

# INQUIRIES INTO THE CRISTERO INSURRECTION AGAINST THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION \*

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Interest in the Cristero insurrection against the Mexican Revolution has continued unabated since the 1960s. Until now all the major published studies have viewed the rebellion as the climactic outcome of the long-standing conflict between church and state in Mexico.<sup>1</sup> By adopting this perspective, these works have deepened knowledge of church-state relations and sharply delineated the composition and development of Catholic and revolutionary factions. At the same time, these studies have offered a wide range of interpretations of the Cristero movement, interpretations that are incompatible with one another.

This article examines the published works on the church-state conflict and the Cristero insurrection. Its aim is to show that their competing interpretations of the uprisings derive from shared assumptions that entail assigning responsibility for the violent struggle to one or more of the contending groups and, with one exception, imputing a religious motive to the rural rebels. The article also examines two recently published studies that focus more narrowly on the Cristero stronghold of the Los Altos region of Jalisco. The final section proposes an alternative line of inquiry that relies on a comparative approach to set aside existing contradictions and to place the Cristero phenomenon in its proper context.

A principal concern of the major studies has been to reconstruct a sequence of events that subsumes under the church-state conflict the outbreak and termination of the violent struggle in specific sections of the countryside. These works point to the renewal of the church-state confrontation following the overthrow of Victoriano Huerta's regime, and they trace the uprisings to President Plutarco Elías Calles's determination to implement provisions of the Constitution of 1917 that restricted the internal functioning of the church. Enforcement of the

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"Calles Law," according to this chronological sequence, was scheduled for 31 July 1926. In order to bring about its repeal, the episcopacy suspended religious services and an economic boycott was sponsored by the Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa, a Catholic lay organization founded in 1925 by middle-class politicians who were excluded from the political arena. The strategy of passive resistance was overshadowed, however, by scattered rural uprisings centering in the central and western states. By the end of 1926, the League, which encountered no moral opposition from the episcopacy, set out to coordinate the local groups in arms. The insurrection, which lasted for almost three years and mustered a contingent of approximately twenty-five thousand combatants, became known as the Cristero rebellion because of the rebel battle cry, "¡Viva Cristo Rey!" In August 1929, U.S. Ambassador Dwight W. Morrow negotiated a settlement, a *modus vivendi*, between the episcopacy and the government, and the rural rebels laid down their arms.

THE CONSPIRACY: CLERICAL-FEUDAL-IMPERIALIST OR REVOLUTIONARY-MASONIC-PROTESTANT?

Both Nicolás Larín (1968), a Soviet historian, and Antonio Ríos Facius (1963, 1966), a Mexican businessman and journalist, have reconstructed the sequence of events linking the church-state conflict to the rural violence in order to advance their ideological positions. Larín wanted to demonstrate the exploitativeness of the Catholic Church in Mexico, and Ríos was interested in documenting the courageousness of the members of the Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana, the ACJM. Although their points of departure differ, both men interpreted the insurrection as stemming from a national conspiracy that had foreign (specifically U.S.) support, and both regarded the leading conspiratorial faction (either the church or the state) as monolithic. But this similarity is only formal. Larín, who adopted a dogmatic Marxist position, viewed the conflict as a clash of opposing socioeconomic forces; Ríos, who adopted a dogmatic Catholic position, viewed the conflict as a spiritual struggle, one pertaining to faith.

In *La rebelión de los cristeros*, Larín set out to expose the reactionary role that the Catholic Church has played throughout the historical development of Mexico (1968, 12). He wanted to show specifically that the unstable bourgeois regime that had emerged from the inconclusive Revolution of 1910–17 succeeded in crushing the clerical-landowning insurrection of 1926–29, which was backed by United States monopolies, through a short-lived alliance with workers and cultivators (p. 246). Larín thus postulated a clerical-feudal-imperialist conspiracy behind the

Cristero uprisings, and he claimed that the insurrection drew support from a small group of hacienda workers who were deceived, bribed, or coerced by their employers into taking up arms against the revolution (p. 160).

