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Mexico in Verse

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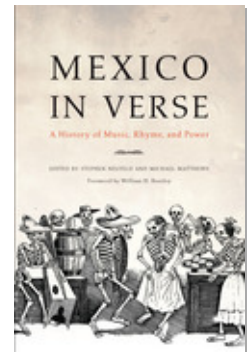
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PRIMARY DOCUMENT

Of all the radical reforms outlined in the Constitution of 1917, perhaps none spurred as much animosity and contention as those targeting the Catholic Church. The constitution's anticlerical provisions sought to—once and for all—divest the Church's power, seen by many Revolutionary leaders as a prime cause of the nation's backwardness and lack of progress. As a result, the country again fell into the grips of civil war, this time between the new Revolutionary National government and Christian rebels (known as *cristeros*). The latter, tens of thousands strong, opposed the heavy-handed policies that disbanded religious processions, exiled foreign priests, and closed Church schools, convents, and monasteries. The Cristero Rebellion (1926–1929) introduced a new bloody episode to the nation where the indiscriminate killings of officials, teachers, and priests revealed that opposition to the constitution was not solely religious, but also based on agrarian grievances and attacks on local autonomy. Temporarily called to truce after the assassination of President-elect Álvaro Obregón, the cristeros would rise up again in the mid-1930s. Stephen Andes investigates the corridos written and sung by these Catholic rebels, and explores how they created alternative and developing Christian identities in so doing.

“Corrido de la Contestación a las Estupideces del Bandido Rito Betancourt”*

“Ballad of Response to the Stupidities of the Bandit Rito Betancourt”

Vuela, vuela palomita
y no dejes de volar;
vuela y dile a los del Valle
que ya viene Quintanar.

Fly, fly little dove
and don't stop flying;
fly and tell those of El Valle
that Quintanar is on his way.

* Unknown, “Corrido de la Contestación a las Estupideces del Bandido Rito Betancourt,” in *Corrido Histórico Mexicano: Voy a cantarles la historia (1924–1936)*, tomo IV, dir. Antonio Avitia Hernández (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1998), 42–43.

¡Ah qué bandidos del Valle,
tan faltos de dignidad!
pues que por bandido tienen
a don Pedro Quintanar.
[. . .]

¿Qué nos ofende diciendo
fanáticos con medalla?

a nosotros no nos manchan
las babas de la canalla.

Estas beatas que así veis,
tan cultas y silenciosas,
no se parecen en nada
a vuestras viejas babosas.
Bolcheviques sin bandera,
sin Patria y sin religión;

vil lepra que sólo causa
un poco de compasión.
[. . .]

Vuela, vuela palomita,
párate en aquel placer
ven a ver a los del Valle
temblando como mujer.
[. . .]

¡Qué susto nos han metido!,
(decía Fidel el Panzón)
la verdá me dan torzones
al pensar en Castañón.
[. . .]

Que si son veras hombres
y veras valientitos,
que salgan a conocer,
a sus meros papacitos.

Ah what bandits are those in
El Valle,
so lacking in dignity!
and a bandit is what they claim
don Pedro Quintanar to be.

Do you think you've offended
taunting fanatics with medals
divine?
we'll never be upended
by the drivel of swine.

These holy women that you see
in us,
so piously educated and soft spoken,
are nothing in the least like
your idiotic old ladies so broken.
Bolsheviks without flag,
without country and without
religion;
vile leper that only arouses
such little compassion.

Fly, fly little dove,
alight in that place
come and see those in El Valle
trembling like a woman.

What a fright we've been given!
(said Potbellied Fidel)
truth is it hurts my stomach
in thinking of Castañón [a cristero
leader].

If true men you would be,
and if valiant laddies,
then come out to meet,
who's really your daddies.

Vuela, vuela palomita,
párate en aquel palmar
anda y dile a los del Valle
que su papá es Quintanar.

Fly, fly little dove,
alight on that palm tree afar
go and tell those in El Valle
that their dad is Quintanar.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the writer of this corrido characterize his enemies? What symbols and specific language does the writer employ?
2. How would listeners of this song interpret the use of gendered language in attacking their enemies in verse?
3. Why would the writer of this corrido characterize cristero enemies as Bolsheviks without country or flag?

CHAPTER FIVE

Singing for Cristo Rey

Masculinity, Piety, and Dissent in Mexico's Cristero Rebellion

Stephen J. C. Andes

Mexico's epic civil war known as the Cristero Rebellion (1926–1929) was less than a year old when a contingent of Catholic insurgents led by Pedro Quintanar established control over the region of Huejuquilla el Alto, Jalisco. From their stronghold in Huejuquilla, *cristero* rebels attacked federal troops and pro-government militias (*agraristas*) in many of the country's central-western states: Zacatecas, Jalisco, Nayarit, and Durango.¹ The constant raiding by Quintanar's soldiers won praise and plaudits from cristero allies and sympathizers. However, it enraged, infuriated, and generally exasperated local anti-cristero *agraristas* in Valparaíso, Zacatecas, a town just thirty miles away