MEXICO

RELIGIONS AS A PERCENT OF POPULATION
Roman Catholicism 88.0 percent
Protestantism 5.8 percent
Others 1.9 percent
None 4.3 percent
(2000 Census, INEGI)

COUNTRY OVERVIEW
The United States of Mexico, comprising 32 states and a total of 1,220,663 square miles, is one of the largest and most powerful countries in the Americas, located in North America between the USA in the north and Guatemala and Belize in the southeast. Mexico's population in mid-2000 was reported to be 99,639,000, the third largest nation in the Americas in population size after the USA and Brazil. It is composed of a diversity of ethnic groups: Mestizos (mixed Spanish-Indian blood who are native Spanish-speakers), 88%; Amerindians (239 living languages among 13 linguistic families), 9%; and others (including Caucasians, Afro-Americans, Middle Easterners and Asians), 3%. The predominant Indian languages are: Náhuatl, Maya, Mixteco, Zapoteco, Otomí, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Totonaco, Chol, Mazahua and Huasteco.

When the Spanish explorers arrived in Mesoamerica in the early 1500s, they discovered some of the greatest cultures in the history of the Americas, beginning with the Olmec civilization that began about 1200 B.C.E. and continuing through the Aztec empire that dominated the central and southern regions of Mexico with its elaborate ceremonial and political center—Tenochtitlán—founded in 1325 C.E. and built on a man-made island in Lake Texcoco in the Valley of Mexico. Hernán Cortés (1485-1547) and his army of about 600 Spaniards and thousands of Tlaxcalan allies conquered the Aztecs in 1519-1521 and established Spanish rule on the ruins of the Aztec capital, later renamed Mexico City, which today is one of the world’s largest cities (about 20 million people). In 1500, there were an estimated 25 million Amerindians in the territory known today as Mexico.

Although Cortés (age 37) was appointed governor and captain-general of New Spain in 1522, he was superseded in 1535 by the first viceroy of New Spain, Antonio de Mendoza, who ruled for 15 years. Between 1535 and 1824 a total of 62 viceroys governed New Spain. During these three centuries Spanish explorers and priests expanded the territory of the Viceroyalty of New Spain to include all of the present territory of Mexico, in addition to what are now the southwestern states of the USA (Texas became independent in 1834 and the other territories in 1848 by means of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo) and the nations of Central America (became independent of Mexico in 1823), with the exception of present-day Panama. During the Spanish colonial period, the Roman Catholic Church dominated the religious life of New Spain by the establishment of Catholic churches in nearly every town and village of Mexico, and it also accumulated extensive property in the growing cities and vast tracts of agricultural land in the countryside.

After Mexico's Independence from Spain in 1821, the Catholic Church began to lose its place of privilege in Mexican society, because citizens no longer were obligated to pay tithes or to work for the Church as peasants. However, the Catholic Church did maintain its monopoly on religion in Mexico as seen in the Constitution of 1824, which declared that the state religion "will perpetually be Catholic, Apostolic and Roman." Full diplomatic relations were maintained between the Mexican government and the Vatican until broken in 1867, after the period of French intervention in Mexican politics.
From Independence to the Mexican Revolution (1821-1910), the Catholic Church was aligned with Conservative political parties. However, during the struggle for independence from Spain (1810-1821), certain Church elements identified with the revolutionary struggle of peasants against the landed aristocracy; among these elements were Father Miguel Hidalgo and other liberal-minded priests such as Father José María Morelos who led uprisings against the Spanish colonial government. This period of Mexican history produced an important division between the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the “church of the people,” which has continued to the present.

During the 19th century, the Roman Catholic Church was heavily involved in politics on the side of the Conservatives who opposed the Liberal movement and Freemasonry, which gained popularity among the wealthy elite. The Catholic leadership strongly opposed the reform movement led by Benito Juárez, and it welcomed the French occupation of Mexico in 1862 under Maximilian of Hapsburg that favored the Church. However, the French imperial venture was unable to survive the stiff resistance of Mexican nationalistic forces and U.S. political pressures; in 1867, after capturing and executing Maximilian, Juárez returned to the presidency and counteracted the threat posed by the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

Church-state tensions eased considerably during the Conservative administration of Porfirio Díaz between 1876 and 1910, but flared up again after the Revolution of 1910. The Constitution of 1917 established a clear separation between Church and State, guaranteed that public education would be secular and humanistic, and prohibited the clergy from participating in the nation's political life and from owning property.

The Cristero War of 1926-1929, provoked by Conservative Catholic forces, was an attempt to invalidate certain anti-religious laws established in the Constitution of 1917, which were opposed by the Catholic bishops and their political allies. When attempts failed to amend the Constitution, Catholics forces in the states of Jalisco, Guerrero, Michoacán, Colima, Guanajuato, Querétaro, Puebla and Veracruz resorted to armed violence against the government of President Elías Calles. The war terminated in June 1929 after President Emilio Portes Gil promised to end religious persecution and to respect the liberty of conscience, which allowed the Catholic clergy to save face and resume their religious obligations in Catholic churches across the country.