Ríus's position lies at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum from that of Larín. In *La juventud católica y la revolución mejicana* (1963) and *Méjico cristero* (1966), Ríus recounted the trajectory from 1910 to 1931 of the Catholic youth movement in Mexico that, under the impetus of Catholic Social Action, became organized after 1913 through the ACJM. He considered the Cristero rebellion to have been a defensive response, propelled by the ACJM and the League (which the ACJM helped organize in 1925) against the anti-Catholic conspiracy instigated by the Mexican Revolution, with the support of Yankee Masonry and Protestantism (1966, 11). Ríus did not elucidate the intricacies of the Revolutionary-Masonic-Protestant conspiracy, but he gave the impression that the ACJM almost single-handedly laid the foundations for "Méjico cristero."

#### THE INTERNAL DIVISIONS WITHIN THE CATHOLIC AND REVOLUTIONARY FACTIONS

Despite their contradictory doctrinaire positions, the studies by Larín and Ríus have more in common with each other than they do with Alicia Olivera Sedano's *Aspectos del conflicto religioso de 1926 a 1929* (1966). The latter constituted a pioneering effort to understand the church-state conflict and the outbreak of the Cristero rebellion by exploring the divisions that characterized the Catholic and revolutionary sides of the struggle. Derived from a 1963 master's thesis, this work mapped in sketchy form what were to become the major areas of scholarly concern. Perhaps because of its tentative nature, it avoided the interpretive simplifications of other published accounts.

Olivera's main contribution lies in her specification of the opposing participants in the struggle. For her the confrontation between the revolutionary state and Mexican Catholicism involved two internally differentiated factions: the revolutionary faction, which by 1924 began to exhibit an increasing division between groups led by Alvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles, and the Catholic faction, which included the members of the episcopacy, the middle-class League directors, and the predominantly rural Cristero rebels. Subsequent works by Robert E. Quirk (1973), David C. Bailey (1974), and Jean A. Meyer (1973-74) would recognize the polarization within the revolutionary camp and, more specifically, the consequences of the alliance of the Calles regime with the laborites of CROM, the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexi-

cana. But they would place one of the segments of Mexican Catholicism (without necessarily overlooking the other two) at the center of the struggle.

The strength of Olivera's work lies precisely in its lack of interpretive closure. The nearest she came to expressing a central thesis is when she asserted that the violent struggle was brought about by dissatisfied Catholics in areas marked by a high degree of religiosity (1966, 131). Provoked by what they regarded as an attack on their "essential liberties," these Catholics refused to accept the rigorous application of the fundamental law of the land and took up arms against the government. But Olivera did not totally equate the motivational drive behind their actions with religious faith, and she speculated at one point that religious devotion may have been complemented by agrarian discontent (1966, 258). Olivera concluded that the Cristeros may have also resorted to violence in protest against the defective implementation or the absence of the government-sponsored agrarian reform.

The publication of Olivera's study coincided with the appearance of James W. Wilkie's seminal article, "The Meaning of the Cristero Religious War against the Mexican Revolution" (1966). Together these two researchers established the groundwork for a more differentiated perspective on the multifaceted relations between the revolutionary state and Mexican Catholicism. Moreover, both of them pioneered in utilizing a source of historical information that had remained untapped until then—the oral testimony of surviving participants in the struggle (see also Olivera 1970 and Wilkie and Monzón 1969). Nevertheless, Olivera's work is primarily recognized today not for contributing to the development of "oral history" in Mexico but for having made first use of the substantial portion of League documents in the possession of Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra, a League vice-president. The limitations of her important study arise from its predominant reliance on this one source, which is partial in its contents as well as in its viewpoint.

#### THE IRRECONCILABLE STRUGGLE OF IDEOLOGICAL BELIEFS

In *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church, 1910–1929* (1973), Robert Quirk sought to account for the events leading to the clash between the Catholic Church and the revolutionary state on the basis of their irreconcilable differences in fundamental beliefs and derived policies. As he indicated, "by 1926 the battle lines had been drawn between the Catholic Church and the Mexican revolutionary government—in agrarian reforms, in the formation of labor organizations, and in education. . . . Both showed an equal lack of toleration for the ideas of others. It was impossible to reconcile the extreme claims made for the rival ideologies" (1973, 143). According to Quirk, the civil

strife that resulted from this ideological struggle was a test of where the greater power lay.

