J. Lat. Amer. Stud. 40, 109–133 © 2008 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0022216X07003653 Printed in the United Kingdom

The Resistance of the Marginalised: Catholics in Eastern Michoacán and the Mexican State, 1920–40*

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Abstract. This article analyses Catholic resistance to the anti-clerical laws of the 1920–1940 period in various municipalities in eastern Michoacán. It argues that the diverse strategies adopted by Catholics in each region was more a response to the variety of local power dynamics at play, than an expression of different religious expressions (sacramental versus 'popular' Catholicism). It concludes that the predominance of pacific forms of resistance was the result both of efforts on the part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to reach a modus vivendi with the Mexican state, and of social expressions of Catholicism 'from below'.

Keywords: Mexican Catholic Church, anticlericalism, Catholic resistance, political factions, post-revolutionary Mexican state

Most of the historiography which focuses on forms of Catholic resistance in Mexico in the first half of the twentieth century has viewed them as part of a long process linked to the complex high level relations between state and Church. The same approach has generally been adopted towards analysis of the Cristiada, regarding both traditional 'partisan' studies[1] and academic analyses published since the 1960s.[2] These have explained the Cristiada (1926–29) as the outcome of Church-state conflicts, viewing the causes of the revolt as linked to one side or the other. Most authors attribute rural

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* This article is part of an ongoing research project entitled 'Integrados y marginados en la construcción del Estado mexicano posrevolucionario. Una investigación de los juegos de poder local y sus nexos con la política nacional, 1920–1950', financed by the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT).

[1] Nicolás Larín provides a Marxist reading and Antonio Ríus Facius the hagiographic Catholic interpretation of the Cristero conflict: Larín, *La rebelión de los cristeros, 1926–1929* (México, 1968); Rius Facius, *Méjico cristero. Historia de la ACJM, 1925 a 1931* (Mexico, 1966).

[2] Robert E. Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church, 1910–1929* (Bloomington, 1973), David Charles Bailey, *Viva Cristo Rey! The Cristeros Rebellion and the Church-State Conflict in Mexico* (Austin, 1974), Alicia Olivera, *Aspectos del conflicto religioso de 1926 a 1929. Sus antecedentes y consecuencias* (Mexico, 1966), Jean Meyer, *La Cristiada*, 3 vols (Mexico, 1993).

participation in the *cristero* movement to the degree of religious commitment held by the population, even though they disagree about the extent of religiosity of the different actors involved: Robert Quirk views it as low, David Charles Bailey and Alicia Olivera saw it as moderate and Jean Meyer judged it to be high.[3]

Meyer's classic volume *La Cristiada* (1973) was particularly celebrated by historians and Catholic readers. However, over time doubts emerged about Meyer's sources and methodology, as well as his overall interpretation which overly dichotomized elite and popular forms of religion, and traditional and modern. Meyer tended to overplay the ideological motives of the *cristeros* and simplify relations between campesinos, Church and state.[4] Nonetheless, his work inspired many studies, especially the post-revisionist generation or 'new cultural historians', to include religiosity as a central factor in their historical analyses.[5]

The growth of regional histories between 1970 and 1990 came to signal the importance of the religious dimension for understanding post-revolutionary Mexican society. The conflict between Church and state was no longer a matter solely of 'high politics', but rather implied a cultural conflict with deep roots in society. From the 1990s onwards, post-revisionist studies made the religious element a central focus of study, attempting to understand the ways in which a popular religious culture emerged in the areas where the Cristiada was most intense. Michoacán has attracted considerable attention from scholars: for example, Matthew Butler examined the multiple identities of popular religious culture in the region, Christopher Boyer analysed emergent forms of consciousness and discourse which underpin campesino identity, and Marjorie Becker considered the link between gender and religion in the rural population's sentiments of piety.[6] All these authors, with the exception of Becker, focus their attention on the religious conflict of the 1920s and particularly on the Cristiada. They do not

[3] Ramón Jrade, 'Inquiries into the Cristero Insurrection against the Mexican Revolution', *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1985), p. 64.

[4] Matthew Butler, *Popular Piety and Political identity in Mexico's Cristero Rebellion: Michoacán, 1927–29* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 5–6; Adrian A. Bantjes Aróstegui, 'Iglesia. Estado y religión en el México revolucionario: una visión historiográfica de conjunto' en *Prohistoria*, no. 6 (2002), p. 214; Ramón Jrade, '*Counterrevolution in Mexico: The Cristero Movement in Sociological and Historical Perspectiva*', Unpubl. PhD. diss., Brown University, 1980, p. 62.

[5] An assessment of the different historiographical interpretations of the 1910 revolution can be found in Enrique Guerra Manzo, 'Pensar la revolución mexicana: tres horizontes de interpretación', *Secuencia*, no. 64 (2005), pp. 51–78; Enrique Florescano, *El nuevo pasado mexicano* (México, 1999) and; Luis Barrón, *Historias de la Revolución Mexicana* (México, 2004).

[6] Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire. Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Peasants, and Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley, 1995); Christopher R. Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos. Politics, Identity, and Agrarian Struggle in Postrevolucionary Michoacán, 1920–1935* (Stanford, 2003); Butler, *Popular Piety*.

consider the vicissitudes of the conflict in the 1930s – the eruption of the Second Cristiada (1932–34). Nor do they consider the struggles within the Catholic camp between the ecclesiastical hierarchy, those in favour of passive resistance (including *Acción Católica Mexicana*, *Legiones*, *Base*, and the *Unión Nacional Sinarquista*) and the 'active' resistance (*Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa*, LNDLR).

Jennie Purnell's work is somewhat at odds with the new post-revisionist historiography; although her main focus is on the 1920s, she finds that the main reasons underpinning factional alignments in the Cristiada – whether in support of Church or the state – had to do with the articulation of forms of land-holding and authority.[7] Such a line of explanation of the Cristiada was earlier advanced by Jrade at the start of the 1980s.[8] Jrade and Purnell, respectively, found that *cristero* communities were characterised by the centrality of the parish, as well as by the strong leadership of the priest in matters of community life, a leadership that was exercised either through a monopolistic faction or cooperation with other brokers close to Catholicism. In contrast, revolutionary communities tended to confine the authority of the priest to the parish alone and local brokers challenged any attempt to extend his influence beyond the religious sphere.[9] In this sense, rather than different degrees of popular religiosity, the key factor was the different correlation of forces amongst local factions. This article adopts such an approach. Its main objective is to clarify the forms of resistance used by Catholics in the electoral district of Zitácuaro[10] to confront both the state's anti-clerical laws[11] and local enemies of Catholicism between 1920 and 1940.

[7] Jennie Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico. The Agraristas and Cristeros of Michoacán* (Durham, 1999).

[8] Jrade, '*Counterrevolution*', pp. 7–35 and 196–8, and 'Inquiries', pp. 65–6. Jrade corrects and improves on the arguments presented by José Díaz Estrella and Ramón Rodríguez Cruz in *El movimiento cristero: sociedad y conflicto en los Altos de Jalisco* (México, 1979).

[9] Jrade, '*Counterrevolution*', p. 196; Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation*, pp. 4–19.

[10] The municipality of Zitácuaro was the *cabecera* of the electoral district that comprised the municipalities of Tuzantla, Benito Juárez, Susupuato, Jungapeo, Ocampo, Angangueo and Tuxpan. Given that the political conflicts of the *cabecera* of this district tended to affect all the municipalities, reference is also made to them.

