

"¡DIOS NO MUERE!": THE CRISTO REY MONUMENT AND CHURCH- STATE
RELATIONS IN REVOLUTIONARY GUANAJUATO 1914- 1950.

by

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ABSTRACT

JOHN CATTON. "¡DIOS NO MUERE!": THE CRISTO REY MONUMENT AND CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN REVOLUTIONARY GUANAJUATO 1914- 1950. Under the direction of DR. JÜRGEN BUCHENAU)

This thesis examines the role of the Catholic ideology of Cristo Rey during the Cristero Conflict, which lasted from 1926 to 1929. This conflict was an armed rebellion led by militant Catholics who opposed the Mexican government's enforcement of anti-clerical provisions in the Mexican Constitution of 1917. This thesis argues that the creation of the Cristo Rey devotion in Guanajuato, Mexico as well as the statue erected dedicated to that devotion in 1923 demonstrate the early role the Mexican clergy played in escalating tensions between the Church and the State. It further demonstrates that the militant Catholic interpretation of Cristo Rey was impactful outside of Mexico.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Nancy Kimberly Resendiz Chavez.

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INTRODUCTION

Driving along Mexican Highway 45, between the Mexican towns of León and Silao, one is greeted by the rustic mountain landscape of central Mexico. During the approach to the town of Silao, a tiny black dot at the top of one of the mountains, known as “Cerro del Cubilete”¹ comes into view, until eventually, the enormous bronze statue of Christ, arms outstretched over the Mexican countryside, becomes entirely visible. This 20-meter-tall monument, known as the “Santuario Votivo Nacional de Cristo Rey de la Paz,”² sits over 200 meters above the ground at the summit of the mountain. The monument, one of the most popular religious pilgrimage sites in Mexico, has been immortalized in conservative Catholic culture, through art, religious ceremony, and music.

The story of this monument is critical to our understanding of the relationship between the Mexican Catholic Church and the Mexican government during the first half of the 20th century. Originally constructed in 1920, this image of “Cristo Rey” or “Christ the King” served as conservative Catholic response to the Mexican Revolution which many Catholic clergy saw as a threat to the Catholic Church in Mexico. It would be destroyed in 1928, by revolutionary, anti-clerical forces, and was rebuilt in 1950 as the tensions cooled between the Catholic Church and the Mexican State. This thesis will demonstrate that years before the armed Catholic rebellion against the Mexican government known as the Cristiada, the Mexican Catholic clergy sought to create and use the Catholic ideology of Cristo Rey to combat liberal and anticlerical factions during the Mexican Revolution.

¹ This roughly translates as “dice cup hill.” According to local legend, it received that nickname due to the fact that the mountain is shaped like a dice cup.

² The name of the monument translates to, “National Votive Sanctuary of Christ the King of Peace.”



(Figure 1.1) “Santuario Votivo Nacional de Cristo Rey de la Paz” in Guanajuato. (Photo taken by the author)

So why was there a conflict between the Mexican government and the Catholic Church in the first place? The Catholic church is arguably the longest lasting vestige of Spanish colonialism in Latin America. The result of hundreds of years of Catholicism being the main religion of the colony ensured that the church played a major role in the everyday lives of Mexicans from baptism to marriage and finally, to burial. It also ensured that even after the colonial period, most of the Mexican population remained Catholic, with 99% of Mexican residents identifying as Roman Catholic in the 1910 census.³ The roots of the religious conflict between the Catholic church and Mexican state date back to the nineteenth century. To the liberal reformers, inspired by revolutions in France and the United States, it was not the ideology of the Catholic church that they were

³ Departamento de La Estado Nacional. *Resulten del Censo Gral. de Habitantes, de 30 de Noviembre de 1921*. 1928., 102.

opposed to, but rather its unmitigated status and unregulated wealth that it had been accruing since the colonial era.

The special status given to the Catholic church during the colonial period known as the “fuero” meant that Catholic clerics had no obligations to the Mexican state, neither in the form of taxation nor within the legal system. This status was not seriously challenged until November 1855, when the Minister of Finance and future president of Mexico, Benito Juárez, subjugated the Catholic clergy to civilian courts which had previously only been beholden to their own ecclesiastical court systems.⁴ The abolishment of their “fuero” status became enshrined later in the 1857 Mexican constitution which placed the official duty of maintaining the civil registry of births, deaths, and marriages under the responsibility of the federal government.⁵ It also forced the Church to divest its vast land holdings to the state and removed the Church’s control over cemeteries.⁶ These laws within the constitution outraged the Catholic clergy with Pope Pius IX stating the laws were “an injury to the religion” and officially called the 1857 constitution “null, void, and without any value.”⁷ Angered Catholic conservatives refused to accept the constitution and launched a coup against Juárez’s government, a conflict that would become known as the War of Reform which lasted from 1858 to 1861. The liberal faction under Benito Juárez eventually won the conflict, and Juárez was elected as the president of Mexico in January 1861.

However, this did not entirely quell the conservative rebellion. Conservative guerrillas still operated in the countryside and conservatives such as José Pablo Martínez del Río sought to

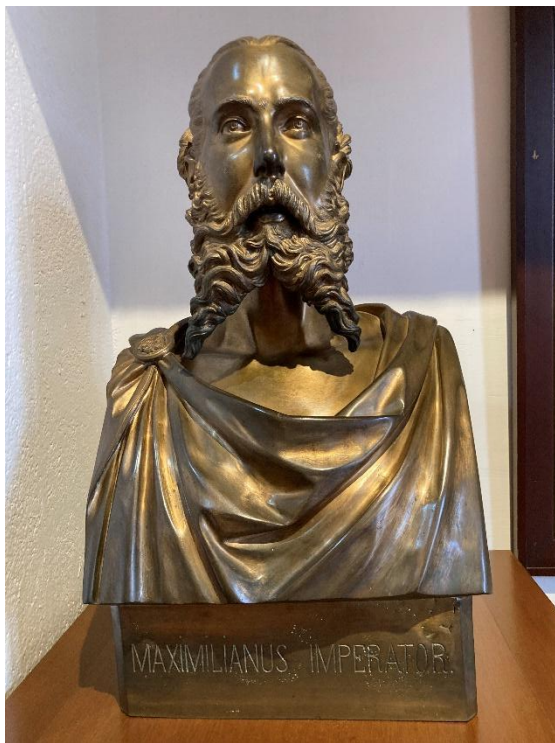
⁴ Arturo Elias. *The Mexican People and the Church*. Unknown Publisher, 1935. 11. Accessed Online through New Mexico Digital Collections, <https://nmdigital.unm.edu/digital/collection/fapecft/id/8574/rec/10>

⁵ David Bailey. ¡Viva Cristo Rey!: The Cristero Rebellion and the Church State Conflict in Mexico. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974., 12.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Arturo Elias. *The Mexican People and the Church*. Unknown Publisher, 1935., 12. Accessed Online through New Mexico Digital Collections, <https://nmdigital.unm.edu/digital/collection/fapecft/id/8574/rec/10>

reestablish a Catholic monarchy in Mexico had strong support. Looking for available monarchs in Europe, a Mexican delegation of Conservatives, offered the crown of Mexico to the Habsburg prince Maximilian in 1864 with the support of tens of thousands of French troops sent by Emperor Napoleon III and with the understanding that the creation of this monarchy was popularly supported in Mexico. Maximilian I of Mexico was the younger brother of the Austrian emperor, Franz Joseph I. The forces supporting President Juárez were able to militarily defeat Maximilian's army in 1867, establishing the Mexican republic. But the affair would taint Catholic conservatives as supportive of foreign interventionism, especially during the presidency of Porfirio Díaz.



(Figure 1.2) Bronze depiction of Maximilian as a Roman Emperor ca. 1865 in the Alhóndiga de Granaditas Museum, Guanajuato, (Figure 1.3) The observatory added to the Viceroy of Mexico's Palace at Chapultepec by Emperor Maximilian, Mexico City (Photos taken by the author)

The Catholic clergy was granted many concessions, especially in terms of land, especially rural properties during the Diaz presidency who sought to unite a still divided country. After the Mexican Revolution began in 1910, many Mexican revolutionaries such as Antonio I. Villarreal and Adalberto Tejeda, saw the opportunity that the revolution created to eliminate the social and political power of the Catholic church in Mexico. The winners of the revolution expanded the measures from the 1857 Constitution that limited the role of the Catholic church in a new document known as the Constitution of 1917. This constitution prohibited church -run schools, (Article 3) outlawed monastic orders, (Article 5) limited public worship to inside church buildings, (Article 24) established all church owned real estate as national property, (Article 27) prohibited religious periodicals and considered all clergy subject to government judicial jurisdiction. (Article 130)⁸ Despite the creation of these measures, in 1917, they were almost never enforced, especially in more conservative regions where the Catholic Church was particularly strong.

In 1926, President Calles, a staunch anti-clerical, urged the state governors who had not been enforcing these articles to get in line, seizing church property and forbidding public religious practices. In June 1926, he signed into law a statute that strengthened the penalty for violations of Article 130 of the Constitution ranging anywhere from hefty fines to jail time. This launched a military rebellion by religious conservatives in a war against the state that lasted from 1926 until 1929 when President Emilio Portes Gil, along with the American Ambassador, Dwight Morrow, brokered a truce between the rebels known as “Cristeros” and the state.⁹

⁸Author Unknown. *English Translation of the New Mexican Constitution: Effective from May 5th, 1917*. Publisher Unknown, 1917., 3-64. Accessed online through Northwestern University Libraries: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ien.35556003545423&view=1up&seq=1>

⁹ Walter Lippmann. “Church and State in Mexico: The American Mediation.” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 8 no. 2, January 1930, 186-207.

The Cristero War has been the subject of many works by historians. However, seminal works such as Robert Quirk's *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church 1910- 1929* and Jean Meyer's *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People Between Church and State 1926- 1929* do not focus on the creation of the ideology of Cristo Rey, nor discuss the impacts of the creation of the monument dedicated to that devotion in Guanajuato. Many of the most famous histories on the Cristero War such as David Bailey's *Viva Cristo Rey!: The Cristero Rebellion and the Church-State Conflict in Mexico* and Jean Meyer's *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People Between Church and State 1926–1929*, also overlook the period before Plutarco Elías Calles enacted his statutes that enforced the anti- clerical laws in the Mexican Constitution. This framing of the conflict enforces the idea that the armed phase of the Cristiada was reactionary. However, this analysis of the creation of the Cristo Rey monument demonstrates that as early as 1914, the Mexican clergy sought non-violent means of combating the Mexican state and in many ways, was the instigator of conflict.

This piece builds upon the work of historians such as Robert Quirk, Robert Curley, Matthew Butler, and Stephen J.C. Andes, who have all analyzed the Mexican Catholic church's relationship with the Mexican state during the 20th century, but the goal of this thesis is to examine the motivation and the impact of the Mexican Catholic clergy's creation and adoption of Cristo Rey in revolutionary Mexico. This thesis seeks to intervene in the historiography of the Cristiada to demonstrate that in many cases, such as the case in Guanajuato, during the years before the armed phase of the Cristiada in 1926, the Catholic Church was an agent of anti-revolutionary change. However, this thesis is careful to note that neither the Mexican state nor the Catholic Church during this period were monolithic.

Works such as Robert Curley's, *Citizens and Believers: Religion and Politics in Revolutionary Jalisco, 1900–1930* describe how many Mexican lay Catholics participated in politics through official political parties such as the National Catholic Party. While Curley focuses on the overt political actions of lay Catholics, this study will focus on how the Mexican clergy was able to challenge the Mexican Revolution outside of official political parties. While the region of Jalisco has received more attention from historians such as Curley, the construction of the Cristo Rey monument demonstrates that the Catholic church in Jalisco's neighbor to the east, Guanajuato, was a pivotal player and decision-maker in the postrevolutionary state. I aim to demonstrate through this work that despite not being as populated and as well studied as their Jalisciense counterparts, the Guanajuato clergy played a massive role in establishing the conservative response to the Mexican Revolution through the construction of the monument and the devotion to Christ the King.