The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917 brought the leftist Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to power, which controlled national politics until 2000 when the National Action Party (PAN), led by Vicente Fox, won the presidency under a center-right banner.

Since World War II, Mexico has become a decidedly urban society; the percentage of urban dwellers increased from about 40 percent of the population in 1950 to about 72 percent in 1990. Traditionally, agriculture was the foundation of Mexico’s economy, but today the economy is driven by new forces: services, commerce, manufacturing and the petroleum industry. Also, since 1945, Mexico’s population has exploded, from less than 25 million people to almost 100 million in 2000. Although more than one million people attempt to enter the labor force for the first time each year, the Mexican economy is unable to absorb all of them, which forces many people to enter the northern migration stream to the USA and Canada. Mexico City, one of the largest cities in the world, contains nearly a quarter of the nation’s total population; and it is clogged with traffic and chocked by pollution, along with two other large cities, Guadalajara and Monterrey.

**RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE**

After the Constitution of 1857 formalized the liberal reforms, which limited the power of the Roman Catholic Church and broadened individual freedoms, the systematic penetration of Protestant groups began in Mexico.

The 1917 Constitution provides for freedom of religion; it states that everyone is free to profess their chosen religious belief and to practice the ceremonies and acts of worship of their respective belief. Congress may not enact laws that establish or prohibit any religion. The Constitution also provides for the separation of church and state. The 1992 Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship defines the administrative policies and remedies that protect the right to religious freedom. A provision was added to the Constitution in 2001 that established, for the first time, a constitutional prohibition against any form of discrimination, including discrimination against persons of the basis of religion.

Although the government generally respects this right in practice, there are some restrictions at the local level. This is especially true in southern Mexico within some of the Native American Indian communities where Protestants
(the majority are known as Evangelicals) are occasionally persecuted by nominal Roman Catholics under the leadership of Mayan village elders or caciques, such as in the state of Chiapas where the most serious incidents have occurred. However, the incidents of persecution are not exclusively for religious reasons, but rather due to a combination of political, cultural and religious tensions, which limit the free practice of religion within some communities.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

1 DATE OF ORIGIN IN MEXICO
1521 C.E.

2 NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS IN MEXICO
Mexico has the world’s second-largest Catholic population (after Brazil), with about 88 percent of the nation’s 100 million inhabitants claiming affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church in 2000.

3 HISTORY
The first bishopric erected in Mexico was the See of Yucatan, under the patronage of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios in 1518. Pope Clement VII named Fray Julian de Garces as the first Bishop of New Spain in 1526. Up to 1544 the dioceses established in New Spain were: Puebla, erected in 1526 at Tlaxcala, translated to Puebla in 1539; Mexico, 1530; Guatemala, 1534; Oaxaca, erected with the title of Antequera in 1535; Michoacán, erected in 1536 at Tzintzuntzan, translated later to Patzcuaro, and from there to the new city of Valladolid, now Morelia; and Chiapas in 1546. They were all suffragans of the Archdiocese of Seville in Spain.

On 31 January 1545, at the solicitation of Spanish King Charles V, the Pope Paul III separated these dioceses from the metropolitan See of Seville and erected the Archdiocese of Mexico, with the above-mentioned dioceses as suffragans. Before the end of the 16th century the ecclesiastical Province of Mexico included, besides those already mentioned, the Diocese of Comayagua in Honduras, erected 1539; Guadalajara, 1548; Verapaz in Guatemala, 1556; and Manila in the Philippine Islands, 1581.

The Office of the Holy Inquisition was permanently established in New Spain by Spanish authorities in 1571, under Pedro Moya de Contreras and Juan de Cervantes, for the purpose of defending the Catholic Faith and rooting out any heresies that might exist within all levels of society. Any offenders could be detained, imprisoned, tortured and killed by the inquisitors in their quest to maintain the purity of the Catholic Faith and to protect its members from the influence of heretics, such as Jews, Muslims, Protestants (called “Lutherans”), blasphemers, bigamists, practitioners of witchcraft, those committing acts against the Holy Inquisition, and other miscellaneous heretical activities. Between 1540 and 1700, the Tribunal of Mexico reported a total of 950 cases, the majority of which were against blasphemy (225), bigamy (198), Jews (158) and Protestants (97). The Tribunal of the Inquisition in Mexico was initially abolished in 1813 and finally abolished in 1820.