[11] The clergy and Catholics were opposed to articles 5, 24, 27 and 130 of the Constitution, which established (respectively): the prohibition on creating monastic orders; confinement of religious ceremonies exclusively to official places of worship and only then under state supervision; the expropriation of Church property and capital by the state (all churches, parish houses and locales of religious associations were made property of the nation); regulation of religious functions and the number of priests authorised to officiate religious services. A broader explanation appears in Antonio Ríus Facius, *Méjico*, pp. 2–15. Additionally, educational secularism, as specified in Article 3 of the 1917 Constitution also enraged Mexican Catholics. Their discontent mounted with the successive reforms of the 1920s and 1930s which banned priests from establishing or directing primary schools and

The central argument of this article is that the differences in forms of Catholic resistance in Michoacán in the 1920s and 1930s were an expression not only of different degrees of religiosity, but also of specific power dynamics[12] between rival factions in the different communities and regions of the state. It was precisely the local correlations of forces – understood as dealings of power and resistance, not limited to the political sphere alone – that forced Catholics to adopt diverse strategic positions in each region. In this way, as a number of studies have shown, Catholicism was forced into clandestinity to a far greater extent where its enemies were more powerful (for example, in Zamora and Zitácuaro), whilst it was more defiant and difficult to control and legally restricted where the factions allied with the state were weaker (as was the case in Ciudad Hidalgo and Coalcomán).[13]

Church-state conflicts cut across the individuals in state and church-allied blocks,[14] placing them in a contradictory situation in which their different identity markers, or repertories of values, and their norms of behaviour had to assume priority. The theoretical premise advanced here is that individuals operated according to an intuitive idea of the concept of 'vital opportunities':[15] they aimed to maximize their life chances, with their values

declared that all private schools had to be officially approved and monitored. When attempts were made to introduce co-education (1932) and socialist education (1933) in state schools, their opposition became more radical. See Enrique Guerra Manzo, *Caciquismo y orden público en Michoacán, 1920–1940* (Mexico, 2002), pp. 185–94, and Guadalupe H. Monroy, *Política educativa de la revolución (1910–1940)* (Mexico, 1985).

[12] In its understanding of relations of power and resistance, the post-revisionist historiography has tended to rely on the essentially structuralist reading proposed by James C. Scott, in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 1992). This article also draws on the complementary approaches of Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault. Foucault conceived of power as a relation of governance between at least two actors and understood its exercise as something involving the resources, strategies and resistance of those actors. Elias, by contrast, interprets power as a functional relationship of dependence between the parties involved and observes more keenly the changing sources (or resources), quotas and balances of power produced between individuals and groups in any given social configuration. See Norbert Elias, *Conocimiento y poder* (Madrid, 1994), pp. 53–4 and Michel Foucault, 'El sujeto y el poder', in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Más allá del estructuralismo y la hermenéutica* (Mexico, 1988), p. 239.

[13] For the case of Ciudad Hidalgo, see Butler, *Popular Piety*; for Zamora and Coalcomán, Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos* and Guerra Manzo, *Caciquismo y orden público*.

[14] The Catholic block is here understood as comprising all those actors who, despite their differences, actively or passively promoted the defence of religion, the extension of civil liberties and the annulment of laws which limited religious freedom. The state block refers to the state and its local allies.

[15] Ralph Dahrendorf defined the concept of 'vital opportunities' as the possibility of individuals to choose, a possibility which is, in turn, constrained by the links between them (their adscription to structures and cultural referents). There can be no social action without referents which provide that social action with meaning, as social action does not occur in a vacuum. Instead it is shaped by two elements: ties such as the family, the

providing a guide to action, but this never cancelled out their freedom to choose between contradictory symbolic universes.[16]

The emergence of an anti-clerical consciousness

The east of Michoacán experienced rapid economic growth during the Porfiriato following the arrival of the railway.[17] In the north of the region, the districts of Maravatío and Zinapécuaro, forestry and agricultural production expanded; a textile factory was also established in Taximaroa (today known as Ciudad Hidalgo), which in turn stimulated the production of linen by local haciendas and ranches. In the south, which comprised the district of Zitácuaro, where the majority of the indigenous population of the region was concentrated, the railway stimulated the growth of commercial agriculture (fruits and grains), and the production of meat, tobacco and cotton. This provoked attacks on the communal property of Mazahua and Otomí Indians in the district, pushing them onto ever smaller plots, a dynamic which fed the *agrarismo* of the 1920s and 1930s. Banks were also opened which provided credits for the construction of infrastructure, such as irrigation, reservoirs and wells. All this increased the prosperity of local ranchers, *hacendados* and

neighbourhood, churches, political parties, nation, social position and so forth, which constitute structures and values; and opportunities to choose (freedom). Dahrendorf considered that social conflicts involved the search for vital opportunities, both by dominant and dominated sectors of society, although they were expressed in different ways by each sector. The view advanced here is that the political class is not only charged with maintaining public order and governability, but also with increasing – or blocking – vital opportunities. The regional brokers who were such a fundamental element of the political class of the period, and who are particularly scrutinised here, tended to utilise social demands in order to exercise leadership and mediation, and in this sense they can be understood as generators of vital opportunities. See Ralph Dahrendorf, *Oportunidades Vitales* (Madrid, 1983), pp. 49–64 and 89–90 and *El conflicto social moderno* (Madrid, 1990), pp. 10–47.

[16] Norbert Elias, Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg developed this sociological interpretation in different ways. Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg saw culture as 'a repertoire of programmes for the choice of strategies', which actors could even reject in any given moment, choosing other alternatives. Their theoretical proposal and research tried to show the ways in which actors realise innovations, learn new rules of the game and try to put them into practice through processes of trial and error in different social fields. For his part, Norbert Elias argued that individuals possess different layers or repertoires of values that correspond to the multiple and interrelated ways they are integrated into society. The intensity of identification varies greatly from one layer or field to another. Individuals tend to interiorise contradictory layers in their patterns of behaviour, with some being active and others latent. In their day-to-day life, the layer which is most connected to the social configuration on which their vital opportunities depend will be the most important. See Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg, *El actor y el sistema* (México, 1990), pp. 30 and 314–26; Norbert Elias, *La sociedad de los individuos* (Barcelona, 1990), pp. 74–5 and 232–3.

[17] This comprised the electoral districts of Maravatío, Zinapécuaro and Zitácuaro.

traders. Mining had existed in the area since the colonial period, but it was during the República Restaurada (1867–75) and the Porfiriato (1876–1911) that greater foreign capital investment allowed for the expansion of infrastructure at the mining centres of Tlalpujahua and Angangueo. The installations of the French-owned firm Dos Estrellas, at El Oro and Tlalpujahua, allowed it to become one of the main producers of gold and silver in the country. The American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO), owned by US capital, dominated the municipality of Angangueo. These two mining centres were the most successful in the region.[18]

The majority of haciendas and ranches in eastern Michoacán were of medium size. In 1889 agrarian properties in the region comprised three or four medium size haciendas (of approximately 5,000 hectares each), between ten and 20 small or medium sized haciendas of some 2,000 to 3,000 hectares each, and a large number of ranches of less than 1,000 hectares. The owners and tenants of these properties introduced intensive methods and techniques of cultivation. The better-off *hacendados* also introduced modern agricultural machinery. This allowed them to meet the demands of the mining and urban centres in the region and even to export their surpluses. In this manner, the collapse of communal agriculture was replaced by the growth of small-scale farming.[19]

Until 1876 local political affiliations were defined by the civil war; these divisions had themselves originated in the Independence period: Zinapécuaro and Maravatío became strongly pro-clerical, while Zitácuaro was liberal.[20] When Porfirio Díaz took power, there were 96 Catholic churches in the whole of eastern Michoacán. The district of Zitácuaro had 20 churches, but only half of these were in use, in Zinapécuaro there were 39 and in Maravatío 37. In Zinapécuaro and Maravatío 15 churches were only used occasionally, but 61 stayed open at the weekends for the celebration of mass. In contrast, in Zitácuaro only seven churches were used regularly and thirteen remained closed. The ratio of churches to population in the north (Maravatío and Zinapécuaro) was one for every thousand inhabitants, while in the south (Zitácuaro) it was one for every 2,893 inhabitants, indicating

[18] José Alfredo Uribe Salas argues that the rise of these two mining centres allowed them to 'rival those of Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Hidalgo, México, Chihuahua, Sonora, and others', although he does not offer any comparative data to support this claim. See José Alfredo Uribe Salas, 'Minería y poder empresarial en Michoacán: la contrarrevolución en Tlalpujahua', *Relaciones*, no. 32 (1987), pp. 76–8.

[19] Butler, *Popular Piety*, pp. 39–41, Ramón Alfonso Pérez Escutia, *La revolución en el oriente de Michoacán, 1900–1920* (Morelia, 2005), pp. 25–7.