Quirk's book both revised his doctoral dissertation of the same title (1950) and expanded upon his article entitled "Religion and the Mexican Social Revolution" (1964). Referring to the two earlier works, Wilkie observed that Quirk's interpretation assumed that church and state are monoliths, a depiction that needs to be qualified (1966, 214–15). Rather than treating them as internally undifferentiated blocks, Quirk focused on what he considered to be the strategic segments of church and government, namely, the episcopacy and the executive branch, and he identified the part with the whole, assuming that the part totally controlled the whole. Particularly in reference to the church, Quirk insisted that the episcopacy exerted "firm" domination over all Catholic lay organizations, including the secret organization known as the "U" (1973, 126, 142), a situation that presumably changed only after July 1926. He contended that "more and more, as the bishops and priests prepared to shut down the schools and churches, the effective leadership of the Catholic movement passed to the laymen" (1973, 171).

Quirk traced the crystallization of the ideological rivalry between church and state back to 1920 (1973, chap. 5). At that time, the radical version of indigenous socialism, which had been embodied in the Constitution of 1917, began to be implemented by the executive branch of the revolutionary government. Simultaneously, the mediievally inspired movement of Catholic Social Action, rooted in Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, was being pursued with vigor by the episcopacy. Quirk viewed the Cristero insurrection as a by-product of the ideological struggle and skirted it apparently because of its insignificance.

Although it encompassed major portions of the countryside in the central and western Mexican states and eventually mustered a contingent of nearly twenty-five thousand men, the insurrection did not inspire the massive popular support that Quirk apparently expected from a "Catholic" nation. He placed responsibility for this weak response on the shoulders of Mexico's prelates and priests, who had failed to achieve the spiritual conquest of the people and whose Social Action movement offered no realistic solutions to the problems of modern society (1973, 148–49, 125–26). Consequently, "the clerical strike failed, in large part because most Mexicans, especially those in the countryside, felt no overwhelming need for masses and sacraments" (1973, 3). In contrast to the vast majority, the small minority who took up arms "fought, and were willing to die, for a cause greater than themselves, their sacred religion" (1973, 188). The issue of participation or nonparticipation thus was translated into a motivational question concerning religious loyalty, and Quirk contended that the church evoked little of this sentiment.

Quirk's handling of this period in Mexican history was shaped by his assumption that the decisive struggle was ideological in nature and confined to the apex of the church and state hierarchies. It was also shaped by evaluative judgments about the church in Mexico that are presented throughout his work without the benefit of supportive evidence. What emerges from them is an image of the church as incompetent, aristocratic, corrupt, and retrogressive (1973, 148–49, 244–45, 149 and 21, 125–26; also 1964, 64). Thus the Cristero insurrection recedes to the background as an inconsequential offshoot of an ideological clash.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE MILITANCY OF THE CATHOLIC LAY LEADERSHIP

In *¡Viva Cristo Rey!: The Cristero Rebellion and the Church-State Conflict in Mexico* (1974), the late David Bailey produced a study based on a detailed reconstruction of the actions of elites—Catholic and revolutionary, lay and clerical, domestic and foreign—to account for the outbreak, the course, the conclusion, and the consequences of the Cristero insurrection. Although Bailey maintained that his central focus in this work was the saga of the Cristeros, he immediately specified that he was concerned with their rebellion insofar as it is related to “two other conflicts broader in scope and implication than the warfare that devastated large areas of Mexico during those tragic years. The first was the longstanding enmity between Mexican Catholicism and the Mexican state, which in 1926 reached a climax that triggered the insurrection. The second was the division within the Mexican church caused by the determination of Catholic militants to destroy the regime created by the 1910 revolution” (1974, xi).

The dissertation upon which this work was based stated unambiguously that the two conflicts “help explain the cause and the significance of the Cristero rebellion” (1969, ii). Like others before him, Bailey therefore viewed the Cristero rebellion as a climactic episode of the century-old church-state conflict, and he underscored the extent to which by the 1920s “both forces had altered their [original] positions. . .” (1974, 301). But unlike others, he assigned the burden of responsibility for the renewal of confrontation to “the determination of Catholic militants to destroy the regime created by the 1910 revolution” (1974, xi). Although the term “Catholic militants” was not formally defined, Bailey's presentation identified them as those carriers of the new Catholicism, the urban-based, middle-class professionals or future professionals who headed the ACJM and the League (1974, 304). This fundamental premise, which linked the militancy of Catholic lay leaders to the armed struggle, raises crucial questions concerning the source of militancy, the origin of leadership, and the influence of Catholic beliefs in the Cristero rebellion.

