as an autonomous civil institution, but tensions continued into the 1980s, when the hierarchy admonished the institution for its "horizontal and immanentist vision," accusing it of placing too much emphasis on social and economic ministries at the expense of spiritual concerns.[107]

CONCLUSION

The social Catholic movement of the revolutionary era should be seen as an alternate Catholic vision for national reconstruction. Under Méndez Medina, the SSM became an institutional embodiment of this Catholic social alternative. Between 1920 and 1925 the SSM flowered under his leadership, but after his dismissal in 1925 and the collapse of the political sphere a year later, social Catholicism waned in Mexico. The Vatican wanted Catholic associations in Mexico and worldwide to conform to the international mold: organic corporatist groups, firmly under the control of the hierarchy, but "outside and above" all political parties.[108] Catholic Action's "statutory prohibition" against political participation represented a fundamental contradiction to the integralist formation of lay activists.[109] Lay militants naturally did not reverse course immediately, and Vatican officials understood that Catholic cultural norms would not

106. Hanson, "Day of Ideals."

107. Fazio, *Algunos aportes*, pp. 37–38.

108. *Estatutos Generales de la Acción Católica Mexicana,* 1929, f. 3., in Archivo Histórico de la Universidad Iberoamericana, Archivo Acción Católica Mexicana, Sección Junta Central, Estatutos y Reglamentos, 1924, 1927–38.

109. Aspe Armella, *La formación*, p. 16.

change overnight, but in "cooling down" the political activities of Catholics, eventually "the Church broke, unintentionally, the integral vision of Catholicism," as Jean Meyer affirms.[110]

The established culture of intransigent-integralism remained strong in Mexico during the 1930s, but was opposed by Rome's model of Catholic Action. Many lay activists rejected conciliation with the Mexican Revolution and refused to accept limiting the Catholic movement to exclusively religious activities.[111] The persistence of Catholic intransigence toward the state, combined with prohibitions against Catholic unionization, resulted in the decline and constraint of social Catholicism in the 1930s. Catholic Action mirrored efforts by the Mexican state to "secularize" the Church by delineating specific spheres of action in which lay activists could legitimately function. Church policies promoted the same societal differentiation and marginalization of religion often associated with modernization, albeit with different goals: Mexican bishops desired to minimize conflict with the state, while state anticlericals sought to purge society of its traditional religious foundations.[112] In the process, Catholic labor organization, which had the potential to inflame Church-state conflict by competing with the state's own project, was temporarily abandoned.

A new generation of leaders within the SSM, under Pedro and Manuel Velázquez, successfully negotiated these constraints to once again tailor a Catholic alternative "third way" between capitalism and socialism. Social Catholicism as advocated by the Secretariat in the 1950s and early 1960s did not have to contend with virulent anticlericalism, which enabled the institution to embrace state cooperation in a more profound and pronounced fashion than had the previous generation. This shift represented an adaptation in the social Catholic movement, which the SSM spearheaded. The Secretariat first propounded a developmentalist path toward bettering economic conditions in Mexico, but beginning in 1969 the SSM became one of the first organizations within the Mexican Church to officially adopt a liberationist policy. This once again brought the institution into direct conflict with both the administration of President Echeverría and socially moderate members of the Church hierarchy. Although the row ended when the Mexican episcopate removed its sponsorship, the Secretariat continued under the direction of Father Manuel Velázquez and his team of lay workers.

110. Jean Meyer, *El sinarquismo, el cardenismo y la iglesia (1937–1947)* (Mexico: Editorial Tusquets, 2003), p. 21.

111. Barranco, "Posiciones políticas," p. 49.

112. On this type of internal Church secularization in Europe, see Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca. N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 25.

Today, Father Manuel and his remaining staff continue their work in the offices of the SSM in Colonia Juárez, Mexico City. Although officially retired, Father Manuel, nearly 90 years old, regularly comes to work to read *La Jornada*, a left-leaning Mexico City daily, and catch up on correspondence. Fidelina Ramírez Cruz, a retired schoolteacher and member of the executive committee, runs the day-to-day business. The organization serves as a consultant to social projects such as the Cajas Populares, and promotes human rights, judicial reform, and peace, primarily as a signatory to communiqués written by other institutions and published in the Mexican and international press. The conflict with the Church hierarchy in previous decades has dissipated; since approximately 2007, Velázquez and Ramírez Cruz have served as advisors to the Commission of the Social Pastorate for the Mexican Episcopate, the Church office designated to promote social action. The Vatican has also asked Velázquez to advise the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace, a sign of the broader trend whereby much of the liberationist movement has been appropriated by the official Church and shorn of its more radical aspects. When asked about the legacy of the SSM in a 2008 interview, Velázquez answered in English with typical good humor: "You got me!" He then collected his thoughts and stated that the SSM's legacy was evident in the continued efforts of the cooperatives, the ongoing work of the Commission of the Social Pastorate, and—perhaps most meaningfully to him—in the generations of "people educated socially."[113]

Much research remains to be done on Mexican Catholic social action after 1931, and a longer view of Catholic activism in Latin America merits fuller discussion.[114] For example, like the SSM, the Christian Democratic parties in Chile, Venezuela, and elsewhere began as confessional social Catholic movements, but eventually eschewed their sectarian identity in order to participate more fully in the national arena. Thus, the persistence and modification of social Catholicism in Mexico does not appear to be an isolated case.[115] While the Mexican social Catholic movement did not die in the 1930s, it instead adapted, negotiating for space and influence both within the Church and in postrevolutionary Mexico more broadly. The defeat of social Catholicism of the intransigent-integralist variety after the Cristero Rebellion did not necessarily spell the

113. Author interview with Father Manuel Velázquez Hernández, director of the Secretariado Social Mexicano (SSM), Mexico, July 9, 2008; e-mail correspondence, Manuel Velázquez Hernández to author, November 12, 2010.

114. An attempt has been made from a sociological perspective; see Robert Sean Mackin, "The Movement that Fell from the Sky? Secularization and the Structuring of Progressive Catholicism in Latin America" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005).

115. Kirk A. Hawkins, "Sowing Ideas: Explaining the Origins of Christian Democracy in Latin America," in *Christian Democracy in Latin America: Electoral Competition and Regime Conflicts*, eds. Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 79.

complete destruction of the movement. Rather, the period between 1925 and 1944 represented merely the immunization against one particular strain of social Catholicism. Indeed, by 1940 the Mexican Catholic accommodation with the secular state in the political and social arenas was emerging with greater strength, and this in turn influenced social activists. Many Mexican social Catholic activists abandoned intransigent-integralism and embraced what Jacques Maritain described as "integral humanism."[116] This was characterized by the continued search for a "new Christian social order," but guided by "generous co-operation" with the state toward the goal of "rendering more human and more just the world in which [Catholics were] engaged."[117] Pedro and Manuel Velázquez and the Mexican Social Secretariat stand as important examples of this adaptation and survival of social Catholicism after the Cristero Rebellion.

University of Texas of the Permian Basin
Odessa, Texas

STEPHEN J. C. ANDES

116. Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a New Christendom* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), p. 253.

117. Ibid.