[20] The participation of Zitácuaro in the civil war was considerable. Juárez himself sent a letter of congratulations to the municipality; see Alfonso Espitia Huerta, *Pueblos republicanos de Michoacán*, (Morelia, 1972), pp. 27–8.

clear differences in the degree of penetration of the Church in both areas. After 1876, these differences became even more accentuated with the arrival of a large number of Protestants in Zitácuaro. The liberal elite welcomed the new immigrants, who came mainly from North America, but also included non-Christians from Armenia, Lebanon and Turkey, the majority of whom were traders. The North American Protestants quickly built churches and successfully spread their influence amongst different sectors of the population. Examining the case of the Presbyterians, Bastian claims that hundreds of citizens of the district *cabecera* and of another eleven communities 'organised Presbyterian religious societies which, by 1882, comprised 16 congregations with approximately 2,664 adult members among their affiliates, equivalent to ten per cent of the adult population of the district'. Jean-Pierre Bastian, the principal scholar of nineteenth century Protestant societies, refers to this as a 'process of mass conversion', whose main centres were 'the municipalities of Zitácuaro, Jungapeo and Tuxpan'.[21] The district's belligerent liberal tradition, which provoked the burning and destruction of the *cabecera* three times during the nineteenth century,[22] appears to explain the rapid conversion of diverse sectors of *zitacuarense* society to Protestantism. The weakness of the Catholic Church in the region, as well as the support of masonic lodges, liberal clubs and some local landowners, was critical to the success of the Protestant missions.[23]

Bastian considers that although the conversions were undoubtedly religious in nature, they were above all else a 'political phenomenon, which was confirmed by the active protection extended by the liberal *jefe politico* to dissidents. …[…] Far from being promoted by US missionaries, [religious] dissidence was spread by certain Mexican liberal leaders'. Protestantism, he adds, was 'a religion of *jornaleros* and ranchers,' rejected by large landowners who remained faithful to Catholicism.[24]

Rather than promoting democracy, the fusion of Protestantism and liberalism served to reinforce an anti-clerical consciousness in the region, which was spread through various means. One of its principle vehicles was

[21] Jean-Pierre Bastian, *Los disidentes. Sociedades protestantes y revolución en México, 1872–1911* (México, 1989), pp. 99–100; Matthew Butler, 'Cristeros y agraristas en Jalisco. Una nueva aportación a la historiografía cristera', *Historia Mexicana*, vol. 52, no. 2 (octubre-diciembre 2002), p. 524, referring to the case of the municipality of Ocampo also claims that 'after 1880 mass conversions to Protestantism took place'.

[22] The first time was on the orders of the *realista* Captain Felix Calleja, on 12 January 1812; the second was at the hands of the *santanista* guards on 1 April 1855; and the third by Belgian troops under the command of the conservative Ramón Méndez, on 15 April 1865. See Moisés Guzmán Pérez, 'Zitácuaro: la ciudad liberal, 1880–1910', in Gerardo Sánchez Díaz et al., *Pueblos, villas y ciudades de Michoacán en el Porfiriato* (Morelia, 1991), p. 227.

[23] Bastian, *Los disidentes*, p. 100, Butler, *Popular Piety*, pp. 42–3.

[24] Bastian, *Los disidentes*, pp. 100–1; see also, Guzmán Pérez, 'Zitácuaro', pp. 240–1.

the *Junta Patriótica Liberal Benito Juárez* (JPLBJ), founded in 1895;[25] in addition, religious education of the population was strengthened and by 1910 there were eight Presbyterian schools in Zitácuaro – far above the national average. Jean-Pierre Bastian and Matthew Butler believe there were genuine cases of religious conversion amongst the elite, but note that it is more difficult to evaluate the degree to which Protestantism took hold amongst ordinary people. Many ranchers shared the vision of the elite, as did some indigenous people, who fled from the onerous demands of Catholic festivals. They maintain that Protestant attitudes certainly filtered down to the people after 1910, articulated via new agrarian leaders and Protestant preachers.[26]

State Allies: Liberals and Agraristas

Between 1910 and 1940 numerous political factions appeared in the district of Zitácuaro, but only three of these took root more permanently: the liberal faction, whose principal exponent was the Junta Liberal, the *agraristas* and the Catholics.[27]

The first president of the Junta Liberal was Enedino Colín, one of the main *hacendados* of Zitácuaro, who did not favour of the 'liberal conservatism' of Porfirio Díaz, who sought reconciliation with the Catholic Church. Enedino Colín managed to bring a group of liberals together in the Junta including *hacendados*, timber merchants, bureaucrats and local traders, who together monopolised power for most of the Porfiriato. According to Butler, the Junta's hegemony had at least three consequences for local politics: it eroded the influence of the clergy in the region; sharpened tensions with *rancheros* and indigenous communities, which led to the later strengthening of *agrarismo*; and promoted the existence of an anticlerical tradition which filtered down to ordinary people and gave *agrarismo* a markedly anticlerical tone.[28]

When the 1910 revolution erupted, the Junta – now led by Saúl V. Gallegos – embraced the *maderista* cause. During the federal elections of 1911, the Junta selected its founder, Enedino Colin (who had fled after the barracks coup of Victoriano Huerta) as its federal deputy. Gallegos and his group fought the *huertistas* in the region. When the revolutionary troops divided, their members also adopted different paths, some adhering to the

[25] Verónica Oikión Solano, *Los hombres del poder en Michoacán, 1924–1962* (Zamora, 2004), p. 87.
[26] Butler, *Popular Piety*, pp. 43–5 and 88–104, Bastian, *Los disidentes*, pp. 99–102.
[27] Other partisan forces appeared in the region, but did not manage to take root: for example, the Partido Voluntad Popular, the Partido José María Morelos, the Partido Demócrata Mexicano. See Pérez Escutia, *La revolución en el oriente* and Oikión Solano, *Los hombres del poder*.
[28] Butler, *Popular Piety*, pp. 44.

Convention of Aguascalientes and others aligning with the *carrancista* troops. When the government of Pascual Ortiz Rubio was installed in Michoacán (1917–20), the majority of the Junta's members became *ortizrubistas*, led by Enrique Colín – representative of the district's *hacendados*, León Rodríguez and Estanislao Martínez. Others separated from the Junta and developed a more radical social liberalism, which even came to develop links with *magonismo*. After 1915 this new group began to challenge the hegemony of the Junta, arguing that it had lost its way and was failing to meet the demands for social justice of campesinos and workers, new actors that had emerged on the political scene with the revolution. This new group was composed of rural teachers, soldiers and former revolutionary officers, artisans and religious ministers. During the armed struggle a number of them had established links with national figures, which proved a great asset in promoting their movement throughout the region. Amongst these were Saúl V. Gallegos (a rural teacher who embraced the *villista* cause and fled to the USA after its defeat), Neftalí N. Cejudo (a Presbyterian minister, rural teacher and colonel in the *maderista* and *zapatista* armies, and a constitutionalist after 1915, where he reached the rank of general), and Moisés Alvarado, *maderista* and *carrancista*, whose trajectory was similar to Cejudo's.[29]

When Francisco J. Múgica ran for the governorship of Michoacán in 1917, the majority of this liberal wing endorsed *mugiquismo*, which found expression through the *Partido Socialista de Michoacán* and promoted the first agrarian demands in the region. The Junta immediately responded by blocking demands for land, using violence and intimidation against the petitioners. When Múgica won the governorship in 1920, demands for allocation of ejidos multiplied. Despite maintaining an alliance with Múgica, the Junta did not halt the violence in the region. In October 1922, however, it momentarily lost power following the denunciation of the assassination of various *agraristas*.[30]

In contrast to other regions in Michoacán where *hacendados* and priests presented a united front against *agrarismo*, the *zitacuarense* elite could not count on the support of the Catholic Church, given their anticlerical ideology. The Junta resorted to a two-pronged strategy: on the one hand, they co-opted some agrarian leaders in an attempt to divide their movement, something which was successfully attempted via Jesús Aguilar in Chichimecuillas and Ramón Alcántara in Laguna Verde; on the other hand, they promoted networks of anti-agrarian political elites.[31]

[29] Oikión Solano, *Los hombres del poder*, pp. 87 and 91, Butler, *Popular Piety*, pp. 68–9, *El Baluarte* (Zitácuaro), 21 February 1926.
[30] Butler, *Popular Piety*, p. 73.
[31] Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos*, pp. 125–6 and Butler, *Popular Piety*, p. 73–4.