This study will also highlight the importance of non-political Catholic groups in shaping revolutionary discourse. Matthew Butler's study of Catholic practices in his book chapter entitled 'Eucharistic Angels: Mexico's Nocturnal Adoration and the Masculinization of Postrevolutionary Catholicism, 1910-1930,' illustrates how even prayer groups such as nocturnal adoration societies, participated in anti-revolutionary rhetoric. These groups provided the atmosphere for like-minded conservative Mexican Catholics to meet and share their ideas of what their ideal society should look like and were critical to the creation of the Cristo Rey monument.

Very few academic histories on the revolutionary period focus on the Catholic perspective of the Mexican Revolution and even fewer of those study the role of the state of Guanajuato in shaping conservative ideology. This project centers around the construction,

destruction, and eventual reconstruction of a religious monument known as Cristo Rey del Cubilete in the state of Guanajuato. It was erected as a response to the Mexican Revolution, was destroyed by the opposing forces of that revolution, and was rebuilt during the 1940s, becoming one of the most famous religious sites in Mexico. This monument has been largely overlooked by historians outside of the state of Guanajuato. Luis Cabrera Cruz's *Datos Íntimos para la Historia del Monumento a Cristo Rey* and José de Jesús Ojeda Sánchez's *Tabor Mexicano: Historia Mínima del Monumento Votivo Nacional a Cristo Rey* are the only works on the monument and neither utilize archival sources.

This thesis utilizes correspondence of both Government and Church officials, contemporary newspaper articles in archives such as the Archivo del Arzobispado de México, (AHAM) the Archivo del Arzobispado de León, (AAL) the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), and the Colección Documental de la Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada. (BMLT) In particular, the ecclesiastical documents found in the AHAM and the AAL, such as meeting minutes, letters between bishops, and pastoral letters were critical to this work.

As a methodology, this essay uses the concept of "rituals of resistance" as outlined by William Beezley, Cheryl Martin, and William French, to describe how the Mexican clergy used religious rituals to challenge the Mexican state. I argue that the Archbishop of León, Emeterio Valverde Téllez, attempted to combat the Mexican Revolution through these rituals of resistance such as the promotion of the ideology of loyalty to Christ the King as alternatives to the Mexican revolution. The iterations of the monuments themselves as space and place and the usage of the holy hour also demonstrate the ritualistic methods employed by the Mexican clergy to combat the revolution. Additionally, this work seeks to illustrate how the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Mexican state changed over time. Taken as a whole, the destruction of

the original monument in 1928 and the rebuilding efforts in the 1940s demonstrate the shift in the church-state relationship from anti-clerical to the more neutral *modus vivendi* of mid-century Mexico.

In chapter one, I highlight the roots of the militant devotion to Cristo Rey. It looks at the how the Mexican Catholic Clergy felt threatened by the Mexican Revolution and used Catholic ideology and ritual as non-violent ways of challenging the Mexican state. The dedication of the Mexican nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1914 demonstrates not only this antagonism by the Catholic Clergy to challenge the Mexican state but further demonstrates how the clergy sought to spar with the Mexican state, experimenting with how much they could get away with through violating the Mexican constitution before being punished. This chapter also highlights the transnational impact of the Cristo Rey devotion, with the Catholic clergy declaring the Mexican nation a vassal to Christ the King in 1920 five years before the devotion was formally adopted by the Catholic Church in Rome.

Chapter two is concerned with the dedication of the Cristo Rey monument in 1923 and its aftermath. It demonstrates not only how the creation of the monument was widely supported by many Mexican Catholics, but also how the dedication ceremony, a blatant and intentional violation of the Mexican Constitution, forced the Mexican government to take action through the expulsion of Papal Nuncio, Ernesto Eugenio Filippi. This chapter also notes the importance of the reaction to Filippi's expulsion by Mexican Catholics. This event united Catholics throughout Mexico and created one of the first national Catholic protests against the Mexican government. This chapter also demonstrates the transnational impacts of the Filippi expulsion. The destruction of the monument by anti-clerical forces in 1928 demonstrated that the monument continued to be an important symbol to both sides of the Cristero conflict.

In the conclusion chapter, I seek to analyze the creation of the current monument, completed in 1950. The creation of the Cristo Rey chapel in the Cathedral of León and the Ecclesiastical conference held by Bishop Valverde Téllez in 1938, demonstrate the willingness of Valverde Téllez to test the relaxing relationship between the Catholic Church and the Mexican state. The approval of the reconstruction of the monument by governor of Guanajuato, Ernesto Hidalgo, in 1944 demonstrates this. The conclusion further demonstrates how the monument is still central to Catholic Conservative culture in Mexico. Religious pilgrimages of thousands and religious ceremonies renewing the vows of vassalage to Cristo Rey demonstrate the continuing relevance of the monument in Conservative Catholicism. The conclusion further demonstrates how the monument has been used by conservative politicians such as Vicente Fox as a political tool.

CHAPTER ONE: ¡VIVA CRISTO REY!: MILITANT CATHOLIC DEVOTION TO THE SAGRDO CORAZON AND CRISTO REY.

July 17, 1928 was a beautiful afternoon in Mexico City, and Mexico's former president, Álvaro Obregón, was certainly in a celebratory mood. The experienced caudillo had just won re-election to the presidency and attended a congratulatory banquet at the restaurant, "La Bombilla" in the village of San Angel near Mexico City.¹⁰ Sitting at the place of honor in the middle of the head table, he surely did not notice José de León Toral posing as a newspaper caricaturist, moving around the banquet hall, sketching drawings of the music director who was conducting the orchestra, and the politician, Aarón Sáenz Garza in his sketchbook. After drawing a sketch of Obregón, León Toral approached the head table, negotiating his way between guests and the massive floral sign that read, "Guanajuato's Honorary Tribute to Álvaro Obregón."¹¹ Meanwhile, Obregón was enjoying his roasted goat, unaware that the approaching youngster was hiding a revolver in his hat.¹² León Toral was able to fire five shots into Obregón's head, killing Obregón instantly and leaving the proud caudillo lying face first in a muddled mess of goat and blood.¹³

A sensational trial was hastily arranged for Toral in the hopes of uncovering the true motivations for this very public murder. In a direct line of questioning by President Plutarco Elías Calles, León Toral admitted that he murdered Obregón, "So that Christ would reign in Mexico."¹⁴ To modern ears as well those of many contemporary Mexicans, these were simply

¹⁰ Jürgen Buchenau. *The Last Caudillo: Álvaro Obregón and the Mexican Revolution*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2011., 159.

¹¹ Ibid., 161.

¹² Robert Weis. *For Christ and Country: Militant Catholic Youth in Post-Revolutionary Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 2.

¹³ Charles Hackett. "The Assassination of President- Elect Obregon." *Current History*, September 1928. 1026. It is suspicious that León Toral was able to shoot five shots at President Obregon before he was apprehended. Some historians theorize that some of the soldiers surrounding the president allowed this.

¹⁴ Robert Weis., 7.

the ravings of a religious fanatic. However, León Toral was not alone in this sentiment. Months earlier, in November 1927, the Catholic priest, Miguel Agustín Pro, was accused of aiding a plot to murder President Obregón where assassins threw sticks of dynamite at Obregón's motorcade on his way to the Plaza del Toros.¹⁵ The former president received only minor cuts from the shattered glass of his vehicle and proceeded to enjoy the bullfights later that afternoon. President Calles rounded up several suspects including Pro and Pro was shot without trial, by a firing squad under Calles' direct orders.¹⁶ On the morning of November 23, he was led to the garden of the Mexico City Police headquarters, which one Irish journalist, Francis McCullagh, described as the "garden of death."¹⁷ Pro was lined up against a wall, and in the moments before the order to fire, outstretched his arms imitating Jesus on the cross. With a crucifix in one hand, and a rosary in the other, Pro yelled, "viva Cristo Rey!" or "long live Christ the King" as he was struck by the firing squad's bullets."¹⁸

Pro quickly became known as a martyr for the radical Catholic movement, with over 20,000 mourners attending the priest's funeral revering Pro as a saint.¹⁹ Many mourners attempted to take petals from the flowers surrounding Pro's body in an attempt to obtain a holy relic. Reports of miracles cures resulting through the intercession of Miguel Pro circulated throughout the country including a case of restored sight.²⁰ The journalist, Rafael Martínez labeled Pro a "contemporary apostle", and the future archbishop of Mexico City, Luis Martínez

¹⁵ Francis, McCulloh. *Red Mexico: A Reign of Terror in America*. New York: Louis Carrier & Co, 1928., 227.

¹⁶ David Bailey. *Viva Cristo Rey! The Cristero Rebellion and the Church- State Conflict in Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974., 169.

¹⁷ McCulloh, 225. Interestingly, the Prefecture of police in Mexico City was the former home of the Catholic general, Don Fernando Gonzalez who served under Porfirio Diaz. The home was later appropriated by the government.

¹⁸ Ibid. 276

¹⁹ Ibid., 289.

²⁰ Ibid., 294.

would later comment, “a glorious death is almost always the climax of a noble and holy life,” and the “glorious death” of Father Pro was the “happy consummation” of a desire for martyrdom.²¹ Pro was beatified by Pope John Paul II as a saint and Catholic martyr in 1988, noting that Pro died “in odium fidei” or “in hatred of the faith.”²²

Both the examples of León Toral and Father Pro reveal how the radical Catholics adopted the ideology of “Cristo Rey”, or “Christ the King” during the Cristero rebellion. The Catholic church’s promotion of this ideology in various ways such as the creation of the national monument to Cristo Rey in Guanajuato demonstrates the Catholic Church’s early tacit support of the Cristero movement. This cultural, ritualistic resistance based on Catholic theology and symbolism allowed Mexican Catholics to counter the Mexican Revolution through non-violent means. This ideology that Christ was king over Mexican souls, not the Mexican government would also be adopted later by violent, radical Catholics during the Cristero rebellion.

The roots of the devotion of Cristo Rey lay in the image of the “Sagrado Corazón de Jesús” or “the Sacred Heart of Jesus.” These two devotions would later become intertwined with each other during the 1920s. The Catholic devotion to the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is very old, with individual devotions to the Heart of Jesus dating from the Middle Ages. But the 17th century visions of the French nun and mystic Margret Mary Alacoque helped bring the devotion to the attention of the high clergy with Pope Clement XIII permitting the celebration of

²¹ Martínez, Rafael. *Un Apóstol Contemporáneo: Como Vivo y Como Murió, Miguel Agustín Pro, S.J.* México City: Compañía Editora Acámbaro, 1941., 5-6

²² Vatican. “The Martyrs of Our Century Beatified by Pope John Paul II: Splendid Figures of Bishops, Priests, Religious and Lay People.” Accessed online, (https://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01031997_p-58_en.html)

the Sacred Heart in 1765, and Pope Pius IX extending it to the entire church as Catholic doctrine in 1856.²³

According to Catholic theology, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, usually visually represented based on Mary Alacoque's vision - a flaming heart surrounded by a crown of thorns- represents the infinite love of Jesus Christ demonstrated through the pain endured during the crucifixion, his charity, and "interior life."²⁴ This devotion was particularly popular amongst Catholics during the nineteenth century, especially by Pope Leo XII, who actively discerned the role of the Catholic Church during the rapidly changing world of the industrial era. Believing that liberal modernization without the church led society astray, Leo XII advocated that the Catholic laity apply Catholic doctrine to their daily lives, including politics and the workplace.²⁵ In his 1899 encyclical, *Holy Year*, he argued that Catholics should prioritize the authority of Christ in their lives through the consecrating themselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus stating, "the whole human race is most truly under the power of Jesus Christ."²⁶ However, Leo XIII argued that this consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus should not be limited to individual devotion, but stated that nations and governments should consecrate themselves to Sacred Heart. Leo XIII stated further that countries that devoted themselves to the Sacred Heart would better the lives of its citizens because, "it can establish or draw tighter the bonds which naturally connect public affairs with God and gives states a hope for better things."²⁷

