

Dateline Mexico by Carlos Cota Meza

'Quo vadis,' Girolamo?

The Mexican Papal Nuncio has backed NAFTA, while the country's Bishops Conference remains in doubt.

On May 16, the official government daily *El Nacional* published an article under the provocative title "Church Blesses the Free Trade Pact with the U.S."

The headline is based on the statements of the Vatican's Papal Nuncio in Mexico, Msgr. Girolamo Prigione, who said that "Mexico should form an economic bloc [and] promote its interests, to achieve progress and to defend itself from other markets, such as that of Europe and the Pacific. That is why it must not remain an island, which would condemn it to sterility. . . . Mexico cannot be hung out to dry," the religious diplomat stated.

Prigione's statements were made at the opening of a conference organized by the Mexican Bishops' Conference, to commemorate the centennial of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

During his address to the press, Monsignor Prigione was asked by *EIR*'s correspondents to comment on the similarity of conditions in the Mexican economy today, under the George Bush and Carlos Salinas de Gortari governments' free market economic policies, to those denounced by Leo XIII's celebrated document. Wouldn't the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) then be just a magnification of this "savage capitalism," as Pope Leo XIII called it? they asked.

A visibly irritated Prigione responded: "And what would you have Mexico do, be isolated?" When told that there, in fact, existed a *third alternative* between the failure of Marxism and the genocide of liberal capitalism,

which is the "economic integration of Ibero-America," the Papal Nuncio interrupted with a cynical, "What Ibero-America?"

Certainly, the Mexican Catholic Church—which is not the same as the Papal Nuncio—has neither supported nor rejected NAFTA, and it has certainly not "blessed" it. The reason for this ambiguity is that it considers the acts of the Mexican government to be ineluctable, and since "the Church has no models to propose," current problems are viewed as a "historically given situation."

The Catholic Church's Bishops Conference President Msgr. Adolfo Suárez Rivera declared that NAFTA is "something that will definitely happen," but that the Church "will demand equality in this treaty, so that the big fish doesn't eat the smaller. . . . Unfortunately, the only thing Mexico can offer at this time is cheap labor power."

The Mexican Bishops Conference itself has drafted a document on NAFTA, in which all the bishops indicate that "the treaty is only legitimate if it contributes to the just and humane development of the countries involved, and of their neighbors; a social policy in favor of the weak . . . should be applied; the cooperatives, the small and medium-sized industries, and some state companies should be respected. . . . The *maquiladoras*, while a source of work for the population, have nonetheless generated human problems, above all along the northern border."

This is not the first time that the Vatican diplomat has come out with

a position at variance to that of the Mexican Catholic Church. Indeed, many analysts agree that the Mexican Church is split between Prigione on the one side, and the followers of Cardinal Ernesto Corripio Ahumada, on the other.

The most public disagreement within the Church is over Church-State relations, where the position of the Papal Nuncio has been consistently in favor of the Salinas government. Further, it has been noted that Monsignor Prigione displays a certain pleasure in making this factional situation public. In an exclusive interview with the magazine *Proceso* (No. 749, March 11, 1991), the Papal Nuncio asserted that all discussion with government officials over the formalization of Church-State relations was exhausted. "The decision of the President is all that remains. . . . We are awaiting it. . . . The Cardinal [Corripio] should not get involved. We have official channels for that."

Opposed to this rather lyric view of relations between the Catholic Church and the Mexican government are the statements of the recently named Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo: "The establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican without the juridical status of the Church being recognized inside Mexico is a fiction that cannot be sustained, and we will end up with continued *schizophrenia*." The most logical and natural thing would be to recognize the Church, and then establish relations with the Vatican, said the Cardinal.

Monsignor Prigione often speaks in the plural, as in his use of the phrase "we expect," or "we are prepared to . . ." It is clear that in his "we," the Mexican Catholic Church hierarchy is not included. What is not known is if his "we" is intended to include Pope John Paul II, or perhaps some faction within the Vatican's State Department.