In this way, after Múgica's fall in March 1922, the Junta managed to maintain close links with the interim governor Sidronio Sánchez Pineda (1922–24). During the *delahuertista* rebellion (1923–24), the Junta faltered in its support for Plutarco Elías Calles. In contrast, the *agrarista* movement took advantage of the correlation of forces to strengthen its alliance with him. The Junta recovered its position in 1923–24. In 1926 two of its prominent members, Generals Arturo Bernal and Uriel Avilés, established strong links with *callista* politicians, such as Carlos Riva Palacio and Melchor Ortega,[32] both of whom became federal deputies in the same year. During the governorship of Lázaro Cárdenas (1928–32), the Junta suffered a setback, but under the subsequent governorship of Benigno Serrato (1932–34), it recovered a large part of the ground it had previously lost, including municipal presidencies and congressional deputies. By contrast, the *cardenista* sexenio was a time of gain for *agrarismo*.

With the support of Lázaro Cárdenas, Cejudo promoted himself as the undisputed *agrarista* leader between 1923 and 1933. In 1934 he was displaced by another distinguished *cardenista*, Aquiles de la Peña, who began to develop a profile in the municipality of Ciudad Hidalgo in the second half of the 1920s and later established a long-running *cacicazgo* which extended throughout the entire district of Zitácuaro until his death in 1959. Apart from thriving in politics, De la Peña also built a timber emporium in the region. It seems that Cejudo's political fortunes declined after he was involved in two large-scale massacres: confrontations between liberals and *agraristas* which occurred in June 1933 and March 1934.[33] De la Peña took advantage of this situation in order to cement his influence in the district of Zitácuaro. It was within this context of constant clashes between the liberal and the *agrarista* faction (the two allies of the post-revolutionary state) that Catholic resistance to anticlerical policies of the 1920s and 1930s should be situated.

Catholics and the Post-Revolutionary State

A church survey in 1926 indicates that there were seven priests in Zitácuaro, of whom four were Catholics and three Protestants. In Zinapécuaro, Ciudad Hidalgo and Maravatío there were 15 Catholic priests and one Protestant minister. All were natives of Eastern Michoacán. As Butler argues, this indicated that the churches recruited clergy locally and viewed 'local knowledge' as essential to the success of their mission.[34] This knowledge

[32] Neftalí N. Cejudo to Sidronio Sánchez Pineda, Zitácuaro, 29 September 1923, Archivo General de la Nación (henceforth AGN), Obregón-Calles, caja 348, exp. 818-L-47. Oikión Solano, *Los hombres del poder*, pp. 89–94.

[33] Oikión Solano, Los hombres del poder.

[34] Butler, *Popular Piety*, pp. 110–1.

made it almost inevitable that priests would participate in dynamics between the different political factions in each local community. As classical studies of political clientelism have shown, face-to-face relations – family networks, friendships and neighbours – are central in the constitution of factionalism.[35]

Butler found an 'absence of priestly labour' in Zitácuaro as acute as that encountered in Ciudad Hidalgo. This allowed indigenous communities to develop their own autonomous, non-sacramental forms of Catholicism: rituals where they used *pulque*, flowers, corn and images that linked ancestral cults to souls in purgatory, as well as *marianist* cults to the Virgin de los Remedios. In this sense, he adds, the encounter with Protestantism (and with *agrarismo*) was more associated with religious mobility and party affiliations than to genuine acts of conversion. Indigenous people saw no contradiction in continuing with their religious practices, customs and weak links with Catholicism. At the same time as they took part in Protestant *juntas*, they continued with their Catholic cults. They were able to unite all these practices within popular culture. Similar processes also occurred within mestizo communities.[36]

Butler maintains that Protestantism was accompanied by a rejection of Catholic culture and a flowering of new forms of social, economic, political and religious organisation in the 1920s, such as 'revolutionary' ejidos, official rural schools and Protestant churches. Although some communities became accustomed to 'peaceful religious pluralism', in all the villages of the district of Zitácuaro attempts were made to eradicate Catholicism and impose a Protestant hegemony. These tendencies towards de-Catholicisation 'were more pronounced in mestizo communities where the church had never been a key social and religious institution'. Revolutionary leaders tried to fill the cultural vacuum by creating a culture of 'revolutionary *agrarismo* and civic nationalism'.[37]

According to Butler, the Catholic Church in Zitácuaro was attacked by both Protestantism and *agrarismo*. Religious observation declined far below regional standards. The wave of anticlericalism across the whole district generated the impression that the power of the church had been seriously eroded. The widespread support of campesinos for the Calles government, as well as the 'individualist' attitude adopted towards religious matters by the local population, did not provide the *cristeros* with the same support they received in other areas. For these reasons the Cristiada only found support amongst weak armed groups in Zitácuaro.[38] Butler views Zitácuaro as a sanctuary of liberalism, Protestantism and *agrarismo*; Catholicism appeared to

[35] José A. González Alcantud, *El clientelismo político. Perspectiva socioantropológica* (Barcelona, 1997), provides a good summary of this literature.
[36] Butler, *Popular Piety*, p. 134.
[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 134–5
[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 137–8.

be in retreat and reduced to an 'individualism' which limited its capacity for collective action.[39] However, as has been argued here, the play of power and resistance in Zitácuaro are somewhat more complex than Butler suggests.

During the Porfiriato, Catholic groups in Zitácuaro maintained a long struggle for local power with their enemies, a struggle which was not interrupted by the revolution. The very founding of the town of Zitácuaro by the Franciscan order in 1526 was linked to the cult to the Virgin de los Remedios. Liberals and Protestants undermined Catholicism, but it did not disappear. In 1896 there were three religious associations, or *cofradías*, within the parish which continued to function regularly, despite the criticism of liberal elites.[40]

On 9 January 1906 neighbours of Jungapeo appealed to the Archbishop of Morelia, Atenógenes Silva, to 'not remove' the town's teacher, Virginia Arriaga, as this would 'greatly prejudice the young people she is responsible for' and 'a change of teacher would lead to the loss of the great advances of our children'.[41] The same villagers sent another missive on 5 February 1914, but this time to the new Archbishop Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, in which they asked for a priest to be sent as they had been without a sacerdotal visit for some time and they required this in order to 'meet out spiritual needs'.[42]

Both missives indicate some of the tasks that the Church performed in the region, providing educational, moral and spiritual guidance. Liberalism and Protestantism leveled their attacks at all of these fields. However, evidence suggests that Catholicism resisted this offensive, as it did the onslaught of *agrarismo* which erupted with the 1910 revolution. During the *maderista* regime, Catholics from eastern Michoacán not only actively participated in the *Partido Católico Nacional* (1911), creating local branches, but also established *Círculos de Obreros Católicos*, sponsored by the Church hierarchy, which were consolidated in the municipalities of Zitácuaro, Angangueo, Taximaroa and Zinapécuaro.[43] Following the defeat of Victoriano Huerta, Catholic political parties were banned by the *constitucionalistas*. However, Catholics took

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 169–76. Butler states that religious persecution depended to a large extent on the balance of local political forces. He claims that while in the northeast of eastern Michoacán the church was protected by municipal authorities and their parishes, in Zitácuaro they suffered for opposing reasons. However, he underplays the fact that passive resistance was more intense in Zitácuaro than in the north east precisely because of this.

[40] Moisés Guzmán Pérez, *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios* (Morelia, 1999), pp. 79–84; Crispín Duarte Soto, chronicler of Zitácuaro, provides a detailed account of the religious and civic festivals in the municipality which combined liberal and Catholic traditions: Crispín Duarte Soto, *Zitácuaro. Compilación de artículos* (Ciudad Hidalgo, 2000), pp. 159–79.

[41] Archivo Histórico de la Catedral de Morelia, Archivo del Arzobispado de Michoacán (henceforth cited as AHCM-AAM), F: Diocésano, Sección Gobierno, Siglo XX, serie Parroquias, subserie Visitas, caja 65, exp. 1.

[42] AHCM-AAM, F: Diocesano, Sección Gobierno, Siglo XX, serie Parroquias, subserie Visitas, caja 65, exp. 15.