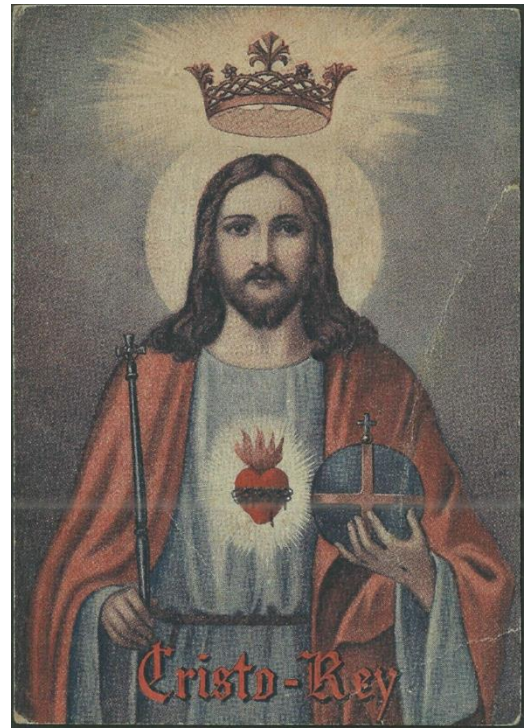
²³ "History of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri." From *Half- Hours with The Servants of God*. New York: Murphy and McCarthy, 1891., 65

²⁴ "Devotion to the Sacred Heart." From *Half- Hours with The Servants of God*. New York: Murphy and McCarthy, 1891.,13

²⁵ Pope Leo XIII. "The Consecration of Mankind to the Sacred Heart of Jesus." From Carl Moell. *The Sacred Heart Encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI*. New York: The America Press, 1953., 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11



(Figure 2.1) Prayer card depicting the execution of Padre Pro advocating for his sainthood published in El Paso, Texas in 1927. Note the usage of “Viva Cristo Rey!” at the bottom of the card. (Figure 2.2) A prayer card depicting the popular image of Cristo Rey with the sacred heart at his chest, in addition to an orb, crown, and scepter denoting Christ’s nobility over the entire world. Printed in Spain ca. 1925. (Prayer cards from the personal collection of the author.)

Leo XII was not the first Catholic theologian to tie the devotion of the Sacred Heart with the idea of a kingdom ruled by Christ. In the tenth century, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, commenting on the piercing of Jesus’ side during the crucifixion he said that “we might see the invisible wound of thy love. Who, then, would not love a heart thus wounded. I too, have found the heart of my king, my brother, and my kind friend Jesus, and I shall adore it.”²⁸ However, Pope Leo XIII was the first Roman Pontiff to use the devotion of the Sacred Heart as a method

²⁸ “Devotion to the Sacred Heart.” From *Half-Hours with The Servants of God*. New York: Murphy and McCarthy, 1891., 11-12

of consolidating church authority with state governments. Later in his life, Leo XII would consider the encyclical *Holy Year* “the greatest act of his pontificate.”²⁹

In the years following the destruction in the First World War, Pope Pius XI sought a Christian symbol that could unify a war- torn Europe.³⁰ In his first papal encyclical, *When in the Inscrutable Designs of God*, Pius XI, expanded Leo’s views of the role of the church in modern society. Pius XI viewed secularization as the greatest threat to the Catholic church, stating that it was the main cause of the First World War.³¹ Stating that “true peace can only be found in the Kingdom of Christ,” Pius XI suggested that states needed to combat modernist secularization in order to prevent such a future collapse of civilization.³² He also advocated for lay Catholics to be involved in politics through Catholic Action and established that the Catholic Church has a right to defend itself from:

unjust regulations that do injury to the rights of an order superior to that of the state, to interfere with the constitution given the Church by Christ, or to violate the rights of God himself over civil society.³³

Therefore, according to Pius XI, the solution to the ills of secularization as outlined in *When in the Inscrutable Designs of God*, was to submit to the “Kingdom of Christ.” Stating through the encyclical, *In the First* in 1925 that, “the hope of a lasting peace among the nations and states will never dawn so long as individual men and states deny and exclude the empire of our savior,”

²⁹ Carl Moell. *The Sacred Heart Encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI*. New York: The America Press, 1953., 3

³⁰ Pope Pius XI served as Pope from 1922 until 1939.

³¹ Fabrice Bouthillon. “D’une théologie à l’autre: Pie XI et le Christ-Roi.” Ratti, Achille. Pape Pie XI. Rome: École Française de Rome, 1996, 294-295.

³² Pope Pius XI. “The Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ.” From Ryan, James. *The Encyclicals of Pius XI*. London: Herder Book Co, 1927., 38.

³³ Ibid., 42.

Pius XI officially established the feast of Christ the King.³⁴ This declaration established that the kingdom of Christ was without limit in authority or in geography and that all statesmen were bound to worship and obey Christ publicly.³⁵ Pope Pius XI claimed that this dedication to Christ as King would help bring peace to a war torn world, stating,

Whenever men shall in public or in private acknowledge the royal power of Christ, incredible benefits will necessarily come to the entire civil community, as for instance justice and liberty order and tranquility, concord and peace.³⁶

The devotion to Christ the King quickly became popular throughout the world inspiring theologians such as Karl Barth, Cyril Martindale and Bernhard Bartmann.³⁷ However, this devotion perhaps had the greatest impact in revolutionary Mexico, which in the decade before Pope Pius's declaration of Christ the King in 1925, used the Catholic theology of the Sacred Heart and Cristo Rey in order to challenge Mexican state authority.

Inspired by the works of Pope Leo IX, which addressed the Catholic church's stance on labor reform, such as the encyclical, *Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor*, the Mexican clergy became more frequently engaged in politics. Eucharistic congresses such as those in Puebla in 1903 and in Morelia in 1904 established the role of the Catholic Church in providing primary school education to Mexico's working classes.³⁸ The Guadalajara Eucharistic conference of 1908, affirmed that the Catholic Church supported that workers be treated and paid fairly and

³⁴ Pope Pius XI. "Encyclical Letter of our Most Holy Lord, Pius XI, to the Venerable Brothers, Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops, Bishops and to other Local Ordinaries- In Peace and Communion With the Apostolic See On the Establishment of the Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ As King." New York: The Home Press, 1925., 1

³⁵ Ibid., 13

³⁶ Ibid., 7

³⁷ See Cyril Martindale. *Christ is King: A Course of Sermons Preached at Westminster Cathedral*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1927. And Bernhard Bartmann. *Jesus Christus Unser Heiland und König*. Paderborn: Bonifacius Druckerei, 1926.

³⁸ Vinke, Ramon. *Consagración al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús*. Caracas: Editorial Arte, S.A., 2021., 105.

that they receive Sunday as a day of rest.³⁹ However, the growing social and political issues of Mexico were too great and moving too fast for the Catholic Church to remedy. In 1910, a revolution instigated by Francisco Madero, became an armed civil war in which every segment of society was to be questioned, including the role of the Catholic Church.

Despite the involvement of lay Catholics through Catholic political parties such as the National Catholic Party in 1912, the rhetoric of anti-clericalists involved in the Mexican Revolution such as Venustiano Carranza concerned many church officials. Individuals such as Dr. Luis Silva, would later equate the revolution itself with state atheism, stating, “official atheism is cause of all our great misfortunes”⁴⁰ and he implored the Sacred Heart to end “the terrible factional struggle, which is tearing at this moment the entrails of our beloved country.” The devotion of the Sacred Heart, which had been popular in Mexico since the 1860s among priests returning from Europe after the Reform War, became a political form of Catholic resistance to the revolution.⁴¹

In November 1913, the archbishop of Morelia, Mons. Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, concerned about the anti-clerical stance on some Mexican revolutionaries, proposed to go to Rome and appeal before the Pope that Mexico should swear loyalty to the sacred heart of Jesus.⁴² Bishop Ruiz y Flores was not only able to obtain the blessing of the Pope, but he also received permission to conduct the ceremony at the Metropolitan Cathedral in Mexico City by President

³⁹ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁰ “Las Solemnidades de la Consagración de la República al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, en Guadalajara”, *El País*, January 9, 1914.

⁴¹ Preciado, Julia. “Consagrar a México al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús en 1914: dos lecturas desde la historia cultural.” *Signos Históricos*, vol XXI, núm. 41, Enero- Junio, 2019, 132.

⁴² Vinke, Ramon. *Consagración al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús*. Caracas: Editorial Arte, S.A., 2021, 111.

Victoriano Huerta⁴³ himself as long as the ceremony refrained from any overt political messaging.⁴⁴ This was not followed. On January 11, 1914, Mexican generals Ángel Ortiz Monasterio and Eduardo Paz in full military regalia placed a crown and scepter before the image of the Sacred Heart in the Metropolitan Cathedral before a large crowd of Catholic bishops and faithful.⁴⁵ Members of the student organization, El Centro de Estudiantes Católicos, processed before the Archbishop of Mexico City, José Mora y Río⁴⁶ with a Mexican flag with an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe replacing the Mexican eagle. After consecrating the flag, Archbishop Mora y Río stated,

I congratulate you, because you have chosen for your flag the true national flag, you have completed it by fixing on it the image of the Blessed Virgin of Guadalupe, which is something indispensable, something that we should not do without, when it comes to symbolize the Mexican homeland.⁴⁷

A choir accompanied by a small orchestra then sang the national anthem.

In addition to the religious service in the basilica, 12,000 members of Catholic lay organizations, workers associations and bands participated in a parade accompanied by Mexico City police.⁴⁸ The march from the plaza of Carlos IV to the cathedral constituted a clear violation of the Mexican Constitution of 1857. Yet President Huerta allowed the march, which to many

⁴³ Victoriano Huerta became the president of Mexico through a coup supported by the United States in 1913. He would lead Mexico in a military dictatorship until he was overthrown in 1914.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 112.

⁴⁵ Antonio Rius Facius. *La juventud católica y la Revolución Mexicana 1910-1925* Editorial Jus, S.A. México 1963, p. 63.

⁴⁶ José Mora y Río served as the Primate Archbishop of Mexico City from 1908 to 1928. Since Mexico was not served by a Cardinal, as Primate Archbishop of Mexico City, Mora y Río was given special jurisdiction over Mexican dioceses.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 64., “Os felicito, porque habéis escogido por vuestra bandera la verdadera nacional, vosotros la habéis completado fijando en ella la imagen de la Virgen Santísima de Guadalupe, que es algo indispensable, algo de lo que no debemos prescindir, cuando se trate de simbolizar la Patria Mexicana.”

⁴⁸ Preciado, Julia. “Consagrar a México al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús en 1914: dos lecturas desde la historia cultural.” *Signos Históricos*, vol. XXI, núm. 41, Enero- Junio, 2019, 135- 139.

supporters of Carranza clearly indicated that the Catholic Church supported the Huerta regime. In Guadalajara, the local archbishop José Orozco y Jiménez, blatantly disregarded a ban of an outdoor celebration issued by orders of the governor of Jalisco, José López Portillo y Rojas to not hold an outdoor celebration, instead holding a massive parade throughout Guadalajara.⁴⁹

The Mexican episcopate sought a national monument dedicated to the Sacred Heart. Initially envisioned by the archbishop of Michoacán, Dr. Leopoldo Ruiz in 1912, the monument that would later become known as “El Monumento de Cristo Rey” began as a monument dedicated to the Sacred Heart as a means of healing a divided country.⁵⁰ In a letter to Archbishop Mora y del Rio, the Archbishop of Zacatecas, Miguel María de la Mora y Mora stated, “the triumph of this revolution will terribly persecute the Church wherever she reigns” and that a monument that reminds Catholics of the kingship of Christ will, “achieve the peace that the Republic needs so dearly.”⁵¹

In 1920, the Mexican episcopate met in Mexico City for a Eucharistic Congress dedicated to the anniversary of the crowning of the *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*. It also formally decided to create a national monument dedicated to the Sacred Heart. Several archbishops appealed to the Archbishop of Mexico City, José Mora y del Río in an attempt to have the national monument dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in their diocese. The archbishop of Guadalajara even

⁴⁹ Interestingly, the state of Jalisco was governed at the time by the Catholic political party, the Partido Católico Nacional. (PCN)

⁵⁰ AHAM, Caja 46 Exp. 37, Letter from Archbishop Leopoldo Ruiz to Archbishop José Mora y del Río, June 12, 1912.