The evangelization of the Amerindian tribes of Mexico by Roman Catholic missionaries began with the arrival of the Franciscans (1524), Dominicans (1526) and the Augustinians (1533). The Franciscans dedicated their efforts to the Aztecs in the Valley of Mexico and in Puebla, to the Tarascos (1526) and to the Mayas (1542). The Dominicans also worked among the Aztecs in the Valley of Mexico, but also extended their missionary efforts to the Zapotecas and Mixtecas of Oaxaca and the Tzotziles, Tzendales, Choles, Zoques, etc., of Chiapas. The Augustinians, as well, worked with the Aztecs in the Valley of Mexico and adjacent regions, as well as with the Tarascos, Otomies and Huaxtecas toward the northeast of Mexico City and with the Cohuixas, Tlapamecas and Yopis to the south.

The Carmelites of Santa Teresa first arrived in Mexico in 1585 and established themselves in Puebla (1585), Atlixco (1589), Valladolid (1593), Guadalajara (1593), Celaya (1597), Desierto de Santa Fe (1608), San Angel (1613), Salvatierra (1644), San Juaquín de Tacuba (1689), Toluca (1698), Oaxaca (1691), and later in Orizaba (1735), San Luis Potosí (1738) and Tehuacán (1745).

Between 1594 and 1722, the Jesuits worked among the Amerindians in northern Mexico, establishing mission centers in the Valley of Guadiana (Durango), Sinaloa, Sonora, Chihuahua, Baja California and Nayarit.
During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Franciscans organized a vast mission empire that included 11 districts: from Sierra Gorda and Tampico in the northeast to Sonora, Arizona, New Mexico and Alta California in the northwest. The Dominicans established two important mission centers in Sierra Gorda (1686) and Baja California (1772).

During the Spanish colonial period (1520-1821), there was a strict church-state relationship in Mexico. However, it was easier to build a Catholic church on top of the ruins of an ancient Indian worship center than to impose a new culture, religion and government upon a civilization that predated Spanish rule by centuries. However, Catholic priests systematically established churches in nearly every village of Mexico prior to Independence from Spain in 1821.

Among the religious orders of men established in Mexico during the Spanish colonial period were the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Carmelites, Brothers of St. James (Dieguinos), Jesuits, Mercedarians, Bethlehemites, Benedictines, Oratorians, and Brothers of St. John of God; and among women, the Poor Clares, Capuchines, Carmelites, Conceptionists, Cistercians, Augustinians and Dominicans.

The Catholic clergy attempted to bridge the gap between the Spanish and Indian cultures by establishing a chapel to Our Lady of Guadalupe at Tepeyac in 1555-1556, which later became the most sacred site for Catholics in Mexico. Future generations of clerics embellished the legend of Our Lady of Guadalupe, so that by 1648 Mexican peasants considered the shrine to have supernatural significance and to be a sign of divine approval regarding themselves as the “new chosen people” that God had selected through the agency of the Virgin Mary, who, according to the legend, miraculously appeared at Tepeyac in 1531.

The brown Virgin of Guadalupe is a powerful symbol of Mexican national identity today, and a source of particular pride among its indigenous minority. Few nations in the Americas are as Catholic as Mexico, where the Catholic religion stands at the center of Mexican society and is the heart of its culture, which is highly syncretistic: a mixture of Roman Catholic beliefs and native Amerindian animism.

Currently, Mexico has the second-largest Catholic population in the world, after Brazil. Roman Catholicism in Mexico is extremely varied: from traditional folk religious practices (especially in isolated rural communities, such as those in Chiapas), to revolutionary ideas of advocates of Liberation Theology, and from apolitical Catholic Charismatic prayer groups to those who participate in the politicized Opus Dei movement. There are a variety of Catholic layman’s groups with different goals, purposes, and political orientations in modern Mexico, such as: Mexican Catholic Action, the Knights of Columbus, and the Christian Family Movement, as well as a variety of organizations among university students and workers.

**HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY LEADERS**

+ **Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas** (1474-1566) became the first Catholic priest ordained in the Americas in 1510, defended the rights of the Amerindians against Spanish oppression, and became the Bishop of Chiapas in 1545.

+ **Dominican friar Pedro de la Peña** was the first professor of theology at the University of Mexico, founded in 1553; he later became the Bishop of Quito, Ecuador.

+ **Junípero Serra** (1713-1784) was born in Majorca and joined the Franciscan Order in 1730; he earned a doctorate in theology from the Lullian University at Palma, Majorca, where he also taught philosophy until he joined the missionary college of San Fernando, Mexico, in 1749. He has assigned to the Sierra Gorda Indian Missions north of Queretaro where he served for nine years; he learned the language of the Pame Indians and translated the catechism into their language. In 1767 he was appointed superior of a band of fifteen Franciscans for the Indian Missions of Lower California (now the Mexican state of Baja California). Early in 1769 he accompanied Captain Gaspal de Portolá's land expedition to Upper California (1769-1770) and later established and administered a chain of Franciscan missions in present-day State of California between 1769 and 1782.

+ **Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla**, a parish priest of Dolores, raised the standard of revolt against Spain on 16 September 1810 (now celebrated as Mexican Independence Day); he marched against the capital with an ill-assorted, badly armed company of Indians but he was defeated, captured and executed on 30 July 1811.