[43] Pérez Escutia, *La revolución en el oriente*, pp. 57–8.

advantage of the vagaries of the electoral laws which only banned parties with religious names or slogans, or those that united a particular belief and/or race.[44] During the governorship of Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1917–20), a political struggle for control of the municipality in Zitácuaro occurred between liberals and Catholics, which included the use of violence. For example, on the night of 3 February 1918, a gang of bandits linked to Catholic circles kidnapped and assassinated the municipal president of Jungapeo, the *constitucionalista* Herón Gallegos.[45] In Zitácuaro, the Liberal Junta was momentarily displaced from power by Catholic groups between 1917 and 1918. It was not until the elections of December 1918 that the Junta recovered its control over the municipal council.[46] In the 1920s and 1930s, Catholic presence in the electoral arena diminished, and although it did not disappear it was not until the 1940s that it recovered its force. Disputes in the electoral terrain took place primarily within the revolutionary block, between Liberals and *agraristas*. Catholics were more concerned with confronting the anticlerical laws of the state.

The arrival of Múgica to power shook Catholicism. In contrast to Ortiz Rubio, who showed signs of religious tolerance, Múgica advanced policies which sought to combat the church on all fronts, especially in the social and educational fields. Múgica's brief governorship was marked by numerous conflicts with Catholics and the ecclesiastical hierarchy: expropriation of property, profanation of churches,[47] and confrontations between *mugiquistas* and Catholics.[48]

The President of the Republic, Álvaro Obregón, did not approve of the radical turn taken by the Múgica government and forced Múgica to request a temporary leave of absence from the local congress.[49] Sidronio Sánchez Pineda assumed the post of interim governor (1922–24) and was more moderate towards *hacendados* and the Church. However, in eastern Michoacán Liberals, *agraristas* continued to be immersed in disputes with Catholics. Timber companies and the municipal president of Angangueo – of Catholic affiliation – tried to block the work of rural teachers in the

[44] Martín Sánchez Rodríguez, *Grupos de poder y centralización política en México: el caso de Michoacán* (Mexico, 1994), p. 76.

[45] Vicente Marín Iturbe, *Jungapeo en la historia* (Mexico, 1966), pp. 68–73.

[46] Pérez Escutia, *La revolución en el oriente*, pp. 303–4 and 311.

[47] Archivo General e Histórico del Poder Ejecutivo del Estado de Michoacán (henceforth AGHPEM), Ramo Gobernación, Subramo Conflictos Políticos, caja 2, exp. 42.

[48] For example, in April 1921 Múgica's attempt to take over the Colegio Teresiano and install the Escuela Normal de Morelia immediately led to acute confrontations with the Catholic opposition. But by far the most significant case was the confrontation between Catholics and *mugiquistas* in the streets of Morelia between 8 and 12 May 1921, occasioned by the profanation of the city's cathedral. Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos*, pp. 166–71; Sánchez Rodríguez, *Grupos*, pp. 188–9.

[49] Sánchez Rodríguez, *Grupos*, pp. 216–31.

municipality, threatening parents who sent their children to official schools with the loss of their employment.[50]

However, something which proved an even greater insult to the Catholic population was the decree issued by Governor Enrique Ramírez on 8 March 1926 which strengthened controls on the clergy of Michoacán, better known as Law number 62. This law regulated religious practices, obliged priests to register with the municipal councils and limited the overall number of priests in the region. Priests were given thirty days to comply with the new law, after which time they would be subject to fines and imprisonment.[51] Throughout Michoacán protests were made calling for the law to be repealed. In order to bring pressure on the authorities, on 17 April the Archbishop of Morelia, Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, decreed the suspension of services in his archdiocese for a month.[52] In this context, the wave of protests turned violent in some places. The worst case was that of Zitácuaro. On 26 April the branch of *Acción Católica de la Juventud Mexicana* (ACJM)[53] in the district, supported by the priest Luis G. Cerda, sent a commission of Catholic women to ask the members of the municipal council to petition the governor to repeal Law 62. In the face of the reiterated insistence of the commission that the council provide a speedy response, the municipal president replied that the council (comprised of a Liberal Junta majority and a minority of *agraristas*) would deal with the matter at eleven the following morning. Before the council meeting took place, the council building was invaded by a large group of Catholics who brought a second petition. The council resolved not to adopt the Catholic proposal, but agreed to send the record of its meeting to the state executive.[54] At first the Catholic faithful applauded the resolution, but then one of their leaders explained that it had not gone in their favour. The demonstrators then attacked an army captain who was trying to persuade them to disperse, managing to disarm and kill him. Seeing their commanding officer killed, the troops reacted by opening fire on the crowd, leaving three dead and various people injured.

[50] Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Educación Pública (henceforth AHSEP), Sección Dirección General de Educación Primaria en los Estados y Territorios, serie Dirección de Educación Federal, Michoacán, 1923, caja 24, exp. 48.

[51] Oikión Solano, *Los hombres del poder*, p. 82.

[52] *Ibid.*, pp. 82–3.

[53] The ACJM in Michoacán was organised through diocesan unions supported by the clergy. After its establishment in 1912 it worked to ideologically influence society through a variety of means: study circles, schools for adults, libraries, cooperativism and credit unions. In the 1920s it had spread to La Piedad, Pátzcuaro, Zinápecuaro, Angangueo, Purépero, Tlalpujahua, Zacapu, Zitácuaro, Morelia and Zamora. It was established in Zitácuaro in 1913. Oikión Solano, *Los hombres del poder*, p. 83, Andrés Barquin y Ruiz, *Bernardo Bergöend, S. J.* (Mexico, 1968), pp. 155 y 165.

[54] Presidente municipal de Zitácuaro a Oficial Mayor de la Secretaría de Gobernación, 29 April 1926, Zitácuaro, AGHPEM, Ramo Gobernación, Subramo Asuntos Religiosos, caja 2, exp. 36.

The municipal president claimed that a 'demonstration of sympathies' on the part of an *agrarista regidor* had given rise to the 'mutiny'. He named José Aguilar, Luis G. Martínez, Ezequiel Correa, Ángel Silva, Luis and Roberto Alanís, Luis Villaseñor, Josefina T. Vda. De Rubio, Aurora Martínez and Josefina Valdés as the principal instigators of the Catholic abuses. The memorials handed over to the council were signed by more than 300 people. The priest Luis G. Cerda was detained, together with the Catholic leaders Cesáreo Robledo, Doctor Ezequiel Correa and Epigmenio Nieto. They were all freed on 4 May by presidential order.

The priest admitted before the authorities that he had called on his congregation to assemble in a building known as the 'Salón Obrero', here they discussed how to approach the council and demand the repeal of Law number 62. From this meeting the idea arose to hold a demonstration and send petitions to the state government through the municipal council.[55]

The *Secretaría de Gobernación* asked the government of Michoacán to shut down the Catholic Church in San Juan Zitácuaro and all others which refused to obey the laws of the day, as well as to order an investigation into the events. The *Secretaría de Guerra* commissioned Colonel Arturo Bernal to implement these measures.[56] In this way, Calles backed the Junta Liberal and appeared not to sanction the *agraristas*' position. Bernal became a federal deputy in June 1926 and won the municipal elections of that year.

The Catholic Dilemma: 'active or passive action'

For some Catholics the April repression signaled that violence was the only way to combat the government's anticlerical onslaught. This was the view of Dr Ezequiel Correa, who became one of the *cristero* leaders in the region. However others, perhaps the majority, believed the government could not be overthrown by force, but neither could it weaken their religious beliefs. They advocated alternative means of resisting the anticlerical policies. This, for example, was the feeling of a group of Catholics from Tlalpujahua when they told Calles: 'We Roman Catholics make up the majority of the great Mexican family'.[57] Our religious beliefs 'with their ceremonies, practices, devotions,

[55] *Excelsior*, 5 May 1926.

[56] Enrique Ramírez a Plutarco Elías Calles, Morelia, 29 April 1926, AGHPEM, Ramo Gobernación, Subramo Asuntos Religiosos, caja 2, exp. 38.

[57] The Catholics of Jungapeo expressed similar sentiments. In a petition directed to the government of Michoacán, in which they requested permission for the priest to officiate, they claimed that of 5,800 inhabitants of the municipality, 5,500 were Catholic and only 300 of 'different beliefs' (AGHPEM, Ramo Gobernación, Subramo Asuntos Religiosos, caja 2, exp. 36). No precise data is available on the proportion of Catholics and Protestants in Zitácuaro, but there is data on the number of priests and churches. A report by the municipal president of Zitácuaro dated 17 August 1926 and sent to the state executive,

do not deprive us of the right to be Mexican citizens. It is impossible to convert us into atheists. […] We neither desire nor want revolutions, we detest them [… what we want] are laws of peace and harmony which guarantee our social order'.[58] By April 1926 two strands of resistance to the post-revolutionary state existed in the district of Zitácuaro: one which Catholics themselves called 'active action' (*acción activa*), which implied the use of violence, and another referred to as 'passive action' (*acción pasiva*), which advocated the use of peaceful means.