First, Bailey maintained that militancy was abetted from above by the leaders of the ACJM and the League. But the militancy that these carriers of the new Catholicism promoted and encouraged in the social and political arenas never entailed plans for an insurrection against the revolutionary regime. When the Catholic lay leaders were confronted with the Calles Law, they did not clamor for violence; instead, they opted for a policy of passive resistance, the economic boycott. Bailey himself noted that while League representatives in Mexico City pondered a decision on whether to command an insurrection or not, in areas of the countryside, "the rebellion was already a fact" (1974, 87, 96).

Second, Bailey contended that "the laymen who led the rebellion at both the political and the military levels were a homogenous group" who belonged "almost without exception . . . to the small Mexican middle class" (1974, 304). In contrast, "the rebels were, in the main, farmers. They were poor, but most apparently were not from the landless bottom of the Mexican social pyramid" (1974, 303). The identification of the social class background of League directors with that of Cristero officers is misleading, however. The vast majority of Cristero officers were drawn from the ranks of those whom Bailey called "rebels." Underscoring a contradictory contention that the locally distinct groups comprising the Cristero forces had invariably generated their own military commanders, Luis González asserted that "the national leadership of the League was invisible, impalpable, and ignored" (1972, 151).

Finally, Bailey sought to document the religious motive behind the insurrection through references to the Catholic background of military and civilian leaders. He described most field leaders as being "intensely Catholic" (1974, 118), but he based this characterization on Lauro Rocha, a student of veterinary medicine who was hardly typical of the officers. Similarly, there is no evidence that Victoriano Ramírez, the colorful cowboy leader of a Los Altos group, joined the rebellion because of "his staunch loyalty to the church" (1974, 118) or that Enrique Gorostieta, the commander-in-chief of the Cristero forces, "later became fervently religious" (1974, 172) or that Anacleto González Flores, the charismatic organizer of Jalisco's Unión Popular was "reared in a staunchly Catholic family" (1974, 40; see Gómez Robledo 1937, 10).

Bailey's elite-centered perspective and his focus on the carriers of the new Catholicism led him to relegate the Cristero phenomenon to a secondary position in *¡Viva Cristo Rey!* Yet the same perspective and focus allowed him to produce the most satisfying and competent study to date on the church-state conflict and its relationship to developments within Mexican Catholicism. In this work, Bailey provided a particularly thorough and cogent examination of the complex relations that emerged between the League directors and the members of the episco-

pace, the unsuccessful efforts by the League to obtain financial assistance abroad, and the skillful mediation of Ambassador Morrow in negotiating the *modus vivendi* between the bishops and the government.

#### THE MYSTICAL ADVENTURE OF RURAL SAINTS

In *La cristiada* (1973–74), Jean Meyer focused for the first time on the rural rebels. This three-volume work sought to cover almost exhaustively the church-state conflict and the Cristero insurrection. Meyer developed both his narrative and his analysis on the basis of twin theses that were unequivocally partisan in nature.

For Meyer, the Cristeros were first of all unwitting victims of the climactic conflict between the Catholic Church and the revolutionary state: “The two powers tried to obtain maximum advantage [from the rural rebellion], and while one denounced federal atrocities and the other condemned the ‘holy war’ directed by the bishops and the Ligüeros, the struggle became for a long time the life and death of the Cristeros” (1973–74, 1:9). Thus, “when in June 1929 Church and State made peace, face to face, the only vanquished were the cultivators” (3:319). Second, for Meyer the insurrection that the church-state conflict triggered derived its massive popular support from the fervent and orthodox religiosity of the cultivators: “In general, the motivation [behind the insurrection] was religious” (3:294), and it appeared to embody “a solidly structured Christianity with regard to knowledge and regularly rooted in Sunday practice and the frequenting of the sacraments” (3:303). In other words, “the religion of the Cristeros was, with exceptions, the traditional Roman Catholic religion, strongly grounded in the Spanish Middle Ages” (3:307).