⁵¹ Letter from the Archbishop of Zacatecas to Jose Mora y del Río December 18, 1913. AHAM caja 46 exp 37 “Mi insistencia obedece a la tristeza que me causa tan solo pensar en el triunfo de esta revolución, que perseguirá terriblemente a la Iglesia, como la persigue ya de modo cruel, en donde impera. En mi diócesis ha sufrido el Clero verdaderos martirios; y solo ha faltado que defieran la vida, los sacerdotes.... con el fin de conseguir la paz de que tanto necesita la República.”

offered land and stone for the project, all expenses paid.⁵² However, it was Emeterio Valverde Téllez, the bishop of León, who offered the most compelling proposal. Within his diocese was Cubilete Mountain, outside the city of Silao, which was the geographic center of Mexico. That meant that a monument dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus could lie in the nation's geographic center, its metaphorical heart. The symbolism was simply too great to pass up for the young bishop.⁵³

Bishop Valverde Téllez's career was vast, serving as León's bishop from 1909 to 1948. The fourth of seven children, Téllez was born in the town of Villa del Carbón in a makeshift shack because the family home burned down a few days before he was born.⁵⁴ Knowing his entire childhood he wanted to be a priest, the young Valverde Téllez frequently created altars in his family's house. Valverde Téllez was known for his humility in seminary. He couldn't even afford a black suit for seminary, opting for a cape instead.⁵⁵ But Valverde Téllez quickly became known for his staggering intellect. He impressed his teachers within his seminary, who were quick to label him as the one of their prize students, rapidly learning languages, natural science, math, and theology.⁵⁶ Upon graduation, he quickly rose through the ecclesiastical ranks.⁵⁷ Months after becoming the bishop of León in 1909, Valverde Téllez went to the Vatican to serve as the secretary of the newly created Mexican Episcopal Commission.⁵⁸

⁵² AHAM, Caja 46 Exp. 37, Letter from Francisco Orozco y Jiménez to José Mora y del Río. June 10, 1914.

⁵³ AHAM, Caja 72 Exp. 15, Collective Pastoral Letter by the Mexican Episcopate, October 16, 1920.

⁵⁴ Manuel Camacho Rangel. Emeterio Valverde Téllez: El Obispo de León Y Asistente Al Sacro Solio Pontificio, Algo Sobre Su Vida Y Su Obra. León: Lumen, 1950.13., 11

⁵⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁷ In November 1890, he was named the priest of Santa Fe, D.F. and within months Valverde Téllez would later take charge of three more churches in the Federal District: Tlalmanalco (1891-5), Zinazantepec (1895) and San Jose de la Capital. (1896) He also became Judge of the Seminary, (1901) Visitor of Parishes, (1901) Vicar general, (1903) and the Secretary of the Chamber and Government. (1907)

⁵⁸ Ibid.



(Figure 2.3) Bust of Bishop Emeterio Valverde Téllez outside the Basílica Colegiata de Nuestra Señora de Guanajuato in Guanajuato. (Figure 2.4) The plaque accompanying the bust describes Bishop Valverde Téllez as “the Bishop of Cristo Rey.” (Photos taken by the author)

Valverde Téllez was an energetic prelate in addition to being one of the Catholic Church's foremost academic authorities. Throughout his career, he oversaw 600,000 confirmations and wrote 286 Diocesan circulars and 50 pastoral letters.⁵⁹ He was also known for his famous poem, *El Poema del Amor Divino*, written while he was in hiding during the revolution. He also composed a three-volume biographic encyclopedia of influential Mexicans over 1,500 pages long.⁶⁰ However, the monument to Christ to King was his passion project that he would pursue until his death in 1948, two years before the project's completion. The devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was central to Valverde Téllez his entire life, ever since receiving

⁵⁹ Luis Cabrera. Oración Fúnebre del Excmo. y Revmo. Sr. Dr. D Emeterio Valverde Téllez VI Obispo de León y Asistente al Sacro Solio Pontificio: Pronunciado en la parroquia de San Miguel de Allende el Día 22 de Enero de 1949. León: Lumen, 1949., 12-15

⁶⁰ Rangel Camacho, Manuel. E; Excmo. Y Revmo. Sr. Dr. Emeterio Valverde Téllez, VI Obispo de León y Asistente Al Sacro Solio Pontificio: Algo Sobre Su Vida y Su Obra. Lumen?: 1950, 49.

his first communion in the feast of the Sacred Heart in 1871 further inspired him to pursue the Cristo Rey project.⁶¹

According to Valverde Téllez, the idea to locate the monument dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was first conceptualized by a local lay group of Catholics known as the “Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament” who wanted to celebrate mass at the top of the Cubilete Mountain near the town of Silao.⁶² During a pastoral visit, Valverde Téllez visited the owner of the property, Don Jose Natividad.⁶³ Valverde Téllez, a frequent hiker who was interested in geology and member of the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística, was particularly interested in the mountain.⁶⁴ Upon hearing that the Geographic Commission of Mexico had a small marker indicating the peak of the mountain as the geographic center of Mexico, Valverde Téllez began to take interest in the site as a pilgrimage destination.⁶⁵

His interest was also probably fueled by his discontent with the Mexican Revolution. In his first circular letter as Bishop of León, he stated that “Christian virtue” was threatened by the “stalking of cunning and powerful enemies who, like hungry and roaring lions, seek to devour the church”⁶⁶ and that Mexican Catholics should follow the examples of the early Christian

⁶¹ Álbum del XXV Aniversario de la Consagración Episcopal del Excmo. Y Rmo. Sr. Obispo Dr. Son Emeterio Valverde Téllez, Obispo de León, Asistente al Solio Pontificio., 25.

⁶² Valverde Téllez, Emeterio. *Monumento y Entronización del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús como Rey de México en la “Montaña de Cristo Rey” antes “Cerro del Cubilete.”* León, 1920., 1-2.

⁶³ José Natividad Macías Castorena was a prominent member of Sinaloense society. He served as rector of the National Autonomous University of Mexico from 1915 to 1916 and from 1917 to 1920 and served as the Deputy to the Congress of the Constituent Union of Mexico of 1917 for District 3 of Guanajuato from 1916 to 1917.

⁶⁴ Rangel Camacho, Manuel. E; Excmo. Y Revmo.. Sr. Dr. Emeterio Valverde Téllez, VI Obispo de León y Asistente Al Sacro Solio Pontificio: Algo Sobre Su Vida y Su Obra. Lumen?: 1950., 58.

⁶⁵ *La Semilla Eucarística: Publication Mensual* Año 13, Num. 11 Mexico City: Jose Donacano Rojas, May 1920., 5.

⁶⁶ Valverde Téllez, Valverde. “Primera Carta Pastoral.” *Cartas Pastorales y Edictos del Ilmo. Señor Doctor Don Emeterio Valverde Téllez, Obispo de León. Tomo II.* León: Imprenta de la CIA. Católica Editora, S.C.L., 1913. 1909., 8 “Mas, por desgracia, el opulento tesoro de las virtudes cristianas está, particularmente ahora, expuesto a innumerables peligros, amenazado por los acechos de astutos cuanto poderosos enemigos que, como leones hambrientos y rugientes, buscan para para devorarla.”

martyrs and “should be willing to lay down a thousand lives.”⁶⁷ He further penned his frustration in 1911 stating,

In modern times, all the nations of the world, forgetting with black ungratefulness the great benefits they owe to Christianity, have hurled slanderous turions against the Holy Church, Immaculate of the Lamb, to make it odious to the peoples; enraged against Jesus Christ, they have associated with the pretentious Jewish people: ‘we do not want him to reign over us; we have no other king but Caesar.’ And saying and doing they banished God in the family of the school, of the laws of civil society, in short; and there is to be disaster sooner or later.⁶⁸

This in combination with the fact that since 1918, Valverde Téllez had advocated for a renewal of Mexico’s vassalage to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the desire amongst Mexican bishops to establish a national monument to the Sacred Heart of Jesus all possibly played a factor in Valverde Téllez decision to begin the project.⁶⁹

Members from the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament, the local priest, Father Eleuterio and the prominent Sinaloense, Don Felipe Bravo suggested replacing the marker from the geographic commission with one that contained an image of the Sacred Heart Jesus, due to the fact that the full name of Sialo was Silao de Corazon de Jesus.⁷⁰ Jose Macias allowed the church to use the mountain and his ranch which would serve as the starting point for all future pilgrimages 800 meters up the summit of the mountain. Local branches of the Adorers of the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 15 “a ejemplo de nuestros padres en la fe, debiéramos estar dispuestos a rendir mil vidas, si mil vidasuviésemos.”

⁶⁸ Valverde Téllez. “Noventa Carta Pastoral.” Cartas Pastorales y Edictos del Ilmo. Señor Doctor Don Emerterio Valverde Téllez, Obispo de León. Tomo II. León: Imprenta de la CIA. Catholica Editora, S.C.L., 1913., 236-237., “en los tiempos modernos las naciones todas del globo; olvidando con negra ingruatuid los grandes beneficios que deben al cristianismo, han lanzado turiones se calumnias contra la Iglesia Santa, Inmaculada del Cordero, para hacerla odiosa a los pueblos; enfurecidas contra Jesucristo, han vociferado con el protervo pueblo judío: no queremos que este reine sobre nosotros; no tenemos otro rey que el César. Y diciendo y haciendo desterraron a Dios en la familia de la escuela, de las leyes de la sociedad civil, en suma; y el desastre tarde o temprano tenía que venir, porque escrito; está que si el Señor no edifica la casa, en raño trabajaron los que la edifican; si el Señor no guarda la ciudad, en ramo se desvelan los que la guardan.”

⁶⁹ “Carta Pastoral Sobre la Entronización Del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús en la Diócesis de León) December 22, 1918, 40.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 7.

Blessed Sacrament and the Association of Catholic Youth helped raise funds by traveling from house to house in León, Silao, and Guanajuato.⁷¹ In a few weeks, over 500 pesos was raised to build the limestone monument to the Sacred Heart.⁷² All materials for the monument were carried by hand to the summit of the mountain and were assembled on-site. Amazingly, the entire project was completed in just four weeks. The limestone obelisk featured a large statue of Jesus Christ clutching an oversized heart, representing the Sacred Heart of Jesus.⁷³

On the morning of April 9, 1920 The entire town of Silao was decorated in the colors of the Sacred Heart: banners of red and white.⁷⁴ Approximately, 20,000 pilgrims arrived from all over Mexico and flooded the town of Silao to be at the dedication ceremony on April 11, 1920, most by foot.⁷⁵ The crowds were so thick at the train station waiting for Valverde Téllez to arrive, the bishop struggled to get out of his Pullman through the crowd.⁷⁶ He was greeted by local government representatives, traditional native dancers, the Knights of Columbus, members of the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament and a large banner that read, “King of Mexico.”⁷⁷

During one of the services preceding the dedication ceremony, a priest from Silao, Monsignor Ruiz made the political implications of the monument very clear in his homily:

⁷¹ Valverde Téllez, Emeterio. Monumento y Entronización del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús como Rey de México en la “Montaña de Cristo Rey” antes “Cerro del Cubilete.” León, 1920., 4.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid. *La Semilla Eucarística: Publicación Mensual* Año 13, Num. 11 Mexico City: José Donacano Rojas, May 1920., 10

⁷⁴ Ibid.,

⁷⁵ Emeterio Valverde Téllez. *Proyecto del Monumento Nacional Que Erigirá Al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús En La Montaña de Cristo Rey*. La Comisión Central y Diocesana, 1922.,1.