In military terms, the *cristero* guerrillas in the district of Zitácuaro were fairly ineffectual. They engaged in few battles and generally stayed in the sierra, indisposed to come down to the valleys.[59] The majority of the region's Catholics were skeptical about the prospect of armed struggle. There were also intermittent uprisings in the Second Cristiada (1932–38), but these were even less than those of 1927–29 and they tended to be confused with raids by bandits who roamed the surrounding mountains.

During the 1930s, the Catholic hierarchy, determined to consolidate a modus vivendi with the state, managed to convince many ardent former Cristeros that the armed struggle was not the appropriate route. They directed their energies towards other forms of struggle through a number of diverse organisations. The conflicts that *agrarismo* had generated between ranchers and campesinos were addressed to the *Unión Nacional Sinarquista* (UNS, 1937).[60] The *agrarista* faction, which dominated the majority of

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specified that there were Catholic churches in Nicolás Romero, Crescencio Morales, Donaciano Ojeda, Francisco Serrato, Los Bernal, Los Alzati (where an additional chapel existed), Los Contreras, Curungueo (in construction), Coatepec de Morelos, Chichimequillas, Aputzio de Juarez, Enandio, as well as the main church of San Juan in the municipal *cabecera*. With respect to 'evangelical temples', they were only found in the municipal *cabecera*, in Coatepec de Morelos, Chichimequillas and Aputzio de Juárez. In all, then, there were four protestant and 13 Catholic churches (AGHPEM, Ramo Gobernación, Subramo Asuntos Religiosos, caja 3, exp. 47). With relation to the number of priests, four were Catholic and three Protestant (Butler, *Popular Piety*, p. 42). This perhaps indicates that the majority of the faithful in Zitácuaro were Catholic. The state census indicates that in the 1920s only one per cent of *michoacanos* belonged to a non-Catholic religion.

[58] Neighbours of Tlalpujahua to Plutarco Elías Calles, Tlalpujahua see 8 April 1926, Archivo General de la Nación, México, Fondo Dirección General de Gobierno, (henceforth AGN, F: DGG), serie Generalidades de cultos religiosos, caja 53, exp. 2.340 (13).19. On 8 May 1926 the Catholics of Zinapécuaro addressed themselves to their municipal president in similar tones to complain about Law Number 62 (Archivo Histórico del Congreso del Estado de Michoacán, henceforth ACEM, Legislatura LIII, Varios, exp. s.n., carpeta 7, caja 1).

[59] Butler, *Popular Piety*, pp. 193–6.

[60] On the impact of *sinarquismo* see, Servando Ortoll, 'Los orígenes sociales del sinarquismo en Jalisco (1929–1939)', *Encuentro* vol. 1, no. 3, 1984, Jean Meyer, *El sinarquismo, el cardenismo y la iglesia, 1937–1947* (Mexico, 2003). Ortoll observes that the success of *sinarquismo* was due in large part to its ability to take advantage of the failings of the system: exhorting the

municipal councils in the district throughout this period, confronted the *sinarquista* vendetta.[61]

The case of Queréndaro – a municipality belonging to the district of Zinápecuaro – provides a good example of the way in which 'peaceful' Catholics tried to continue to impose their idea of social order and evade the legal mechanisms which aimed to stop them from doing so. On 27 June 1929, Ambrosio Macias – who requested that his name be kept secret – informed Calles that Catholics in Queréndaro 'continued to [celebrate mass] clandestinely'. Only when a military detachment was sent in May did 'silence reign', but as soon as it left 'they continued and continue to celebrate mass with greater frequency in the house of Juan Vedota, doing this with more enthusiasm than ever before'. The sacristan, Marcos Aguilar, 'uses the bells to assemble the people and in this way they come from all over to the house of Juan Vedota where the priest lives; commissions of the faithful collect alms to maintain the priest. Not only is [mass celebrated] in this clandestine manner, but so too are all kinds of acts, such as marriages and baptisms.' He added that the same thing was occurring in the municipalities of Zinápecuaro and Indaparéo.[62]

Agraristas and liberals in the district of Zitácuaro denounced similar acts, complaining that the municipal authorities frequently 'searched the houses of the main Catholic leaders', looking for evidence that they were breaking the law.[63] Butler claims that while in Ciudad Hidalgo Catholicism became more public and defiant of the law during the *cristero* period, in Zitácuaro it was more private and clandestine. It can be argued that this was the case because in Ciudad Hidalgo no faction allied to the state took root that was strong enough to force Catholics into greater clandestinity (during his

ejidatarios to demand title, credit and reallocation of land, amongst other things. Ortoll, 'Los orígenes sociales', p. 103.

[61] See, Félix Gómez a General Isauro García Rubio, Zitácuaro, 14 July 1944, AGHPEM, Ramo Gobernación, Subramo Conflictos Políticos, caja 2, exp. 36, where a detailed report is presented of the vicisitudes of *sinarquismo* in the municipality of Zitácuaro.

[62] AGN, F: DGG, serie Violación Ley de Cultos, caja 29, exp. 2.347 (13).50.

[63] Report of the municipal president of Tuxpan to the governor of the state dated 8 February 1928, AGHPEM, Ramo Gobernación, Subramo Asuntos Religiosos, caja 8, exp. 47. Francisco G. Licona denounced similar acts to those of Queréndaro in Tlalpujahua, in a secret missive sent to the Secretario de Gobernación dated 9 April 1927, AGN, F: DGG, serie Violación Ley de Cultos, caja 29, exp. 2.347 (13).48. For its part, on 6 April 1927, the CROM told the secretario de Gobernación that its comrades in the district of Zitácuaro – particularly in the south – had informed them that 'under cover of darkness suspicious groups travel from one place to another […] having discovered that they are no less than clerics accompanied by fanatics who clandestinely celebrate religious services at the same time spreading seditious propaganda [… In addition] some nuns meet in a private school with clerics and Catholic teachers and pray every night and on Sundays in the afternoon.' AGN, F: DGG, serie Violación Ley de Cultos, caja 29, exp. 2.347 (13).47.

governorship, Lázaro Cárdenas lent all his support to *agrarista* Aquiles de la Peña, who emerged as the most important cacique of eastern Michoacán during the 1930s), while in Zitácuaro the radicalism and strength of the *agraristas* and liberals obliged Catholics to turn towards more clandestine and peaceful forms of resistance.

The relative weakness of the Cristiada (both the first and the second) in Zitácuaro is attributable to three factors. First, the existence of two powerful anticlerical factions which limited Catholics' capacity for bellicose action, although they proved unable to eliminate passive resistance. Second, divisions within the Catholic camp which prevented a unified position in favour of armed struggle. Third, the fact that the organisers sent by the LNDLR were not particularly efficient, in contrast to Manuel Chaparro in Ciudad Hidalgo.[64]

On the other hand the main church in Zitácuaro, San Juan, remained closed from the conflict of April 1926, eight months before the start of the Cristiada, until its end in June 1929. Priests and their congregations were immediately obliged to resort to secret practice of their religious rites. Butler's findings suggest that this allowed the families of the Catholic elite to acquire great influence over the sacred sphere, including the administration of the sacraments, religious education and the protection of local priests. An elitist Catholicism thus flourished, which marginalised the poorest groups and ethnic communities from access to the sacred sphere. This excessive protection of the priest – who was always accompanied by an escort of 30 people – became a bone of contention for the priest himself, according to Butler, because it restricted his freedom of movement and impeded him from reaching a greater number of Catholics. He adds that rumours about the presence of the priest obliged him to sleep in a different house every night and dissuaded other Catholics from seeking him out.[65]

In this way, the more public religious ceremonies – such as took place in Queréndaro or Ciudad Hidalgo – were impossible in Zitácuaro between 1926 and 1929. However, contrary what Butler affirms, the evidence suggests that this did not prevent the faithful from meeting their religious needs, nor stop priests from ministering to them, although they had to do it 'under cover of darkness'. When the main priest of Zitácuaro, Wenceslao Ruiz, was arrested by the municipal authorities at the start of 1929 for officiating mass without permission in private houses, the faithful asked that he be