+ **Father José María Morelos**, a parish priest of Carácuaro, lead the liberation of much of southern Mexico from Spanish control, drafts a constitution calling for fair land distribution and racial equality; he is captured and executed by Spanish forces in 1815.
Bishop Samuel Ruíz García of the Diocese of San Bartolomé de las Casas in Chiapas worked for four decades to defend the human rights of the poor and the indigenous population and played a fundamental role in peace negotiations between the Mexican government and the Zapatista National Liberation Army during the 1990s; he retired in 2000 at age 75.

The current President of Mexico, Vicente Fox, is an active Catholic layman in contrast to many former Presidents who had distanced themselves from the Catholic Church as members of the leftist, anti-clerical PRI party; he was educated at a Jesuit University, and he is the first openly Catholic president of Mexico in nearly 150 years.

MAJOR THEOLOGIANS AND AUTHORS

+ Mons. Sergio Méndez Arceo, bishop of Cuernavaca until 1982, was a progressive and an early defender of Liberation Theology in Mexico, beginning in the 1960s; he was the only Catholic bishop to participate in the international conference, “Christians for Socialism,” in 1972.

+ Dr. Enrique Dussel (1934- ), born in Argentina and a naturalized Mexican citizen, is one of the leading Catholic philosophers and historians in the Americas; professor of philosophy at the Autonomous National University of Mexico (UNAM), president of the Commission for the Study of Latin American Church History (CEHILA), general editor of the General History of the Church in Latin America (11 volumes, published in Spanish in the 1980s), and a defender of Liberation Theology.

+ Father Dr. Alfonso Navarro Castellanos (1935-2003) of the Congregation Missionaries of the Holy Spirit was a leader in the Catholic Charismatic movement in Mexico since the early 1970s, with headquarters in the Parish of the Holy Spirit at El Altillo on the south side of Mexico City; he had an international ministry as an author, speaker, philosopher, theologian and evangelist.

+ Dr. Roberto Blancarte (1957- ) is academic director of El Colegio Mexiquense (founded in 1986 and devoted to research and teaching in the social sciences and humanities) and president of the Center for the Study of Religions in Mexico (CEREM); he is author and editor of many books and articles, including: History of the Catholic Church in Mexico (published in 1992 in Spanish by Fondo de Cultura Económico).

HOUSES OF WORSHIP AND HOLY PLACES

Although many of the ancient Catholic churches built during the Spanish colonial period have survived until today and are revered by most Catholics as “holy places,” the shrine that is considered “most holy” is located at the hill of Tepeyac, located on the north side of Mexico City, where the Virgin Mary is alleged to have appeared to a poor Aztec, known today as Juan Diego, in 1531.

The first chapel of the Virgin of Guadalupe was built on top of the hill during 1555-1556, although it was not until 1648 that the popular legend of Our Lady of Guadalupe became widely known among Mexican peasants nationally and annual pilgrimages were made to the site on the anniversary of the alleged apparition of the Virgin. The first Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe was constructed at the foot of Tepeyac hill and dedicated in 1709, but it is now closed to the public; the modern Basilica, dedicated in 1976, holds about 10,000 people and was constructed adjacent to the older church. It is the most visited Catholic shrine in the world, with an estimated four million visitors yearly.

In addition, special celebrations are held annually in honor of the Virgin Mary, Christ and Christian saints at other sites in Mexico, such as the sanctuaries dedicated to “la Virgen de los Remedios” in the state of Mexico; “la Virgen de San Juan de los Lagos” in Jalisco; “la Virgen de Ocotlán” in Tlaxcala; “San Miguel del Milagro” in Tlaxcala; “el Señor Jesucristo de Tetelcingo” in Morelos; “el Señor Jesucristo de Villaseca” and “el Señor Jesucristo de Atonilco” in Guanajuato. But the three most important shrines are those dedicated to “la Virgen de Juquila” in Oaxaca, “Nuestro Señor Jesucristo y San Miguel de las Cuevas de Chalma” in the state of Mexico, and “la Virgen de Guadalupe” in the Federal District.

These sanctuaries include statues, paintings and other symbols of the Virgin Mary, Christ and the Catholic saints, but also included are display cases of small metal representations of men, women and children; human arms, legs, eyes and hearts; as well as animals, cars, boats and other objects. People have left these behind as a testimony to their faith, either in thanksgiving or in supplication for divine intercession to cure a disease or to bring about some special favor. This is part of what is called “popular religiosity” among Catholics in Mexico.