⁷⁶ Valverde Téllez, Emeterio. Monumento y Entronización del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús como Rey de México en la “Montaña de Cristo Rey” antes “Cerro del Cubilete.” León, 1920., 13.

⁷⁷ *La Semilla Eucarística: Publicación Mensual* Año 13, Num. 11 Mexico City: José Donacano Rojas, May 1920., 10

“I mentioned the evils that had fallen upon the present Society and those that threaten it...supposedly ignorant of the kingship of Jesus Christ, who has been thrown out of the laws, out of the schools, and has been pretended to be thrown out of the home.”⁷⁸

The hike to the summit of the mountain took over four hours and a mass was held to consecrate the monument. Pope Benedict XV issued seven-year plenary indulgences for all those in attendance who climbed to the summit of Cubilete Mountain and 300 days indulgence to anyone who viewed the monument, even from the ground.⁷⁹ This was enormously successful as there were an estimated 100,000 families listed in the indulgence records.⁸⁰

On the evening of April 10, the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament held adoration placing the monstrance on a straw altar.⁸¹ After a low mass, held by Bishop Valverde Téllez, he announced that the mountain would no longer be known as “El Cerro del Cubilete” but rather “El Cerro del Cristo Rey” or “the mountain of Cristo Rey.”⁸² Members of parishes throughout Mexico bearing the flag of every Mexican state, swore vassalage to Christ the King, in a manner similar to the Mexican dedication to the Sacred Heart in Mexico City six years prior. One Franciscan priest present commented, “Tomorrow is when you will put into practice the teachings that you have received here and tomorrow is when you will begin the struggle against

⁷⁸ Ibid., 14 “mencionó los male que habían caído sobre la Sociedad actual y los que le amenazan, desgracias muy naturales y muy lógicas, supuesto que desconoce la realeza de Jesucristo, a quien se ha arrojado de las leyes, de la escuela, y se ha pretendido hacerlo aun de hogar.”

⁷⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁸¹ *La Semilla Eucarística: Publicación Mensual* Año 13, Num. 11 Mexico City: José Donacano Rojas, May 1920, 16

⁸² Ibid.,

the world and its passions.”⁸³ Under the stars of night the very first cries of “Viva Cristo Rey” reverberated throughout Cubilete mountain and the rest of Mexico.

⁸³ *La Semilla Eucarística: Publicación Mensual* Año 13, Núm. 11 México City: José Donacano Rojas, May 1920. 20 “pues bien; mañana es cuando vais a comenzar la lucha contra el mundo y las pasiones, mana cuando empresarios a poner en práctica las enseñanzas que aquí habéis recibido.”

CHAPTER TWO: “¡DIOS NO MUERE!": THE EXPULSION OF MONSIGNOR FILIPPI AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PRIMER MONUMENTO DE CRISTO REY.

As successful as the dedication of the monument of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was, Bishop Valverde Téllez desired a larger monument dedicated to Christ the King of a national scale. Only months after the dedication of the monument of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Valverde Téllez sought to create a compound of religious sites atop Cubilete Mountain that would attract pilgrims from all over Mexico. In December 1920, Valverde Téllez sought to establish a large domed basilica built in the Spanish colonial style and dedicated to Cristo Rey.⁸⁴

The plan called for 8 massive pillars to hold the massive dome. Each of these pillars would contain the crests of all of the archdioceses in Mexico. Each would be located near the entryway which was planned to have the coat of arms of Jesus Christ and Mary, elevating Jesus and Mary as king and queen of Mexico.⁸⁵ It seems as though even in 1921, the designers of the project knew that the monument would pose a political problem. In an oddly foreboding pastoral letter describing the project in 1921, Valverde Téllez states that there would also be 8 statues of “warrior angles” with swords to emphasize that, “if anyone should dare to desecrate the Basilica, they will be placed in the hands of “scriptural Justice.”⁸⁶ In preparation for this project in 1922, Valverde Téllez raised funds to construct a road to the top of Cubilete Mountain in addition to

⁸⁴ Emeterio Valverde Téllez. *Carta Pastoral Colectiva Con Ocasión del Monumento Nacional al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús 'En La Montaña de Cristo Rey' Datos Históricos del Monumento Actual Y Anteproyecto Para La Basílica de Cristo Rey*. (Antigua Imprenta de Murguía, 1921)

⁸⁵ Valverde Téllez, Emeterio. *Carta Pastoral Colectiva de Los Arzobispos y Obispos de la República Mexicana, con Ocasión del Monumento Nacional al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús en la 'Montaña de Cristo Rey' Antes 'El Cubilete,' Datos Históricos del Monumento Actual por El Ilmo. Sr. Obispo de León Dr. D. Emeterio Valverde y Téllez Anteproyecto para la Basílica de Cristo Rey*. (México City: Murguía, 1921), 30- 31.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 31. “que exige el respeto debido a sus templos y que, si alguien se atreviese a profanar su basílica, casera en manos de la justicia escritura.”

building electric power lines and installing running water in anticipation of future pilgrims.

Construction of the project was set to begin in 1923.

On January 11, 1923, over 80,000 parishioners from all over Mexico gathered at the base of Cubilete Mountain and hiked the partially constructed roads to its summit. The Mexican newspaper, *Excelsior* estimated that over 15,000 pilgrims came to Silao by rail, and tens of thousands more came from as far as Baja California by car, cart, or foot.⁸⁷ The sudden arrival of thousands of Catholic pilgrims left the town of Silao unprepared to house them. Outdoor camps sprang up all over the countryside surrounding the town. In addition to the thousands present that day was the official Apostolic Delegate to Mexico, Ernesto Eugenio Filippi. As Apostolic Delegate, Filippi officially represented the Pope and made the dedication ceremony a truly international event. He was joined by the archbishop of Guadalajara, José Francisco Orozco y Jiménez, and the archbishop of Morelia, Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores. Filippi consecrated the first stone of the monument in the Pope's name to the joy of the crowd.

This ceremony appeared to violate article 24 of the Mexican constitution which explicitly outlawed public religious services in the open air. This clearly posed a challenging situation for Silao's mayor, Constantino Llaca. On the one hand, he had to appear to follow the constitution's stance on public religious practices to prevent being removed from office by the government but on the other, he also needed to maintain popularity over his deeply Catholic constituency. After appealing to the Secretary of the Interior, Plutarco Elías Calles, Llaca decided to allow the ceremony because it was to take place on Cubilete Mountain, which was technically considered private property. Llaca met with Bishop Valverde Téllez stressing that the ceremony had to take

⁸⁷ *Excelsior*, January 11, 1923.

place on private property and could not interfere with public functions.⁸⁸ Bishop Valverde Téllez responded saying that he was “aware of (the government’s) recommendations and offering to do everything possible to obey (the government’s) wishes.”⁸⁹ When pressed on the matter by journalists, Mayor Llaca claimed that he believed that the pilgrims would not disturb the public order, since “the Catholic people are peaceful and have never interfered in political matters.”⁹⁰

This issue caught the attention of other leaders throughout the Mexican government. The governor of the state of Guanajuato, Antonio Madrazo secretly supported the Catholic Church but also had to answer to the anti-clerical Secretary of the Interior, Calles. Similar to Llaca, Madrazo also had to balance his majority Catholic constituency with the anti-clerical leanings of the Mexican government. Madrazo stated to Calles that as soon as he found out about the plans that were going to occur on Cubilete Mountain, he contacted Mayor Llaca about it, stating that he believed that the ceremony was a clear violation of the law and that “the government of Guanajuato would not tolerate the violation of its laws.”⁹¹ Madrazo also sent 50 men of the 450th regiment under the command of Rodolfo Gallegos to keep the peace.

This was not enough for many anti-clericalists who decided to take things into their own hands. A formal protest was launched by an organization as the “Federación Anticlerical Mexicana” led by Manuel Navarro Angulo and Gustavo Landrón de Guevara. This organization directly appealed to the sympathetic ears of the Secretariat and President Álvaro Obregón. The Secretariat stated that it had already taken adequate measures concerning the case, however,

⁸⁸ *Excelsior*, January 11, 1923.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, “manifestándole quedar enterado de su recomendación y ofreciéndole que haría lo posible por obsequiar sus deseos.”

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, “Agregó el señor Llaca en la entrevista que con él tuve que no cree que eso altere el orden, pues que la gente católica es pacífica y que jamás se ha entrometido en cuestiones políticas.”

⁹¹ *Excelsior*, January 11, 1923.

President Obregón, could not simply overlook 80,000 people participating in what certainly appeared to be an anti-revolutionary protest and stated that the organizers of the pilgrimage “tried to disregard all principles of authority and the respect that is due to our laws.”⁹²

The president decided to formally expel the Papal delegate from Mexico, with reference to Article 33 of the constitution, creating an international crisis. The declaration came as a shock to Filippi who said in clear Spanish to reporters,

I am not a criminal. I have always advised absolute respect for the laws of this country and its authorities, and it cannot be said that I have intended or even allowed the church to be involved in political affairs. I could have accepted anything, no matter how extraordinary it was, except that I was being expelled. I had received so much attention and so many facilities from the authorities and the people, that the idea that the Supreme Government would not decree my expulsion from the country had never even remotely crossed my imagination.⁹³

Filippi would continue to plead his case that the ceremony did not violate the law. Filippi argued that because the entire ceremony took place in a tent on private property, Filippi could not be charged for leading an open-air public service.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the Mexican government issued a notice that Filippi had to leave Mexico within 72 hours. Out of fear of being pursued by a mob, Filippi left in secret by car to Culiacán and boarded a train bound for Laredo, Texas in the early

⁹² *Excelsior*, January 15, 1923. (Accessed at the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Austin, Austin Texas) “quienes ensayaron desconocer todo principio de autoridad y el respeto que se debe a nuestras leyes.”

⁹³ *Excelsior* January 15, 1923. (Accessed at the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Austin, Austin Texas) , “Yo no soy un malhechor. He pensado siempre en la paz y el orden. Siempre he aconsejado el absoluto respeto a las leyes del país y sus autoridades, y no puede decirse que yo haya pretendido ni aun permitido que se mezcle la iglesia en asuntos políticos. Todo podía haber aceptado yo cualquier cosa por más extraordinaria que fuera, menos que se me expulsaba. Había recibido tantas muestras de atención, tantas facilidades de las autoridades y del pueblo, que nunca ni remotamente había pasado por mi imaginación la idea de que el Supremo Gobierno no fuera a decretar mi expulsión del país.”

⁹⁴ *Excelsior*, January 20, 1923.

hours of January 16.⁹⁵ He was joined on the 17-hour journey by the Italian ambassador to Mexico, Count Nani de Mocenigo. Before leaving, Filippi would state,

In the fourteen months that I have lived in this country, I have gathered nothing but the infinite sweetness of the Mexican heart and its great virtues. The incident of my expulsion will never erase the impression I have of the Mexican people, who have had for the Representative of His Holiness nothing but kindness and great respect.⁹⁶

Both crowds of Filippi's supporters and his detractors bought train tickets at stations along the train's route to just catch a glimpse of him.⁹⁷ One group of about a hundred men, including anti-clerical activists like Jesus M Salinas, taunted Filippi with cowbells chanting phrases such as, "Goodbye Filippi!," "Death to the Pope!," "Death to the Knights of Columbus," and "Long live President Obregón!"⁹⁸ Filippi was greeted by the Catholic clergy and the Knights of Columbus in Laredo, Texas, and New York where Filippi boarded a ship to Rome.