Meyer’s theses argued exactly the opposite of those proposed by Quirk and Bailey. While Quirk attributed the insignificance of the insurrection to the failure of the Catholic Church to achieve the spiritual conversion of the countryside, Meyer contended that the massive support of the Cristero movement demonstrated the allegiance of the cultivators to the church, tracing this religious commitment back to the success of the “second evangelization” of Mexico after 1860 (3:305). While Bailey identified the moving force behind the Cristero rebellion with the militancy of the middle-class Catholic lay leaders, Meyer described the insurrection at one point as “an exclusively rural event” (3:219). He also maintained that although the League was never able to impose its leadership over the Cristero movement, its inept attempts to interfere in the war effort “did a lot of harm” (3:88).

The three volumes of *La cristiada* encompass practically the entire contents of the five-volume dissertation that Meyer completed at the University of Paris (1971). Even prior to *La cristiada*’s translation into



Spanish, it was being described as the definitive study of the Cristero insurrection. Meyer subsequently published abridged versions of the study in French (1975) and English (1976), and he compiled two volumes of Cristero "testimonies" and documents—one in French (1974) and the other in Spanish (1981). Although a comprehensive evaluation of *La cristiada* is beyond the scope of this article, what is notable is that the work carries to an ultimate extreme the interpretation of the Cristero phenomenon on the basis of religiosity. Meyer identified the Cristero insurrection as "the apocalypse of 1926–1929" (1973–74, 3:322; also 1974), and he described it as "the great mystical adventure that engendered an anonymous crowd of rural saints" (1973–74, 3:320; also 1974, 222).

Meyer's research strategy differed from that of previous works on this topic. It combined the historian's conventional reliance on archives with the use of two social science techniques, the personal interview and the mail questionnaire. Meyer classified his sources in order of increasing importance as "archives, surveys based on questionnaires, and the testimony of survivors" (1974, 25). Yet his use of the last two data-gathering techniques, which were central to his study, could lead only to predetermined conclusions.

Regarding the interviews, Meyer stated that he supplemented the interviews tape-recorded by Father Nicolás Valdés Huerta with 500 interviews of his own (1:394), and he provided a list of names, organized by state and locality, of his Cristero informants (3:326–28). The list, however, includes a number, perhaps all, of Father Valdés's interviews,<sup>3</sup> and it shows the names of 342, not 500, informants. Moreover, 70 of the interviews listed were carried out in the small Los Altos village of San Francisco de Asís. Consequently, a substantial number of the interviews that Meyer employed in his work were a product of Father Valdés's lifelong work and of Meyer's visit to a Los Altos village.

The interviews by Father Valdés were originally undertaken for the purpose of gathering names and some biographical information about those who had sacrificed their lives "in defense of the Kingdom of Christ the King in Mexico" (Valdés 1964, 12). His overriding concern was to compile materials about what he called "the Journey of Blood." Meyer's invitation to come to San Francisco de Asís began on a Saturday evening with the parish priest urging former Cristeros in his congregation to show final proof of their courage by cooperating with the French historian. Meyer proceeded with his research the next day in the following manner: "Sunday, after Mass, the assembly of survivors answered the questionnaire by raising their hands, then until nightfall, the veterans filed by . . . his small table, without being intimidated by the tape recorder" (1974, 34). In light of the religious context and the manner in which these interviews were carried out, they as well as

those of Father Valdés inevitably yielded testimonies that lent support to Meyer's apocalyptic vision of the rebellion.

The same problem arises with Meyer's use of questionnaires. Meyer carried out two mail surveys, one of Cristeros in 1967 and another of "agrarristas," the beneficiaries of agrarian reform who were mobilized to fight the Cristeros. The first survey included a group of Cristero survivors who either received the journal of Cristero veterans, *David*, or were in touch with its readers. A prominent announcement in the issue of 22 May 1967 (*David* 8:177) urged readers to fill out and return questionnaires that were being distributed among them in order to complete a work that "wants not only to recount the Cristero epic but also to portray the personality of the people who rose up to defend their faith." Of the 1,000 questionnaires that were sent out, 378 were returned fully completed by Cristeros who were acquainted with *David* and who wished to take the initiative to express their religious commitment (Meyer 1973-74, 3:44; also Meyer 1971, 4:69). The survey of agrarristas was a curious one. It included 162 questionnaires that were filled out because of "the friendship that tied former Cristeros with former agrarristas" (1973-74, 3:78, n. 125). The agrarristas were thus contacted solely through their Cristero friends and thus were likely to share the views expressed in *David*.