According to the Secretariat of Religious Affairs of the Mexican government, there were an estimated 11,000 Roman Catholic churches and about 14,000 Catholic priests and nuns in Mexico in 2000.
WHAT IS SACRED
The concept of what is sacred among Roman Catholics in Mexico is in keeping with similar practices in other Catholic countries of the Americas and Europe, where there are numerous shrines and sacred places, including caves, grottos, lakes, rivers, lagoons, crossroads, hills and mountains. Many of these were sacred places for the Amerindians who inhabited the region prior to Spanish colonization, but were clothed with Catholic symbols and renamed in honor of the Virgin Mary, Christ or a Catholic saint. Some of the earliest Catholic churches were built on sites where the Amerindians worshipped their ancient gods and goddesses, such as the hill of Tepeyac on the shores of Lake Texcoco.

The most sacred relic in Mexico is the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which appears on a cloth that is alleged to be the actual cloak of the legendary Juan Diego. This image is housed in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, built at the foot of Tepeyac hill, which is now part of Mexico City.

HOLIDAYS/FESTIVALS
Of nine public holidays, only two are associated with Christian religious events: Good Friday and Christmas Day. However, most employers also grant holiday leave to their workers on Holy Thursday, All Soul’s Day (November 2), Virgin of Guadalupe Day (December 12) and Christmas Eve. The most important Catholic holidays in Mexico are Easter Week and Virgin of Guadalupe Day, although every town and village also holds a festival on their patron saint’s day.

There is a special celebration in honor of the Dead, called Culto a los Muertos, which is celebrated from October 21 to November 2 throughout Mexico, based on pre-Christian beliefs among the Amerindians and on Catholic beliefs brought from Spain. In villages, towns and cities across the country, Mexicans bring a variety of offerings (flowers, food, drink, candles, etc.) to a family altar in their homes or to the graveside of their dead relatives, along with music, dances and fireworks in their honor.

MODE OF DRESS
There is no special dress code for Roman Catholics parishioners in Mexico; however, the members of the various Catholic religious orders for men and women have their own traditional dress codes.

DIETARY PRACTICES
There are no special dietary practices among Roman Catholics in general in Mexico; the variations in diet that exist are due to local customs and practices, mainly among the Amerindian communities.

RITUALS
Traditional Roman Catholic rituals, imported from Europe during the Spanish Conquest, are practiced by the majority of upper-class Catholics in Mexico today, but most middle and lower-class Catholics observe what is called “popular religiosity,” a term used to describe the syncretistic belief system of Mexico’s predominant Mestizo population of nominal Catholics. The religious fervor of some Catholic traditionalists has often led to the persecution of non-Catholics, especially of Evangelicals within some of the Amerindian communities, such as in Chiapas.

The persistence of Indian cultures and belief systems is a vital force in Mexican society today, as seen by the prevalence of animistic practices such as magic (magia), herbal healing (curanderismo), witchcraft (bujeria) and shamanism (a spiritual guide) throughout Mexico, even in some non-Indian areas, among nominal Roman Catholics. The ingredients used in herbal healing (natural medicine) can be found in shops, stalls and tables in open markets everywhere in Mexico.

RITES OF PASSAGE
The traditional Roman Catholic rites of passage are practiced in Mexico: baptism, first communion, confirmation, marriage and the last rights.

MEMBERSHIP
There has been a steady decline in the size of the Catholic population as revealed in the following census figures: 96.2 percent in 1970, 92.6 percent in 1980, 89.7 percent in 1990 and 88.9 percent in 2000. Although this is only a
decline of 7.3 percent in 30 years, in real numbers it represents about seven million people. Many former Roman Catholics are now members of Protestant churches, margin Christian groups (such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons or Light of the World Church), non-Christian religions, or consider themselves to be non-religious.

14SOCIAL JUSTICE
In some indigenous communities, Mayan and Náhuatl in particular, abandoning traditionalist (Christo-pagan) practices for Protestant beliefs is perceived as a threat to the unique identity of those communities. As a result, traditionalist leaders have sometimes acquiesced in, or ordered, the harassment or expulsion of individuals belonging primarily, but not exclusively, to Protestant evangelical groups. In past years, expulsions involved the burning of homes and crops, beatings and, occasionally, killings. On several occasions, village officials temporarily detained Evangelicals for resisting participation in community festivals, which the Evangelicals considered to be “pagan celebrations.”

The social and political situation in the southern states of Chiapas, Oaxaca and Yucatán remains tense between Catholics and Protestants, where there has been religious intolerance in, and expulsions from, specific indigenous communities, whose residents follow syncretistic (Catholic-Mayan) religious practices. These syncretistic practices are the basis for the social and cultural life of the indigenous community and an integral part of its self-identity. Therefore, other religious practices are not only perceived as different and strange, and also as a threat to indigenous culture. Ethnic and religious differences, endemic poverty, land tenure disputes, lack of educational opportunities, and struggles over local political and economic power are often the underlying causes of the problems that create tensions in many of these communities, which at times have resulted in violence.

However, church leaders have been active in promoting interfaith understanding in the region. For example, in 2001 indigenous community members of different religions participated in the first-ever ecumenical celebration to pray for reconciliation among the people in the municipality of San Cristóbal. In 2002 community members in several towns of Chiapas signed a reconciliation agreement to put an end to political-religious clashes of the region. The people involved pledged to recognize and apply the Constitution, which guarantees ideological and religious freedom.