On January 17, Filippi received a telegram from President Obregón, stating that the measure was made out of a "painful necessity to protect the inviolability of the constitution and public tranquility."⁹⁹ In an attempt to explain his actions to his superiors in Rome, Filippi stated in a telegram that he only joined the celebration on January 11, because of the insistence of Bishop Valverde Téllez's assurances that the entire ceremony was within the law.¹⁰⁰ The Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical affairs met on March 19, to decide whether or not to close the

⁹⁵ *Boston Globe*, January 18, 1923.

⁹⁶ *Excelsior*, January 15, 1923. "En catorce meses que he vivido en este país, no he recogido más que la infinita dulzura del corazón mexicano y sus grandes virtudes. El inciéndote de mi expulsión no hará borrar nunca la impresión que llevo de pueblo mexicano, que no ha tenido para el Representante de Su Santidad, más que bondades y un gran respeto."

⁹⁷ *Excelsior* January 20, 1923.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Pani a Gasparri, 17 de enero de 1923, ibidem, ff. 10r-11r. Cited in Paolo Valvo. *La Cristiada: Fe Guerra y Diplomacia en México, (1926-1929)*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2023., 54

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Filippi a Gasparri, 25 de enero de 1923, ibidem, ff. 41r-42v

diplomatic mission in Mexico over this issue. The Spanish cardinal Rafael Merry del Val, warned the council that a closure of the diplomatic mission would set a “dangerous precedent especially among Latin American republics.”¹⁰¹ Later in February 1926, in an apostolic letter to Archbishop Jose Mora y del Rio, Pope Pius XI stated that the church officials had to officially refrain from Mexican politics and disbanded Catholic political parties in Mexico.¹⁰²

Catholic protests against Filippi's removal came swiftly throughout the country. One delegation from the Catholics Women's Association of Mexico attempted to circulate a petition signed by over 1,000 women from all over the republic to President Obregón at the presidential palace but he refused to see them. The Spanish embassy then attempted to mediate between the Vatican and the Mexican government, but Obregón refused the meeting saying that "it would be beneath the dignity of the high office I am entrusted.”¹⁰³ The Mexican Foreign Secretary also issued the following statement to the papal Secretary of State, Cardinal Gasparri,

With respect to Monsignor Filippi under whose direction the clerical elements were organizing politically, even contrary to Christian precepts, and whose participation in recent prohibited outdoor ceremonies has been specifically proven.¹⁰⁴

Catholics all over Mexico wore black in protest. The white and yellow colors of the Papacy were mixed with the black of mourning outside homes and businesses throughout the country. In Guadalajara, one sign read,

¹⁰¹ Ibid., ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Rapporti delle Sessioni, 1923, n. 1259, stampa 1102, s.n.f.

¹⁰² Apostolic Letter from Pope Pius XI to Archbishop More y del Rio, “Paterna Sane Sollicitudo.” February 2, 1926 accessed online at https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/la/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-xi_apl_19260202_paterna-sane-sollicitudo.html “Keep completely away from any political party, so as not to offer your adversaries any pretext to confuse their faith with any party or faction. Therefore, all the Catholics of the Mexican Republic, as such, will not have to form a political party with a Catholic name, and in particular the bishops and priests, as they laudably do, will not affiliate with any political party and will not collaborate with no party newspaper, since its ministry is necessarily intended for all the faithful, even more so, for all citizens.”

¹⁰³ *Detroit Free Press*, January 16, 1923.

¹⁰⁴ *Detroit Free Press*. January 18, 1923.

Let all Mexico be mourned, as a house where there is a dead person, because dignity, decorum, prestige, Civilization, shame are all dead.... by this act we are judged, before all Nations, Mexico is a corpse that stinks.....!!!¹⁰⁵

In Chihuahua, the Pastor of La Parroquia de Jimenez said, “Mourn in your houses as a sign of mourning, because Christ Himself has been insulted.”¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, President Obregón received congratulatory mail from all over the world for his actions. Organizations from Freemasons to factory workers thanked him for preventing “a return to the days of the inquisition.”¹⁰⁷

But for Bishop Valverde, 1923 was only going to get worse. In August of 1923, he completed what believed would be a simple local zoning application to make modifications to his plans for the basilica. However, the Vice Secretary of the Interior of the State of Guanajuato denied the building permits to continue the project stating that there was “no need for Catholic believers to have an additional church when they have a sufficient number of churches throughout the territory of that State for the service of their beliefs.”¹⁰⁸

This decision placed the project in severe financial jeopardy. Publicly Valverde Téllez wrote positive articles in Catholic newspapers, but privately he was hoping “to preserve the spirit of prayer, faith, hope and generosity” among the laity because the workers on the monument still

¹⁰⁵ Manuel Carbajal to Álvaro Obregón, January 18, 1923 AGN, Álvaro Obregón Plutarco Elías Calles, Caja 181 Exp. 438 C 4 2. “¡Que se enlute México todo como se sultan la casa donde hay muerto, porque han quedado muertos la dignidad, el decoro, el prestigio, la Civilización, la vergüenza....: si por este acto se nos juzga, ante las naciones todas! México es un cadáver que hiede.....!!”

¹⁰⁶ Letter from M. Saavedra to Álvaro Obregón, January 22, 1923 AGN, Álvaro Obregón Plutarco Elías Calles, Caja 181, Exp. 438 C 4 2. “Se nos ha ultrajado, católicos en lo más vivo y el atropello es inaudito. Enlutad vuestras casas en señal de duelo, porque ha sido injuriado el mismo Cristo...”

¹⁰⁷ Letter from Francisco Rueda Delegación PCN de Veracruz to Álvaro Obregón, January 18, 1923 AGN, Álvaro Obregón Plutarco Elías Calles, Caja 181, Exp. 438 C 4 2. “Quien con sus procedimientos, muy pronto nos haría retroceder a los tiempos inquisitoriales”

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Emeterio Valverde Téllez to G. Valenzuela, August 31, 1923 AHAM, Caja 72, Exp. 15. “teniendo en cuenta que por una parte, no se advierte la necesidad para los creyentes católicos de contar con un templo más, cuando en todo el territorio de ese Estado disponen de suficiente número para el servicio de sus creencias.”

needed to be paid.¹⁰⁹ As a means of mobilizing support for the project, Valverde Téllez advocated for a national holy hour in all parishes throughout Mexico from 10 to 11 AM on January 11, 1925, as a means of renewing their vow of vassalage to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

All parishioners were to read aloud:

I am your VASSAL for my joy, and I promise to watch over your flag, to extend your Kingdom, to live and die as a Christian at the foot of your throne, sheltered by the mantle of Mary of Guadalupe. Amen. Heart of Jesus, King, and center of all hearts: have mercy on our hearts. Long live Christ the King, in my heart, in my home, and in my Country! Amen.¹¹⁰

All of the parishioners were approved by the Vatican to receive a seven-year indulgence as a result of taking the oath.

Tensions rose to a boiling point in the nearby towns of Pénjamo, Jalpa de Canovas, San Diego de Alejandra and San Miguel de Allende in 1926 as armed Catholic militants rose up against the strict enforcement of the anti-clerical articles of the Mexican Constitution.¹¹¹ In 1927, priests from throughout the state of Guanajuato were arrested or forced into hiding.¹¹² One priest from the town of Abasolo, opulently violated the orders made by the anti-clerical governor of Guanajuato, Enrique Colunga, by holding masses in the open air and led a failed uprising against government forces.¹¹³ Reports of priests such as Father J. Dolores Saucedo, holding large

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Emeterio Valverde Téllez to José Del Río, September 10, 1923 AHAM, Caja 72 Exp. 15, “a fin de que ayuden a conservar el espíritu de oración, de fe, de esperanza y de generosidad.”

¹¹⁰ Oración Que Diariamente Rezan los Vasallos de Cristo Rey, Date Unknown. AHAM, Caja 72 Exp. 15. “¡Viva Cristo Rey! ¡Corazón Divino de Cristo Rey que quieres salvarme! Yo te ofrezco mis obras y sufrimientos de este día para que tu soberana Realza impere sobre México. Soy tu VASALLO por dicha mía y te prometo velar por tu bandera, extender tu Reinado, vivir y morir como cristiano al pie de tu trono, cobijado con el manto de María de Guadalupe. Amén. Corazón de Jesús, Rey y centro de todos los corazones: ten misericordia de nosotros. ¡Viva Cristo Rey, en mi corazón, en mi casa y en mi patria! Amen.”

¹¹¹ Luis Miguel Rionda Ramírez, “Primer Acercamiento A Una Historia Política Contemporánea de Guanajuato Siglo XX.” Disertación., 32

¹¹² José Dolores. *León Cristero* México: Minerva, 1988, 35.

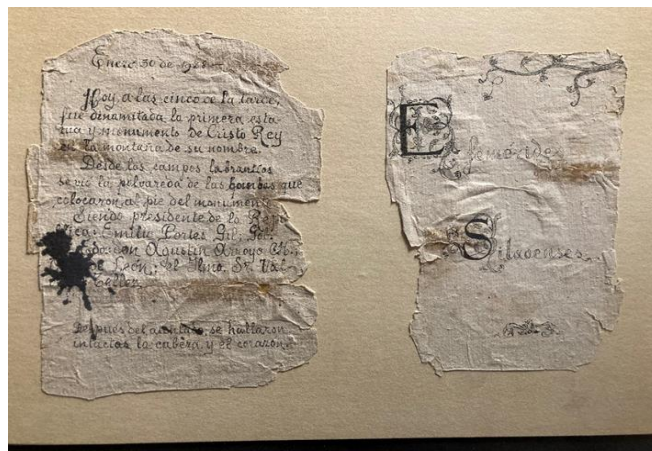
¹¹³ José Guadalupe Munive Rodríguez. “Entre el Pueblo y El Estado: La Rebelión Cristera en Guanajuato.” Disertación Escuela Nacional Antropología E Historia, 2000., 90.

outdoor masses and urging support bands of armed Cristeros flooded government offices throughout Guanajuato. Many mayors such as the mayor of Pénjamo, Marciano Loza asked governor Colunga for permission to create local militias to fight off Cristero “bandits.”¹¹⁴

On January 30, 1928, the citizens of the town of Silao were rocked by an explosion so loud that some thought it had been caused by a volcanic eruption. The top of El Cubilete was obscured in an enormous cloud of smoke and dirt. As large pieces of debris fell to the ground below, it was quickly apparent that their beloved religious statue of Cristo Rey was intentionally destroyed. Though the thousands of laypeople who flocked to Silao’s main churches-- El Templo del Perdón and la Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Victoria-- did not necessarily know who had destroyed the statue of Cristo Rey that day, they most certainly believed President Calles was behind it. Rumors concerning Calles’ alleged involvement in the destruction of the monument ranged from the ordinary to the extreme. One popular rumor was that President Calles had personally ordered a military airplane to bomb the statue. Other theories alleged that Calles ordered members of the leftist labor union known as the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM) to do the president’s bidding and dynamite the statue. The CROM under the leadership of Luis Morones was known to resort to violence and openly go against the Catholic Church.

Who actually destroyed the Cristo Rey Monument remains elusive to this day. The Cristo Rey Monument Museum, known as the Museo de Emeterio Valverde Téllez, houses the only remaining artifacts of the original monument destroyed in 1928, including the remaining fragments of the head and heart of Jesus. Impressively, these portions of the statue remained

¹¹⁴ Documento 802 Clave 1.72. April 15, 1927. Pénjamo Guanajuato. AGE



(Figure 3.1) The surviving pieces of the original monument: the head and sacred heart of Jesus on display at the Museo de Valverde Téllez, Silao, Guanajuato. (Figure 3.2) The original note left in the rubble of the original monument by vandals. On display at the Museo de Valverde Téllez in Silao, Guanajuato. (Photos taken by the author.)

intact during the explosion, a fact that the local faithful consider to be a divine miracle. In a corner of the museum lies the only original written record of the destruction. A glass case contains a scrap of torn paper allegedly left behind at the scene with the words: “The Sinaloan Event.” Is it possible that Sinaloans participated in the destruction of the monument?