Although the self-selection of respondents raises questions of sampling bias, Meyer presented the analysis of the data as if his two groups were representative of all Cristeros and all agrarristas. On the basis of responses to an open-ended question, he accordingly concluded that the motive for participating in the rebellion was overwhelmingly religious (1973-74, 3:292-95). Meyer's interpretation of the Cristero insurrection would therefore appear to hinge on the question of whether Cristeros were more devout than agrarristas. Yet his agrarrista survey did not support such a differentiation. Meyer admitted that "it is surprising to see how the agrarristas were as Catholic as the Cristeros" (1973-74, 3:79).

Meyer's introduction of social science techniques into the study of the Cristero movement represented an exciting complement to the conventional reliance on archival sources. His procedures, however, prevented a rigorous consideration of alternative hypotheses and served instead to provide support for the religiosity thesis. Despite the many shortcomings of the research, Meyer's *La cristiada* has made one essential contribution: it has underscored the grass-roots character of the insurrection and thereby transformed the rural rebels into a legitimate subject for study.

## THE LOS ALTOS STRONGHOLD: ECOLOGICAL CRISIS, ELITE MANIPULATION, OR CULTURAL IMPERATIVES?

Since the appearance of *La cristiada* and its abridged versions, no major published study has attempted to provide a comprehensive explanation of the Cristero phenomenon. The two most recently published works focus on a renowned Cristero stronghold, the region of Los Altos in Jalisco, and they offer interpretations that are confined to that specific area. Like previous works, their proposed interpretations are mutually contradictory.

*El movimiento cristero* (1979) by José Díaz and Román Rodríguez derived from fieldwork that the authors carried out as anthropology undergraduates at the Universidad Iberoamericana. The study was presented as their undergraduate thesis, and its published form contains a lengthy introduction by Andrés Fábregas (1979), who supervised their fieldwork. In this introduction, Fábregas insists that the Cristero movement was not a religious war (1979, 62). Díaz and Rodríguez analyze the social structure of Los Altos, and they competently reconstruct the organizational and ideological intertwining of the local church with the social life of the region (1979, chaps. 2–3).

In proposing their own explanation of the Cristero uprisings, Díaz and Rodríguez do not contradict Fábregas, but their emphasis differs. They contend that the Cristero movement was the outcome of an “ecological crisis” in the region that had been brought about mainly by restricted access to the land in the face of continuing population growth (chap. 1). Because of the church’s local control, the “tension” built up from this crisis was released with the Cristero uprisings in a religious, rather than an agrarian, direction (1979, 145, 224). Fábregas goes a step further and accounts for the misdirected “safety valve” by placing a thesis similar to Larín’s landowning-clerical conspiracy in a regional context. According to Fábregas, the Cristero insurrection was provoked by the maneuvers of an entrenched regional oligarchy and by the agitation of its major ally, the local clergy (1979, 42–43, 48, 50, 66). These two regional elites mobilized the deceived mass of rural believers for the purpose of resisting the policies of the national state.

In *The Holy War in Los Altos* (1982), an American journalist named Jim Tuck deals with the same region, but he makes no reference to an ecological crisis or to manipulative elites. According to Tuck, the Cristero insurrection in Los Altos was a “holy war” that expressed the imperatives of fervent Catholicism and the “extravagant machismo” that constitute the region’s unique culture (1982, 10). While Tuck underscores the religious impulse behind the rebellion in Los Altos, he maintains that elsewhere participation in the Cristero movement was brought about by “caciques (political bosses) out to extend their influ-

ence or malcontents eager to avenge a grudge" or by the alliance of rival tribes with the government (1982, x). This work provides engaging narratives of military campaigns and colorful descriptions of Cristero leaders. The regional analysis promised by the subtitle, however, is confined to a brief first chapter that contains stereotypical views of the region and faulty readings of the secondary source upon which it relies.<sup>4</sup>