15SOCIAL ASPECTS
The Roman Catholic Church and popular Catholic religiosity dominated the political, social and religious life of the nation until the 1960s, when, as elsewhere, a large gap began to emerge between the moral and ethical teachings of the Catholic Church and the views of the Catholic population regarding marriage and family life. A growing number of Catholic couples are now opting for a civil rather than a religious ceremony. The Catholic population has also been experiencing a rising divorce rate and an increase of children born to single mothers, and millions of Catholic couples use unauthorized birth-control methods.

16POLITICAL IMPACT
The history of church-state relations following Independence involves a series of efforts on the part of the Mexican government to curtail the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. Nineteenth-century liberals, trained in the law and influenced by the French Revolution, were strongly anti-clerical, were federalist and favored free-market competition. They were very concerned that the Catholic Church had too much power and control; by owning between one-quarter and one-half of the land and by controlling most schools, hospitals and charitable institutions, the Catholic Church was considered a state within the Mexican state.

During the 1830s and 1840s, the Mexican government approved a series of laws to limit the power of the Church. In 1833, the government adopted several anti-clerical measures, which included one providing for the secularization of education and another declaring that the payment of the church tithe was not a civil obligation.

The first major confrontation between the church and the state occurred during the administration of President Benito Juárez (1855-1872). The Juárez Law of 1855 drastically reduced traditional church privileges. On March 11, 1857, a new Constitution was adopted that denied all ecclesiastical entities the right to own real estate and abolished most remaining ecclesiastical privileges. On July 12, 1857, Juárez confiscated all Church properties, suppressed all Catholic religious orders and empowered the state governors to designate what buildings could be used for religious services. Mexico's first religious civil war was fought between 1857 and 1860 when Conservatives reacted to this legislation.
The Constitution of 1917 confirmed and institutionalized many of the 19th century secular reforms. The new Constitution included at least five articles that affected all religious groups, regardless of denomination. These articles, which remained in effect until 1992, appeared to preclude any national role for the Roman Catholic Church: Article 3 forbade churches from participating in primary and secondary education; Article 5 prohibited the establishment of religious orders; Article 24 mandated that all religious ceremonies occur within church buildings; and Article 27 gave the state ownership of all church buildings.

Article 130 of the 1917 Constitution contained the most extensive restrictions on the Roman Catholic Church. The article stated that the Catholic Church lacks legal status; ecclesiastical marriages have no legal standing; state legislatures can determine the maximum number of clergy operating within their boundaries; and operation of church buildings requires explicit government authorization.

Beginning in 1926 and continuing until the late 1930s, various federal and state administrations strenuously enforced these anti-clerical laws. This paved the way for the second Mexican religious war, the bloody Cristero Rebellion of 1926-1929 in western Mexico. During this period, the governor of Sonora ordered all churches closed; officials in the state of Tabasco required priests to marry if they were to officiate at Mass; and the Chihuahua government allowed only one priest to minister to the entire Catholic population statewide.

The church-state conflict officially ended with the administration of President Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946). With the notable exception of Article 130, Section 9, the government tacitly offered non-enforcement of key constitutional provisions in exchange for the Catholic Church's cooperation in achieving social peace. Over the next four decades, enforcement of Article 130, Section 9, served the interests of both the government and the Catholic Church. The constitutional restriction on ecclesiastical political participation enabled the State to limit the activities of its powerful competitor: the Roman Catholic Church. It also permitted the Church to sidestep controversial political issues and to quietly concentrate on rebuilding its ecclesiastical structure and presence throughout the country, where its hegemony was being challenged by the growing presence of U.S.-sponsored Protestant missionary activity.

By the early 1980s, however, this unspoken consensus supporting the legal status quo had become seriously eroded. The Catholic Church regarded the 1917 Constitution's anti-clerical provisions, especially those governing ecclesiastical political activity, as anachronistic. It demanded the right to play a much more visible role in national affairs. At the same time, the Catholic Church became increasingly outspoken in its criticism of government corruption under the PRI dynasty that began in 1929. The Mexican Catholic Bishops' Global Pastoral Plan for 1980-1982, for example, contained a highly critical evaluation of the Mexican political system. According to the Catholic hierarchy, democracy existed only in theory in Mexico; the PRI monopoly of power produced apathy and frustration among citizens and judicial corruption; and the principal worker and peasant unions were subject to PRI political control and manipulation. Peasants and Indians constituted an exploited and marginalized population mass that barely survived at a subsistence level and was subject to continual repression. During the mid-1980s, the Catholic bishops of Chihuahua and Ciudad Juárez assumed prominent roles in denouncing electoral fraud in northern Mexico. In the south, the Catholic bishops of San Cristóbal de las Casas and Tehuantepec frequently accused the government of human rights violations.