Perhaps the event as described by the *Diario de El Paso* on June 11, 1928, provides the most persuasive, if not the most comprehensive narrative due to the fact that the paper was not subject to Mexican censorship. On January 26, 1928, the Federal troops of the 86th Cavalry under the command of Sub- Lieutenant Alvaro Villanueva Burgos reportedly arrived in Silao in search of Cristero supporters. The soldiers did find some Cristero supporters tied them up and forced them to watch their village of Aguas Buenas at the foot of Cubilete Mountain, being burnt

to the ground because it was ostensibly “infested with rebels.” On January 30, an interesting array of men including local businessmen from Silao, a police inspector, a police paymaster, and a town treasurer, along with the former mayor of the city of Guanajuato joined several soldiers in driving to the summit of the mountain. The group of men then proceeded to place sticks of dynamite at the base of the monument. A local pharmacist from Silao, Luis Galván, allegedly stood atop the altar by the monument and said “Now Christ the King, where are your vassals who protect you? If you really are king and you are God, go defend yourself!” The newspaper claims that after sundown, the men drove women from the city up the summit of the mountain, drank excessively, and initiated “an orgy on the mountain.” The group then took as many supplies as they could loot from the site, such as metal pipes, cables, and wood, and left the smoldering rubble of the Monument of Christ the King behind them. The Mexican writer, Alfonso Junco would later write, “What love built was torn to pieces by hatred. The Colossal monument of Cubilete was ignominiously fulminated, but love is a safeguard, it does not faint, it does not fall.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Ojeda Sanchez., Jose de Jesus, *Tabor Mexicano*. Mexico: Arti-rel, 1982., 79, “Lo que construyó el amor hizo pedazos el odio, fue ignominiosamente fulminado el monumento Colosal de Cubilete, pero el amor a guarda no desfallece, no abdica.”

CONCLUSION: “CRISTO REINARÁ EN NUESTRA PATRIA:” THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CRISTO REY MONUMENT AND ITS IMPACTS.

After the monument's destruction in 1928, the summit of Cubilete Mountain was littered with debris from the explosion as well as the pieces of construction equipment that were too big to be looted. The road that scaled Cubilete Mountain which was under construction in 1923 had become impassable due to landslides and a lack of maintenance.¹¹⁶ However, this did not stop the aged Valverde Téllez from attempting to keep the Cristo Rey project in the national attention. During the Cardenas presidency, Valverde Téllez became more invested in re-instituting seminaries and monasteries throughout the diocese following their closure during the Cristero war.

However, by 1938, Valverde Téllez returned to his idea of a monument dedicated to Cristo Rey. Téllez commissioned the Mexican architect, Nicolas Mariscal and the sculptor, Adolfo Ponzaneli, to construct a modern chapel inside León's historic baroque cathedral.¹¹⁷ The art-deco chapel would feature a large marble statue of Jesus Christ, with two angels kneeling before him offering him crowns. One of the angels offers a crown of thorns while the other gives Jesus a kingly heavenly crown. The large side chapel was considered part of the existing cathedral structure in León, thus avoiding the governmental requirements for local and state

¹¹⁶ Circular written by Valverde Téllez, June 11, 1943 AHAL, Caja Montaña de Cristo Rey, Escritos Varios, Exp. Inventario de Cristo Rey.

¹¹⁷ Emeterio Valverde Téllez. *Cristo Rey en México: Primer Monumento y Primer Congreso en América*. (Mexico City: 1939), 13- 27.

permits. The chapel would later be described as a “te deum in stone,” by local professor, Wigberto Jimenez Moreno.¹¹⁸



(Figure 4.1) The Cristo Rey chapel inside the Catedral Basílica de Nuestra Señora de la Luz.
(Photo taken by the author)

As bold as the chapel project may have been, the dedication ceremony was a far greater political statement. The chapel was set to be dedicated on the feast of Christ the King on January 11, 1938. Valverde Téllez decided to make the event a Eucharistic Congress, a gathering of clergy from all over the world. This Eucharistic Congress was the first of its kind to be dedicated to Christ the King and Valverde Téllez received papal approval for both the chapel project and the congress with pope Benedict XV stating,

Our age is oppressed by enormous forces. Are they not deduced from the fact that the venerable power of the Savior is neglected, rejected, or attacked? For men ought not to

¹¹⁸ Wigberto Jimenez Moreno. “Las Dos Pasiones del Obispo.” From Rangel Camacho, Manuel. E; Excmo. Y Revmo. Sr. Dr. Emeterio Valverde Téllez, VI Obispo de León y Asistente Al Sacro Solio Pontificio: Algo Sobre Su Vida y Su Obra. Lumen?: 1950., 53

depart from the just rule of the Redeemer, lest they rush into adverse and hard times, because just as they could not be saved without Him, so by despising Him, they can never find the paradise of salvation.¹¹⁹

With Papal approval in hand Valverde Téllez began the conference which lasted for four days and mainly consisted of sermons about the kingship of Christ and the necessity for “Christ to reign in our country.”¹²⁰ The surprising boldness in challenging the state in these public sermons is indicative of how the church-state relationship was cooling by the late 1930s.

By the late 1930s Valverde Téllez could begin to take chances concerning his Cristo Rey monument on Cubilete Mountain. According to Valverde Téllez, the “holy enterprise of the monument which until then had remained a golden dream” was to become a reality.¹²¹ This was due to critical cooling of tensions between the Catholic Church and Mexican state. In a landmark historical moment in 1940, Manuel Ávila Camacho ascended to the Mexican presidency. When asked by reporters about his stance on religion, he replied simply, “I am a believer.”¹²² This quote sent shockwaves throughout the country as Camacho was the first Mexican president since before the revolution to be a practicing Catholic. He then proceeded to tone down the enforcement of the laws imposed by Calles and pledged not to enforce article 130 of the Mexican

¹¹⁹ Emeterio Valverde Téllez. *Cristo Rey in México Primer Monumento y Primer Congreso en América*. (Mexico City: 1939), 53. “Congruum est et salutare hac aetate in Christum, universorum regm, religionem quam impenissime alere et fovere. Ingentia mala quibus nostrum premitur saeculum. Nonne ex eo deduncuntur, quod veneranda Servatoris potestas negligitur, refellitur, impugnatur? Nquent enim homines a iusto Redemptoris imperio desciserere quin in adversa et dura praripies ruant, quia quemadmodum sine Eo servari non potuisent ita Eo contempto, nesso nusquam possunt invenire paresida salutis.”

¹²⁰ Ibid, 77. Sermon by Father Isaac Espinosa Ruiz January 12, 1938.

¹²¹ Pastoral Letter 1946 AHAL. Caja Montaña de Cristo Rey 2021, Exp. Inventario de Cristo Rey. “La santa empresa del monumento ha seguido siendo de dorado sueño de las interminables horas de nuestra postración.”

¹²² Steven Niblo. *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption*. (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Imprint, 1999), 138.

constitution out of “moderation and respect for the conscience of Catholics.”¹²³ Ávila Camacho’s stance came from an effort to unify a heavily divided Mexican public that had not seen peace for 30 years. The Mexican historian, Howard F. Cline described Ávila Camacho’s presidential career as centered on “national policies of unity, adjustment, and moderation.”¹²⁴ The Ávila Camacho administration used religion, especially after Mexico entered into World War Two as a unifying factor that separated Mexico from the “unreligious and barbaric” Axis powers. The catholic church cooperated with the Mexican war effort and in return was well received by the Ávila Camacho administration.

Camacho’s interest in improving church-state relations was also reflected by some state governors. In 1943, Ernesto Hidalgo was elected governor of the state of Guanajuato. His track record as a moderate most certainly influenced his reception of the proposal for the Cristo Rey monument. In 1926, he voiced his dissent against the enforcement of article 30 of the Mexican constitution which prohibited the Catholic Church from running primary schools, stating,

When the State is able to face every denominational school that it closes, two secular classrooms, it says that the State is doing patriotic work, but when the State is economically incapable of substituting with a bad secular school a good denominational school that it suppresses, then I think that the State is doing unpatriotic work.¹²⁵

During his 1943 campaign, Hidalgo announced that he did not support the Knights of Columbus, the Knights of Guadalupe, nor the Knights of Labor.¹²⁶ In 1944, Hidalgo was presented with the

¹²³ Pastoral Letter 1948, AHAL. Caja Montaña de Cristo Rey 2021, Exp. Inventario de Cristo Rey. “Y por esa época los tiempos habían cambiado, la vida nacional se encauzaba en un ambiente de relativa tranquilidad y procesos, las leyes se aplicaban con moderación y respecto a la conciencia de los católicos.”

¹²⁴ Howard F. Cline *Mexico: Revolution to Evolution: 1940-1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1963, 153.

¹²⁵ Hidalgo, Ernesto. *Trayectoria*. México: 1943., 28. “Cuando el Estado pueda enfrentar a cada escuela confesional que clausure, dos escuelas laicas, dice que el Estado esta haciendo obra patriótica, pero cuando el Estado es económicamente incapaz de sustituir con una mala escuela laica una Buena escuela confesional que suprime, entonces yo pienso que el Estado está haciendo obra antipatriótica.”

¹²⁶ Hidalgo, Ernesto. *Trayectoria*. México: 1943., 11

plans for the Cristo Rey project by Valverde Téllez's secretary, Monsignor Villanueva. Hidalgo not only approved of the project, stating that Christ was "a symbol of peace and union," but also compared the project to the "Cristo Redentor de Los Andes" monument in Chile.¹²⁷ His only qualm with the project was that the proposed monument was planned to have the phrase, "long live Christ the king!" which he viewed as offering a basis for civil unrest.¹²⁸

Despite Hidalgo's hesitation, Valverde Téllez embarked on the project anyway. Noticing the improvement in church-state relations under the Camacho administration, Valverde Téllez began to start planning the details for the new Cubilete monument. Nicolas Mariscal, the architect of the Christ the King chapel in the León cathedral, was selected to design the new monument. Taking inspiration from sites such as the Cristo Redentor, in Rio de Janeiro, this project was to be truly massive in scale. The 75-foot bronze statue was estimated to cost \$600,000 pesos.¹²⁹ The total cost of the project would reach \$1,129,598.9 pesos.¹³⁰ The monumental effort in raising the required funds for the project was endorsed by the entire Mexican Catholic church with all Catholic parishes in the country raising collections for the project at least once a month.

It was not surprising that the greatest benefactors of the project came from the neighboring Guadalajara diocese, which raised \$50,000 pesos for the project in 1947.¹³¹ Despite his confidence in public, in private, Valverde Téllez was concerned about the looming debts of

¹²⁷ Hidalgo, Ernesto. *El Caso de Guanajuato ante la Conciencia de la Nación: Defensa de la Soberanía de Los Estados, Justificación de un régimen Vilipendiado y Atentatoriamente Abatido, Un Jurado de Honor y su Fallo Absolutorio*. México: 1946), 113-114.

¹²⁸ Ibid. "de evitar cualquiera posible alteración de la tranquilidad pública en el estado."