[64] Butler, *Popular Piety*, p. 186, claims that it was not until Manuel Chaparro was sent by the LNDLR that the *cristero* rebellion became more intensified in Ciudad Hidalgo.
[65] *Ibid.*, pp. 175–6.

judged by 'the competent authorities', lacking trust in local officials, who they believed would accuse him of a 'false crime'.[66]

At the end of the Cristiada anticlerical laws became even tougher.[67] Priests and Catholics resumed their clandestine practices. The priest Wenceslao Ruiz, who was 61 years old and who had lived in Zitácuaro for 35 years, travelled around the sierra by mule to minister to the faithful. On 8 September 1932 *agraristas* from La Florida, in the municipality of Jungapeo, managed to capture him and his entourage in a spot near the main highway. The priest had with him 'all the things necessary to officiate [mass] (wavers, a chalice, a crystal plate, the book of mass, a lectern, a reliquary, scapulars and so forth), without having a license for them'. The authorities declared before the district judge that one of the detainees, Pedro Pérez, had 'brought people to the priest (Wenceslao Ruiz) in order to celebrate religious acts'. Ruiz denied the accusations, stating that he had only officiated in private services in Timbineo, 'a town which is not within the jurisdiction of Zitácuaro district' – where the case was tried. Ruiz added that he was intending to sell the articles in his luggage and that since Law number 100 had come into force he had 'never performed a religious act', but that despite this the municipal president of Jungapeo had ordered him to be 'imprisoned in a highly unsanitary cell' where he was 'detained for more than 24 hours'. In contrast, the Catholics detained along with the priest admitted that he had officiated mass clandestinely and confirmed that 'he was on his way to celebrate mass in La Florida'.[68]

Catholics did attempt to find ways to escape the elitist mould that the zitacuarense elite tried to impose, managing to evade the authorities and celebrate religious rites.[69] Evidence also suggests that serious divisions existed within the revolutionary block which was infiltrated by Catholics. This occurred, again in La Florida, where various members of the *sindicato*

[66] Oficial Mayor de la Secretaría de Gobernación al gobernador de Michoacán, Mexico, 19 January 1932, AGHPEM, Ramo Gobernación, Subramo Asuntos Religiosos caja 3, exp. 7–2.

[67] In May 1932, Cárdenas approved a law, decree number 100, which allowed only three priests to practice in each one of the eleven electoral districts of the region, another measure which enraged Catholics and the church hierarchy. On 14 May Cárdenas sent a telegram to Calles in which he stated the 'approval of this law could provoke agitation on the part of those affected, but I do not believe they will do anything which could be a problem'. Cited in Oikión Solano, *Los hombres del poder*, p. 138.

[68] Archivo Histórico del Poder Judicial del Estado de Michoacán (AHPJM), Juzgado de Primera Instancia, Distrito de Zitácuaro, Penal, 1932, Legajo 3, exps., 179, 189 y 190.

[69] Oficio del subsecretario de Gobernación al gobernador de Michoacán, México, 2 March 1932, AGN, F: DGG, serie Violación Ley de Cultos, caja 8, exp. 2.347 (13).15550. Similar infringements of the law occurred in Jungapeo in June 1933, where the local priest officiated without official permission. AHPJM, Juzgado de Primera Instancia del Distrito de Zitácuaro, Penal, 1933, Legajo 3, exp. 98.

agrarista were arrested after they took part in a Catholic meeting in which Wenceslao Ruiz was due to attend.[70] The same detainee, Pedro Pérez, declared to the district judge of Zitácuaro that Luis Reyes Brisco (the leader of the Junta Liberal in Jungapeo) had invited him to 'join the Junta Política of which he is president'. He also called on him to invite other members of the '*sindicato* [*agrarista*] to join, saying that they would receive guarantees, and that to prove this he would send them the priest from time to time to celebrate mass. Then I started to invite people to join'. The other detained *agraristas* confirmed Pedro Pérez's statement. The judge freed them because the act was not consummated and it was not a crime to 'affiliate to political parties'. Nonetheless, the case illustrates that the Junta Liberal was willing to offer religious promises in order to undermine the *agrarista* faction. The fact that such promises were made suggests the extent to which the Junta was aware of the deep-rootedness of Catholicism in the region.[71]

Catholic groups continued to celebrate religious services 'under cover of darkness' until the anticlerical climate abated towards the end of the 1930s.[72] This clandestine culture was also a response to the reforms of Article Three of the 1934 Constitution, which aimed to introduce 'socialist education'. The Church and its faithful fought to boycott the official schools: on the one hand they exhorted Catholics not to send their children there, threatening to excommunicate heads of household who failed to obey this injunction; on the other hand, they ran private schools, which sought to evade the laws of the time.

Within this context, in 1935 the priest of Queréndaro began a campaign to 'exhort the population to remove their children from the school'. In the end 'of more than 100 pupils, only 33 attended'. In some municipalities the opposition to the official schools even extended to the murder of rural teachers, as happened in Contepec, where a teacher was lynched by the population.[73] On 13 May 1935 *agraristas* in the municipality of Ocampo asked the president of the republic to send them a military detachment, because

[70] Priest Wenceslao Ruiz was going to this meeting when he was arrested.

[71] AHPJM, Juzgado de Primera Instancia del Distrito de Zitácuaro, Penal, 1932, Legajo 1, exp., 10. In this same file, see the letter of 5 September 1932 from the municipal president of Jungapeo to the agent of the Ministerio Público, where the official charged with ensuring public order in La Florida indicated he had found out that a meeting of clerics and a mass in the 'Huerta Grande' was about to be celebrated, led by the traitor Ángel Camargo […] and that in that meeting some *sindicalizados* would take part. He asked for support in order to 'surprise them'.

[72] In this manner, the seeds of a clandestine Catholic culture were sown, which would incorporate other pro-Catholic organisations, such as the ACM, la UNS, el MURO y YUNQUE. On the last two of these see Álvaro Delgado, *El Yunque y la ultraderecha en el poder* (Mexico, 2005).

[73] Inspector Federal de Educación Federal a Secretaría de Gobernación, 4 May 1935, AHSEP, Educación Federal, Michoacán, caja 158, exp. 84.

they feared 'reprisals against the teachers, such as occurred in Contepec a few days ago'.[74]

The archbishop of Morelia, by now also the apostolic delegate, criticised state institutions and protested against the laws 'dealing with religious practice and external discipline' through the Mexican Episcopate. He called on Catholics to 'ignore' them and recommended that they unify in peaceful resistance 'to defend themselves against government procedures'.[75] During the 1930s the church supported various measures to resist the government's anticlerical policies, as well as to counter those Catholics who supported violence, something which would again become manifest in the Second Cristiada. These included the para-religious organisations, the *Legiones* (1934) and the UNS (1937), although its most trusted agent was *Acción Católica Mexicana* (ACM, 1929). Through the ACM the Church fought the ground it was not prepared to cede to the state: 'the struggle for souls and consciences'. *Acción Católica Mexicana* was the only of these large organisations solely controlled by the clergy. It was headed by the priest in each parish and aimed to provide moral and spiritual guidance for his flock. Following the de facto (as opposed to de jure) modus vivendi reached between Church and state in 1938, ACM proved to be the most dynamic of the para-religious organisations.

The main obstacles to ACM in the district of Zitácuaro during the 1930s were the strength of the rival factions (*agraristas* and liberals) and the apathy of Catholics themselves, who seemed to have tired of the political and religious passions which had come to the fore since the 1910 revolution. On 26 May 1933, just two months after ACM was established in Jungapeo, the president of the diocesan *junta* was informed that the ACM had 'four centres established in rural hamlets' where meetings were held every fifteen days'. It seems that the groups which made up the organisation (UFCM, UCM, ACJM and JCFM)[76] 'were guided by this Junta' and that 'the activity of the first days [was] still alive'. However, it was added, the greatest impediments to the organisation's growth lay in the fact that 'the Catholic element was very ignorant and negligent in religious matters', it was 'very disorganised', whereas by contrast the 'non-religious element' (*agraristas*

[74] AGN, F: DGG, serie Asesinatos, caja 41, exp. 2.012.2 (13)52.35.

[75] Oficio del abogado consultor Manuel Avilés al Jefe del Departamento Consultivo de la Secretaría de Gobernación, 4 March 1935, AGN, F: DGG, serie Violación Ley de Cultos, caja 9, exp. 2.347 (13).15615.