In 1991 the Carlos Salinas administration's proposal to remove all constitutional restrictions on the Roman Catholic Church, approved by the legislature in 1992, allowed for a more realistic church-state relationship. However, at the same time, there were ongoing tensions in this relationship, particularly in southern Mexico in general and in Chiapas in particular. Local government and PRI officials and the region's large landowners accused Catholic Bishop Samuel Ruíz of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas of having supported the Zapatista rebellion (now a political party, called the Zapatista Front for National Liberation) that began in Chiapas in 1994, a charge that the bishop strongly denied. However, the Conservative landowners called Ruíz the "Red" bishop for his alleged Marxist sympathies. Federal soldiers constantly searched diocesan churches in their pursuit of the rebels. The federal government also expelled foreign clergy who were accused of inciting violence and land invasions. In addition, the Vatican accused Bishop Ruíz of "theological and pastoral distortions" because of his support for an "Indian Theology," which is associated with the Theology of Liberation. For their part, the Zapatista rebels insisted that the Bishop Ruíz continue to serve as mediator in their negotiations with the federal government.
Strong Catholic support for the candidacy of conservative, Catholic businessman Vincente Fox in the 1999 presidential elections was key to overcoming the PRI’s 71 years of dominance in the political arena and to bringing the center-right National Action Party (PAN) to power in Mexico in 2000.

And what have been the dividends for the Roman Catholic Church? After a vendetta lasting more than 70 years between the PRI-controlled Mexican state and the Catholic Church, there has been a dramatic thaw in relations under the presidency of Vicente Fox, who himself claims to be a devout Roman Catholic. Fox has a Catholic religious education and PAN is a conservative-Catholic force. It remains to be seen whether this political change will, beside economic and social reforms, lead to a cultural-religious struggle. The Catholic Church has now been given the go-ahead to run TV and radio stations in Mexico.

However, it was under the administration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (PRI) that formal constitutional reforms were approved in 1992, which officially recognized churches of all religious groups, restored land ownership rights to the Catholic Church, allowed for the wearing of Catholic vestments and robes in public, authorized the teaching of religion in private schools, and gradually restored diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the Mexican government.

No doubt contributing to this thaw were visits by Pope John Paul II to Mexico in 1979, 1990, 1993, 1999 and 2002. Shortly before the July 2000 national elections, the Pope canonized 27 Mexicans, most of them priests, who were killed during the Cristero Rebellion (late 1920s), which reminded many Mexicans of the historical animosity between the PRI and the Catholic Church. The PAN was formed in the 1930s as a means of channeling protest against the PRI government’s crackdown on the Church. President Fox attended the Mass at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in July 2002 and was on the platform with the Pope when he canonized Juan Diego, now called San Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, the 16th-century Aztec peasant who claimed to witness an apparition of the Virgin Mary.

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES
For many Mexicans affiliation with the Catholic Church is becoming less of a social obligation than in previous decades, with fewer than 20 percent of Catholics today regularly attending Mass. During the 1990s a series of public opinion polls revealed that a growing number of Catholics were unhappy with the Church’s official policy regarding birth control, divorce, remarriage, abortion, the role of women in the Church, obligatory celibacy for priests and nuns, the absolute authority of the Pope and the bishops, and the lack of lay participation in decision making.

Although the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico is strong and largely self-sufficient in comparison to other Latin American countries, there are several major crosscurrents or tendencies within the institutional church that produce some creative tensions. One of the most important of these has been the hegemonic tendency led by the Vatican’s Apostolic Delegate to Mexico, Jerónimo Prigione, who was an invited guest at the inauguration of President Salinas in 1988 and of President Fox in 2000. Prigione, who retired in 1997, still exerts much influence in the internal affairs of the Mexican Catholic Church, and uses his influence to promote the appointment of moderate and conservative bishops, while seeking to isolate the more progressive elements with the Church. His successor Leonardo Sandri, also a staunch conservative, is expected to continue this policy.

Another tendency is that represented by the spiritual or traditional current of bishops based in the central states of Mexico, Toluca, Puebla and Morelos, who are distinguished by their concern for doctrinal and moral issues, rather than for social causes. Although these bishops are not political activists themselves, they strongly support moralist and spiritualist initiatives by lay organizations.

In the northern states, the Catholic bishops became closely associated with the electoral campaigns of the conservative PAN during the 1980s and 1990s, and denounced the electoral fraud committed by the PRI. Their political and socioeconomic positions largely reflect those of business organizations like COPARMEX and CONCANACO, as well as conservative organizations like PROVIDA (National Pro-Life Committee) and DHIAC (Integral Human Development Civil Association).

The bishops of the southern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas have been more concerned about the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions of the peasants and about government repression of the struggles of the poor. They have supported the organization of progressive base communities and have sought to dismantle the paternalistic structures of the Church. This tendency looks to the Theology of Liberation for its inspiration.
Between the conservatives and progressive elements is a substantial group of moderates who identify with the principles of the Second Vatican Council, held in the late 1960s. Associated with this tendency is the influential Catholic Charismatic movement, founded in the early 1970s, which is especially strong in Mexico City.