#### CRITIQUE AND NEW DIRECTIONS

The dominant line of inquiry into the Cristero insurrection has progressively provided more differentiated analyses of Catholic and revolutionary factions. Consequently, it has now clarified the implications of the diversity of groups in the Catholic camp, the sharp divisions within the revolutionary coalition in power, and, more importantly, relations between church and state authorities at a critical juncture in Mexico's history. This line of inquiry, however, has also yielded a wide range of contradictory interpretations of the rebellion.

My analysis has sought to demonstrate that contradictory assertions have derived from assumptions shared by all the major published studies. The major works have viewed the rebellion as an outcome of the church-state conflict, they have reconstructed the sequence of events leading to the uprisings from the perspective of church-state relations, and they have imputed responsibility for the violent struggle to one or more of the rival groups. Moreover, with the exception of Larín's work and a subsidiary section of Olivera's, they have linked the problem of participation in or support of the Cristero cause to the issue of religious commitment. This assumption has led to divergent assessments of levels of religiosity, and it accounts for diametrically opposed evaluations by Quirk and Meyer and more moderate appraisals by Olivera and Bailey regarding the significance of the insurrection.

All the major published works have concentrated on the complexities of church-state relations, but except for Meyer's work, they have left unexamined the grass-roots nature of the uprisings that broke out following the closing of the churches. Meyer employed impressionistic and unreliable data to determine the social characteristics of Cristeros, and he contended that the heterogeneity of their backgrounds revealed the pervasiveness of the religious impulse behind the uprisings. Although the study by Díaz and Rodríguez does not constitute a research endeavor comparable to the preceding works, it attempts to break new ground by examining the social structure of the Cristero stronghold of Los Altos. Their study, however, turns to speculation at the point of linking regional social structure to the Cristero mobilization. It also overlooks partisan variations in the region, particularly the

revolutionary allegiance of two of its *municipios*, which must be taken into account to determine whether there were any differences between Cristero and revolutionary areas.

A key question that departs from the concerns of the dominant line of inquiry is why the uprisings occurred in some areas but not in others. The Cristero insurrection was not a nationwide phenomenon. It centered primarily in the central and western states, and even in those states, allegiance to the rebel camp was far from absolute. Variations in partisanship throughout the countryside suggest differences in social structure between Cristero and non-Cristero areas, and they also suggest that rural collective action may have arisen out of local conditions and developments. From this perspective, an explanation of the uprisings requires an approach that compares Cristero and non-Cristero areas.

An interesting effort to apply a comparative strategy appears in "La rebelión cristera de México" by anthropologist John H. McDowell (1975). This brief and tentative article relies exclusively on published sources, and its significance lies not in its particular findings or conclusions, but on the methodological procedures that guided the analysis. McDowell specifically attempts to establish correlates between settlement patterns (which he calls land tenure patterns) and partisanship (1975, 237–40). On the basis of figures derived from other works, he first compares the "Bajío" with the state of Morelos, centers respectively of the Cristero and Zapatista movements. McDowell then focuses on local studies of Michoacán, one of the states most affected by the insurrection, to examine the participation of San José de Gracia and the nonparticipation of Cherán and Quiroga in the rebellion. McDowell infers from his survey of published works that ranchos and haciendas predominated in Cristero areas and communal villages predominated in Zapatista and non-Cristero areas. He proceeds from these comparisons to a sketchy consideration of the various groups that formed the coalition under the Cristero banner and concludes that "the basic problems of the insurrection were social and economic" rather than religious (1975, 241–44).

McDowell's preliminary effort suggests a possible direction for a comparative inquiry that has not yet been pursued. A major obstacle is that this type of secondary analysis would have to draw generalizations about the insurrection from a sizable group of comparable regional and local studies carried out by other researchers. The regional and local studies that have been published to date, however, are few in number, and they fail to examine partisan variations and the contexts in which they arose.