¹²⁹ Pastoral Circular by Emeterio Valverde Téllez. January 7, 1947 AHAL. Caja Montaña de Cristo Rey 2021, Exp. Inventario de Cristo Rey.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

the project and his failing health. In a private letter to the archbishop of Guadalajara, he said, "I have been moved to tears by this snowy display of the great generosity of you who have always been so fervent for the honor and glory of Our Divine King especially since I was annihilated by this illness of which I will no longer be cured."¹³²

A young priest, Father Ascension Betancourt, and his parishioners decided to take matters into their own hands and erected a humble monument, called "El Monumento Cristo Rey de las Nubes" on April 11, 1942. Betancourt began improving the roads to the summit of the mountain, constructed a dynamo with enough to power 100 light bulbs and he led pilgrimages to the mountain every 11th day of the month. In recognition of all of his work, Valverde Téllez named Betancourt chaplain of the mountain.¹³³

The first stone of the new monument was dedicated on the feast of Christ the King in 1945. The stone was marked by the three-meter iron cross. Interestingly, the stone included the names of both government officials and the clergy, including Luis Martinez, the Archbishop of Mexico City, President Manuel Ávila Camacho, Ernesto Hidalgo, the Governor of Guanajuato, and Valverde Téllez.¹³⁴ The project was officially endorsed by Pope Pius XII in February 1948 who believed that the monument would "produce excellent fruits" in Mexico."¹³⁵ That same

¹³² Undated letter from Valverde Téllez to Guadalajara archbishop José Garribi Rivera. AHAL, Caja Montaña de Cristo Rey, Escritos Varios Exp. Inventario Cristo Rey. "me ha enterneado hasta las lágrimas esta nueva muestra de la gran generosidad de vuestro que siempre ha sido tan fervoroso por la honra y gloria de Nuestro Divino Rey.... muy principalmente desde que caí aniquilado por esta enfermedad de la que ya no me curaré."

¹³³ Pastoral Circular written by Emeterio Valverde Téllez on June 11, 1943. AHAL, Caja Montaña de Cristo Rey, Escritos Varios, Exp. Inventario de Cristo Rey.

¹³⁴ *Crónica de las Solemnísimas Festividades de la Bendición y Dedicación de la Ermita Expiatoria y de la Bendición y Colocación de la Primera Piedra del Templo Votivo en Honor de Cristo Rey de la Paz: En la Cumbre de la Santa Montaña Antes Llamada El Cubilete, Centro Geográfico de la República Mexicana, el día 11 de Diciembre de 1944; y Escrita por el Excmo. Y Revmo. Sr. Obispo de León, Dr. D. Emeterio Valverde Téllez*, (León: Lumen, 1944), 11.

¹³⁵ Pastoral Circular written by Emeterio Valverde Téllez February 1948. AHAL, Caja Montaña de Cristo Rey, Escritos Varios, Exp. Inventario de Cristo Rey, Letter from the Vatican secretary of State J. B. Montini to Valverde

year, Valverde Téllez died from complications surrounding hemophilia. At his funeral, Bishop Luis Cabrera said that he hoped that Valverde Téllez could “lean out of the windows of glory to see from those heights his work already finished... for the glorification of Christ the King in our Homeland.”¹³⁶ The monument was finally consecrated on a cold December 11, 1950, by bishop Manuel Martín del Campo. Over 20,000 people attended the ceremony which resulted in a massive traffic jam on the winding road leading to the mountain.¹³⁷ Despite being invited to the dedication ceremony, Mexican President; Miguel Alemán did not attend because he wanted to prevent potential “political agitation.”¹³⁸

The ongoing political legacy of the monument w persisted throughout the 20th century and continues to have an impact on Guanajuato today. The monument’s association with the Cristero Rebellion popularized the monument’s status in Mexican conservative culture. Early histories written by local historians such as that of the ex- Cristero, José Dolores Pérez, linked the ideology of the Cristero Rebellion with the monument. In his book on the history of Cristero-era Guanajuato, he stated that the Catholic resilience that was inherent through the destruction and reconstruction of the monument demonstrated that “Dios no Muere!” or “God cannot die!”

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Téllez: February 27, 1948: “El Santísimo Padre otorga las merecidas alabanzas a esta obra ya iniciada, porque está seguro de que será muy del agrado del Redentor divino y de que producirá excelentes frutos para vuestra patria.”

¹³⁶ Luis Cabrera. *Oración Fúnebre del Excmo. y Revmo Sr. Dr. D Emeterio Valverde Téllez VI Obispo de León y Asistente al Sacro Solio Pontificio: Pronunciado en la Parroquia de San Miguel de Allende el Día 22 de Enero de 1949*. León: Lumen, 1949., 21-22 “Quiera Nuestro Señor que las obras puedan continuar y que muy pronto nuestro Excmo. Prelado tenga que asomarse por las ventanas de la gloria que vea desde aquellas alturas su obra ya terminada y que el mismo alcance de Nuestro Señor que sirva, como se lo había propuesto, para la glorificación de Cristo Rey en nuestra Patria.”

¹³⁷ *El Sol de León*, December 12, 1950 (Accessed at the Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de León)

¹³⁸ Letter by Miguel Alemán Valdés October 22, 1949. AGN, Miguel Alemán Valdés Caja 163 Exp. 135.2 677: 9.

¹³⁹ José Dolores Pérez, *La Persecución Religiosa de Calles en León, Gto.* (León: Lumen, 1952), 67.

The monument's enduring association with anti-clericalism during the 1920s has also been utilized more recently by conservative politicians in the region. Vicente Fox, governor of Guanajuato, used the legacy of the monument to ascend to the Mexican presidency in one of the most consequential elections in Mexican history. In 2000, he commissioned the minting of a pure silver coin featuring the image of Christ the King and the name of his adult education program, *Instituto de Educación Permanente*.¹⁴⁰ That same year, Fox became the first Mexican president to come from outside Mexico's ruling party, the PRI which had held uninterrupted power in Mexico since 1929. There is little doubt that Fox's conservative opposition party support from Guanajuato was crucial to his presidential victory.



Figure 4.2: Mural in Silao depicting José Alfredo Jiménez and the lyrics of the song “Caminos de Guanajuato.” Figure 4.3: Retablo Ex- Voto dedicated to Cristo Rey in 1990 for a prayer answered. Note that the retablo depicts the Cristo Rey monument itself. On display at the Museo Valverde Téllez.

¹⁴⁰ *La Jornada*, January 30, 2000. (Accessed online at <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2000/01/05/astillero.html>)

The monument continues to remain one of the most integral pieces of conservative Catholic culture in the country. It is the third most visited pilgrimage site in Mexico only behind the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Basilica of San Juan de Los Lagos, bringing in thousands of pilgrims each year. In 2019, 10,000 Catholics renewed their vassalage to Christ the King at the foot of the monument.¹⁴¹ In 2020, over 50,000 Catholic youth pilgrims visited the site. It was even part of Pope Benedict XVI's 2012 pontifical visit to Mexico, who stated,

This place, the majestic monument to Christ the King, on the hill of Cubilete, shows the roots of the Catholic faith among Mexicans, who are constantly blessed by its constant blessing in all their vicissitudes.¹⁴²

However, the monument is perhaps best immortalized in Mexican popular culture by the mariachi song "The Roads of Guanajuato" by the famed mariachi singer, José Alfredo Jiménez, who sang, "From the Cubilete Hill, the Christ of your mountain comforts those who suffer."

Despite the profound impact of the monument in Mexico, it is also important to note the transnational impact of Cristo Rey throughout the Hispanic world. For example, it is estimated that approximately 7,307 Catholic clerics were killed during the Spanish Civil War.¹⁴³ During the conflict which lasted from 1936 to 1939, Spanish Catholic priests often found themselves targeted and killed by members of Republican factions because the Catholic Church often supported Nationalist forces under the leadership of Francisco Franco. In these cases, the militant Catholic imagery and usage of Cristo Rey was transposed from the Mexican Cristiada to the

¹⁴¹ "En México laicos renovaron su consagración a Cristo Rey" *El Universo*., November 25, 2019.

¹⁴² Speech by Pope Benedict XVI at Silao Airport, March 23, 2012., "este lugar en el que el majestuoso monumento a Cristo Rey, en el cerro del Cubilete, da muestra de la raigambre de la fe católica entre los mexicanos, que se acogen a su constante bendición en todas sus vicisitudes."

¹⁴³ Santuario Nacional de la Gran Promesa. *Mártires de Cristo Rey*. Valladolid: Ediciones Reinare, 1950., ii.

fight against communism in Spain. Similar to Mexico, the Spanish government attempted to separate church and state during the early 1930s. The Spanish clergy was very vocal against these measures as one priest from the town of Castellon de la Plana noted in one of his sermons,

Republicans should be spat on and never spoken to. We should be prepared to fight a civil war before we tolerate the separation of Church and State. Non religious schools do not educate men, they create savages.¹⁴⁴

Many hardliners among the left saw the Civil War as an opportunity to eliminate the Catholic church from Spain, with one editorialist from the Spanish Republican newspaper, *Solidaridad Obrera*, stating, “The Church must disappear forever. Churches will now never be used for filthy pimping.”¹⁴⁵

This hard anti-clerical stance among the radical left and the Catholic support of the Nationalists made Catholic clergy a clear target in Republican held territory. In Barcelona, any Catholic priest, religious, or member of religious society could be killed or arrested.¹⁴⁶ Churches were burned, sacked and destroyed throughout Spain. Catholics from the diocese of Lleida lost sixty five percent of its clergy.¹⁴⁷ The province of Toledo, which was held by the Popular Front, saw half of its clergy killed.¹⁴⁸ The killing of clerics throughout Spain would later become known as the “Red Terror,” would transpose the militant Catholic interpretation of Cristo Rey from Mexico and be labeled by the Spain government and the public as martyrs to Cristo Rey.

¹⁴⁴ Alejandro Lopez Lopez. “El Boicot de la Derecha a las Reformas de la Segunda República. La Minoría Agraria, el Rechazo Constitucional y la Cuestión de la Tierra” *Revista de la Cortes Generales*. August 1987., 252-3.

¹⁴⁵ *Solidaridad Obrera*. August 15, 1936.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Preston. *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth- Century Spain*. New York: HarperPress, 2013., 233.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xviii.

The targeting of the Catholic Church was not limited to the clergy. Similar to the destruction of the Cristo Rey monument in Guanajuato in 1928, Spanish Republican militias destroyed monuments dedicated to the Sacred Heart. The most famous of these monuments was the monument to the Sacred Heart at the hermitage of Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles located outside Madrid which was destroyed by a Republican militia in 1936. Five local young boys were killed trying to protect the statue and the seven militiamen who killed those boys shot at the statue of Jesus in a formation imitating an execution.

However, the current international usage of the image of Cristo Rey is not necessarily a militant one. The image is widespread and popular in churches and religious ceremonies throughout Latin America, such as the Semana Santa processions in Guatemala. (See Below)



(Figure 4.4) Parade float in holy week procession in Antigua, Guatemala. The sign for the float reads, "This is the king" and features a large golden crown held by angels at the rear of the float. (Photo taken by the author.)

In conclusion, from its creation as a Catholic reaction to the Mexican Revolution to its destruction during the height of anticlericalism to its eventual reconstruction demonstrating the repaired state of relations by the 1950s; the story of the Cristo Rey monument in Guanajuato represents the complex and ever-changing relationship between the Catholic Church and the Mexican government. During this period, it was a fault line symbol for both the Mexican clergy and the revolutionary Mexican government. The creation of the Cristo Rey ideology by Bishop Emetertio Valverde Tellez demonstrates that the ideology and monument to Cristo Rey was an important rallying symbol for militant Catholics during the Cristiada. The expulsion of Monsignor Filippi and the destruction of the Cristo Rey monument in 1928 also demonstrated that the symbol of Cristo Rey was interpreted as an anti-revolutionary symbol by Mexico's revolutionary government. The centrality of the monument and the devotion of Cristo Rey was in due part the result of the efforts of the Mexican Catholic Clergy use art and Catholic ideology to combat the 1917 Constitution. The fact that the Cristo Rey project began over six before the armed phase of the Cristiada demonstrates that the Mexican Catholic clergy were agents of anti-revolutionary action in an era currently neglected by many historians.

The usage and formal adoption of Cristo Rey as a conservative Catholic symbol approved by the Vatican in 1925 and its usage during the Spanish Civil War demonstrates durability of the ideology of Cristo Rey on a global scale. The Mexican, militant Catholic interpretation of Cristo Rey became popular in Civil War Spain and is reflected in the writings of Pope Pius XI. As its ongoing popularity throughout Latin America illustrates, the influence of this symbol of Catholic conservatism remains to be very prevalent throughout the globe and is an important subject of future study.

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