[76] Since its inception the ACM comprised four organisations, divided into two main branches, masculine and feminine. Each branch was divided into two organisations, according to age and marital status: the *Unión Femenina Católica Mexicana* (UFCM), for married and adult women, the *Unión Católica Mexicana* (UCM), for adult and married men, *Acción Católica de la Juventud Mexicana* (ACJM), for young men and *Juventud Católica Femenina Mexicana* (JCFM), for young women.

and liberals) 'is very numerous, or at least seems to be and is […] very radical'. On 23 May of the same year, the ACM branch in Ciudad Hidalgo reported that 'its work to meet local needs is advancing well'.[77] Its counterpart in Tlalpujahua reported that it did not have many catechists because 'nearly all the members are mine workers and it is very difficult for them to devote themselves to these activities during their few days of rest'. Despite this, 'religious instruction of children is well attended to' by some of the members who dedicated themselves to catechist instruction.[78] The ACM's aim was to concentrate the organisation's activities on religious instruction and ensuring good Catholic conduct in the face of the growing temptations of modernity, such as cinema, theatre, music, dance and new ways of dress. In this fashion, adapting itself to the conditions of each region and parish, the ACM gradually prospered by seeking to re-educate the faithful.[79] The resistance that Catholics had tried to present to the revolutionary state in the 1920s, which covered all areas of social activity, retreated to a bedrock of educational, moral and spiritual activities. However, a sector of Catholics also tried to conduct the battle in the politico-electoral camp through two political parties not controlled by the Church: the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) and the *Partido Fuerza Popular* (of *sinarquista* origin).[80] They knew that this was a struggle that they could not win in the short term, but considered that over time they might be able to prepare themselves to take power.

As factional conflicts declined in the second half of the 1930s, Catholics became interested in renovating their churches and they called on the government to return certain confiscated properties.[81] The reconstruction of the tower of the San Juan church, which had been damaged during the

[77] Archivo Histórico de la Universidad Iberoamericana (henceforth AHUI), F: Archivo de la Acción Católica Mexicana, Sección Junta Central de la ACM, Junta Diocesana, carpeta 2.10.12, Cuestionarios 1933–1934.

[78] AHUI, F: Archivo de la Acción Católica Mexicana, Sección Junta Central de la ACM, Junta Diocesana, Comisión de Actividades Religiosas, carpeta 2.4.12, Cuestionarios Parroquiales 1938–1940.

[79] Roberto Blancarte, *Historia de la iglesia en México 1929–1982* (Mexico, 1993), pp. 33–4.

[80] For example, the PAN candidate for the election of federal deputies in July 1943, Luis Calderón Vega – father of the victor of the presidential elections of July 2006, sent a telegram to Miguel Alemán on 4 July of the same year wherein he denounced the 'illegal installation' of an electoral booth in the municipal *cabecera* of Jungapeo, which was allegedly set up at six in the morning 'without the participation of voters'. AGN, F: DGG, serie Elecciones Diputados Federales, caja 35, exp. 2.311.D.F.(13).1. And so began the sad politico-electoral experience of those Catholics who decided not to abandon formal politics.

[81] Similar petitions were put forward by *juntas vecinales* from different places in the municipality of Zitácuaro; see Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, Morelia, Fondo: Secretaría de Hacienda, Sección Bienes Nacionales, serie Bienes Inmuebles, caja 173, exp. 4203/283(723.5), templo de San Juan Zitácuaro.

war of intervention in the nineteenth century, was completed in mid 1944. Luis María Cerda, priest and coadjutant of the priest Wenceslao Ruiz, by then deceased, blessed the tower in a celebration by the faithful. In the 1940s Cerda promoted the creation of new parishes in Zitácuaro in order to minister to what he considered an 'extensive Catholic territory'. This spirit of reconstruction was rewarded by the coronation of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios on 21 November 1945, an act authorised by Pope Pío XII and attended by the Archbishop of Morelia, Luis María Altamirano y Bulnes, Luis María Martínez y Rodríguez, the Archbishop primate of Mexico and many priests. With this act, the Pope also declared the parish a religious shrine.[82] The optimism of the diocese's chronicler, Juan B. Buitrón, may not have been a coincidence when, in 1944, he affirmed that Catholicism was recovering from the spread of Protestantism in the region.[83]

Conclusions

The case of the district of Zitácuaro analysed here confirms that the pursuit of various religious, educational and agrarian policies – that aimed to remodel the nation after the 1910 revolution – involved the state in support for local factions, which were divided in their disputes over control of ejidos, municipal councils, state deputies and political networks. *Agraristas* and liberals competed to try and gain advantage from the state's anticlerical assault. However, once factional passions began to cool towards the end of the 1930s, it seems that rather than declining, Catholicism in the district was in fact re-invigorated and flourished within the houses, families and communities where attempts had been made to stamp it out. How was this possible? Were conversions not genuine? Had the spread of Protestantism not been widespread? It has been argued here that individuals move in a pendular fashion between the various layers which make up their identity, which themselves appear as a kind of repertory from which they can select different elements according to the context and the opportunities for action presented. These elements are chosen on a pragmatic basis, individuals never lose their freedom of choice. The manner in which this process of selection occurs depends on the level of importance that each layer of identity has for the maximisation of their vital opportunities. In this manner, the revolution opened up opportunities for the acquisition of new resources – including land, water, schools, credit and political

[82] Guzmán Pérez, *Nuestra Señora*, pp. 89–92.

[83] Buitrón, *Apuntes*, p. 93. The current chronicler of Zitácuaro, Duarte Soto, accepts the omnipresence of Catholicism in the municipality, to the extent that religious festivals outstrip civic festivals: Duarte Soto, *Zitácuaro*.

networks – which implied ideological conversions on the part of the actors, some genuine and others fake. Once the revolutionary torment had passed and resources were secured, many actors returned to their old belief structures, of which Catholicism was one very important dimension.

On the other hand, Catholic resistance to the anticlerical laws oscillated between 'active action' and passive action'. The latter eventually prevailed, sponsored from above by a church hierarchy determined to achieve a modus vivendi with the state. However, this was also the result of experiences from below of wide sectors of Catholic civil society, who were convinced of the impossibility of defeating the state and its allies via armed struggle. It was within this context that a peaceful and 'clandestine' Catholic culture flowered, whose principle aim was to avoid the laws of the state and to advance its idea of moral and religious order – areas where the church hierarchy had decided to entrench itself with the faithful.

As this article has tried to show, it was not only divergent religious practices (sacramental versus popular) that obliged Catholicism to assume different forms of resistance in each region, but also the correlations of forces in each specific place. However, we still lack research documenting the way in which both experiences were articulated and lived by the actors. In the case of Zitácuaro, anticlerical groups were more powerful than in any other part of eastern Michoacán, and for this reason Catholicism here was forced to practice forms of pacific resistance above all else. Zitácuaro is unique only in that it was possibly the most radical liberal district of Michoacán – followed by Uruapan[84] – and it had a marked Protestant influence. However, it was not unique with respect to the flowering of passive Catholic resistance. Indeed, apart from the cases of Coalcomán and Ciudad Hidalgo,[85] where active resistance was stronger, in the rest of the districts of Michoacán passive resistance tended to predominate.

In other words, the claim here is not that religion was not an important factor in the conformation of Catholic resistance; rather it is argued that religion tended to follow a logic informed by local power dynamics and was itself conditioned by those same dynamics. For this reason, Catholicism was able to reemerge at the end of the 1930s within the ranks of *agrarismo*, just at the time when radical agrarianism was eclipsed. The explanation for this lies in the pragmatic behaviour of the actors: they pursued their interests without renouncing their beliefs, even though for a time they might have had to embrace their ideological rivals. This reflected a belief system where space existed for contradictory values: a 'state layer' and a 'church

[84] Bastian, *Disidentes*, p. 105.

[85] See Butler, *Popular Piety*, Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos*, Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation*, Guerra Manzo, *Caciquismo*.

layer'. Both formed part of their vital opportunities. However, political vicissitudes led them to prioritise one layer over another at different times. At the end of the day, the tendency was towards a kind of modus vivendi not only in the political but also in the cultural sphere. The ways in which this occurred is a subject which has yet to be investigated.