My own work follows a different path from the one implied by McDowell's approach (Jrade 1982a, 1982b). My work addresses the

problems of generalizing about the rural uprisings from case studies by adopting the logic of the experimental design in a retrospective manner. This strategy guided the selection of the areas for study and provided the foundation for the archival and field research. My work is based in Jalisco, the center of the violent struggle, and it focuses on two different regions of the state, the Ameca Valley and central Los Altos, which are equidistant from and on opposite sides of the capital city of Guadalajara. Adjacent communities within each region shared certain crucial characteristics, but developments during the revolutionary period led them to take up opposite sides during the Cristero insurrection. Generalizations about rural collective action are thus drawn from controlled comparisons of communities within each region. At the same time, these generalizations are cross-checked through paired comparisons of communities from the two regions. The intraregional and interregional comparisons concentrate on variations in agrarian structure, parish organization, and municipal politics before and after the revolution.

This comparative study provides a new perspective on the Cristero insurrection, one that links the rural uprisings to state-building efforts. My findings support the position taken by critics of the dominant line of inquiry that the Cristero phenomenon cannot be explained solely in terms of religiosity. Groups that joined the rebel side in Jalisco cannot be distinguished on the basis of their religious commitment from groups that supported the government. The findings show instead that partisan variations derived from the divergent impact of the consolidation of revolutionary power upon specific forms of rural community organization. In areas of the countryside that were relatively shielded from market forces, the centralizing efforts of revolutionary authorities crystallized class divisions between cultivators in de facto control of the land and cultivators seeking the benefits of land reform. These efforts also provoked power struggles in the drive to extricate conservative local elites, including priests, from community affairs. In brief, my study concludes that the Cristero uprisings were outcomes of class divisions and power struggles that developed in sections of the countryside following the revolution.

This comparative strategy traces the rebellion to sociostructural conditions and power conflicts that characterized some rural areas but not others. It thereby challenges previous interpretations that proceeded directly from the church-state confrontation to the religious motives of rural rebels. The shift away from the intricacies of church-state relations does not imply, however, that the dominant line of inquiry has been exhausted or that it is inherently incompatible with a comparative regional perspective. While the Cristero phenomenon is analytically

distinct from the church-state conflict, it was tied in a variety of ways to developments within Mexican Catholicism that preceded the revolution and led to the subsequent clash with revolutionary authorities. The eventual alliance of the urban leadership of the Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa with the local groups in arms, for instance, gave loose coordination to the scattered rural uprisings and transformed outbreaks of rural protest into counterrevolution. A balanced synthesis of the two lines of inquiry promises to provide a new understanding of the Cristero insurrection as a key episode in the trajectory of the Mexican Revolution.

## NOTES

1. The unpublished theses by Cortes (1969), Hanley (1977), and Miller (1981) follow the dominant line of inquiry on the Cristero insurrection. The one by Foley (1979) and my own (1980) provide new perspectives on the violent struggle by focusing respectively on regional developments in Colima and Jalisco.
2. A perspective similar to Quirk's was adopted by Francis P. Dooley (1976) in the Spanish version of his dissertation (1972). The uniqueness of Dooley's narrative lies in its continuous references to Father Bernardo Bergöend (1976, chaps. 1 and 2). In almost every instance, Dooley traces the ultra-rightist ideological orientation and organizational forms of Catholic lay groups to Father Bergöend, who had adopted the model of "French protofascism" (1976, 29).
3. The late Father Valdés gave me access to these interviews and allowed me to reproduce five of them.
4. On one page, Tuck reproduces an obvious typographical error in a table from Meyer (1973-74, 3:13) that he uses for his "regional analysis." Tuck defines "in the interest of precision, . . . a big landowner as proprietor of a *hacienda* employing more than one thousand people" (Tuck 1982, 14), when the definition should be the proprietor of an estate encompassing more than one thousand hectares. On the next page, Tuck again relies on Meyer's work to assert that "it is noteworthy that many *cristeros*—in Los Altos and elsewhere—were strong admirers of Zapata" (1982, 15). But Meyer himself pointed out that only a small number of the respondents in his Cristero survey had ever heard of Zapata (1973-74, 3:284, n. 29). Tuck's book is nevertheless interesting reading for students of the armed movement. The same cannot be said of the two-volume work by Tuck's Mexican colleague, journalist Víctor Ceja Reyes (1981).

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