CULTURAL IMPACT ON MUSIC, ART, LITERATURE
Roman Catholicism has had a significant influence on all aspects of Mexican life, including music, the arts, and literature, despite the anti-clerical attitude of the PRI party, which ruled Mexico for most of the twentieth century. Catholic religious symbols are seen everywhere, but the most common ones are the cross and the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Spanish colonial architecture is in evidence throughout Mexico, especially in the form of the village church.

OTHERS
The majority of those who are not Roman Catholics today are adherents to the growing number of Protestant (known as Evangelicals) churches in Mexico (5.8 percent of the national population in 2000), to the non-Protestant marginal Christian groups (Jehovah’s Witnesses, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Light of the World Church, etc.), or to non-Christian religions: Native American religions, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Ancient Wisdom (Rosacrucers, Martinistas, Gnostics, etc.), or Magic-Psychic-Spiritualist-New Age groups. The latter category includes the Patriarch Elijah Mexican Church (Iglesia Mexicana Patriarca Elías), founded in 1869 by Roque Jacinto Rojas Esparza (1812-1879), which is also known as the Spiritualist Trinitarian-Marian Movement of the Prophet Elijah (Movimiento Espiritualista Trinitario Mariano del Profeta Elías). In 1990, the Jewish community in Mexico, one of the largest in Latin America, numbered about 64,500, with over 22,000 Jews in Mexico City. There is a small Muslim population in the city of Torreon, Coahuila, and a group of approximately 300 Muslims in the municipality of San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas.

The 1992 Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship requires all religious groups in Mexico to register with Federal Government’s Under Secretariat of Religious Affairs (SSAR). By 2002, about 53 percent of the 5,953 religious associations registered with SSAR were listed as Protestant or Evangelical (about 3,155 organizations); 47 percent were other Christian groups, including Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Russian Orthodox; and only 0.4 percent represented non-Christian organizations.

The various denominations associated with the Protestant movement have been the most successful in establishing their work in Mexico. Between 1850 and 1900 about 20 Protestant denominations and mission agencies had established themselves in Mexico. Between 1900 and 1949, another 30 Protestant church bodies or mission agencies were established in Mexico. In 1910, there were about 24,000 baptized Protestant church members in Mexico: Methodists (12,500), Presbyterians (5,700), Baptists (2,630), Congregationalists (1,540), Christian Churches-Disciples of Christ (900), and Quakers (670). However, by 1936, the total membership of these groups was only 22,882, which reflects some of the difficulties encountered by these denominations during the Mexican Revolution and the Depression years.

Between 1950 and 1985, another 110 Protestant mission agencies arrived in Mexico, and scores of autonomous Mexican denominations also came into existence. In 1962, there were an estimated 276,000 Protestant church members in Mexico, according to a study by Dr. Donald McGavran; at that time, the largest denominational families were the following: Presbyterian (42,000), Methodist (33,000), Adventists (22,700), Churches of God (15,500), Swedish Pentecostals (15,000), Assemblies of God (15,000), MIEPI (10,000), and scores of other groups with under 10,000 members each.

For 2000, Peter Brierly estimated the following membership figures for the larger Protestant groups in Mexico: all Adventists (383,000), all Anglican-Episcopal (11,900), all Baptists (88,030), all Lutherans (2,190), all Methodists (51,590), all Presbyterians (167,170), all Pentecostals (588,600), and all other non-Pentecostals (538,150). The largest denominations were the following: the Seventh-Day Adventist Church (383,000), Union of Independent Evangelical Churches/Swedish Pentecostals (368,000), Assemblies of God (207,000), National Presbyterian Church (155,000), Church of God in the Mexican Republic (86,900), National Baptist Convention (82,900), Movement of Independent Pentecostal Churches/MIEPI (55,000), Methodist Church (46,900), Apostolic Church of Faith in Jesus Christ (46,400), National Christian Church of the Assemblies of God (39,200), Church of God/Cleveland-TN
(37,600), and the Church of the Nazarene (32,500). All other Protestant denominations had less than 20,000 members.

The size of the Protestant population in Mexico in 2000 was estimated at 5,653,800 or about 5.8 percent of the total population, compared to 4.9 percent in 1990, 3.3 percent in 1980 and 1.8 percent in 1970, based on data from the Mexican national census. By comparison, the Protestant population in Mexico is much smaller than in the counties of Central America where Protestants are between 15-25 percent of the national population in each country.

In 1992 the Inter-Religious Council of Mexico was founded in Mexico City with representatives from the following traditions: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Latter-Day Saints/Mormon, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and Sufi-Muslim. The coordinator of the council in 1999 was Jonathan Rose, the Jewish representative.

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