

**THE TARACENA FLORES COLLECTION IN THE BENSON LATIN AMERICAN
COLLECTION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, RELATING TO CHURCH AND
STATE MATERIALS IN GUATEMALA, 1945-54 ***

*Hubert J. Miller
Department of History
Pan American University, Edinburg, Texas*

My first acquaintance with the Taracena Flores Collection (TFC) occurred in Guatemala in 1959. At the time I was on a Smith-Mundt Student Exchange Grant, doing research on the Guatemalan Liberal Revolution of 1871 and the Justo Rufino Barrios administration (1873-1885). My main focus was the study of Church and state relations during La Reforma (1871-1885), as the period is commonly known. While working in the national archives and the cathedral archives in Guatemala City, it was not unusual to run across references to imprints that had been published during La Reforma and were pertinent to my research interests. Unfortunately these materials frequently could not be located in the archives nor were they available in the Biblioteca Nacional. My personal contacts in the city suggested I contact Arturo Taracena Flores for help. It was a lead that proved most helpful on any number of occasions during my stay in that country from July 1969 to the following July. The fact that Mr. Taracena was able to supply me most graciously with these needed imprints enabled me to fill gaps in my historical investigations. The use of these materials convinced me that he had a most rich collections -- a collection I wanted to study in greater detail when I had more time. Little did I realize at the time, that I would have that opportunity when the Benson Latin American Collection acquired the entire Taracena Flores Collection.

The opportune moment to study the Collection at great length came in the summer of 1984 when I received an NEH travel grant to spend a couple of weeks in Austin to look into Church and state relations during the Arevalo-Arbenz administrations, 1945-54. Based on the study of the Collection under this grant and subsequent

visits to the Benson Collection, this paper will survey the most significant materials in the TFC as they relate to Church and state matters during the presidencies of Juan Jose Arevalo Bermejo and Jacobo Arbenz Guzman.

The University of Texas's acquisition of the Collection dates back to 1963, when Arturo Taracena Flores contacted Prof. Richard Adams about the university's interest in his Collection. At the time, Mr. Taracena's eyesight was failing and he was interested in seeing that the materials in his possession would be well preserved and made available to scholars studying Guatemala. His contacts with University of Texas students convinced him of the interest that institution had in his country's history and influenced him to select The University of Texas, as a permanent home for his Collection (1).

In the words of Prof. Nettie Lee Benson "Arturo Taracena Flores is that rare type of book collector that librarians of special research collections prize but seldom expect to find" (2). He loved his native country and for more than sixty years, he collected all imprints pertaining to Guatemala, on which he could lay his hands. The end result was a collection of some five thousand books, an equal number of pamphlets and broadsides, periodicals, maps, newspaper clippings, programs, invitations, funeral announcements, pictures and maps (3).

Not only did Mr. Taracena collect imprints but he tried to obtain information on the authors of the imprint. This could include a picture of the author and newspaper documents relating to the writer. Needless to say, this enhances the value of the imprints for scholarly use. For instance, he supplied extensive information on such key Guatemalan figures as Justo Rufino Barrios, Pedro Molina, Lorenzo Montufar, Rafael Carrera, Miguel Garcia Granados, Mariano Rosell y Arellano, Jose

(*) Presentado en el Southwestern Council of Latin American Studies March 28-30, 1985.

Milla y Vidaurri, Jorge Ubico and others. He did the same for certain topics pertaining to his country's history, such as Central American unionist moment in 1920, political parties and their programs and elections (4).

Mr. Taracena's collection of writings of individual authors is very representative. He followed the same policy in collecting materials on all aspects of Guatemalan life—be they scientific, literary, political, social or economic. At the same time the Collection contains many valuable materials relating to other Central American republics (5).

The focus of Mr. Taracena's work was on the years 1821 to 1962. To understand better the size of the Collection, we need to compare it to Gilberto Valenzuela's four volume *Bibliografía guatemalteca* covering the years 1821-1900, which lists 2,739 imprints, including books, pamphlets and some broadsides. For the same time span, the TEC has over 3,000 imprints, not including *calendarios*, *novenas* and books (6).

The Collection is especially helpful to scholars for 20th century newspaper clippings during periods of crises, which the collector arranged according to subject matter or dates. Equally valuable are his collection of short-lived literary, religious, political and labor publications. These are not always complete but again Mr. Taracena's efforts to select representative and significant items are very much in evidence (7).

The entire TFC has been integrated into the Benson Latin American Collection. The only reference note to show it was part of the original Collection is the designation TFC, that appears on the card catalogue and on the item or imprint itself. Integrating the Collection into the overall Latin American holdings helps the researcher to locate more easily materials in the Collection, that are pertinent to his/her area of investigation.

The TFC focuses more on 20th century materials than on 19th century items. The valuable imprints for the Arevalo and Arbenz administrations demonstrate the assiduousness of Mr. Taracena in collecting 20th century imprints. Here can be found printed presidential addresses, selected issues of *Verbum*, a rather complete set of issues of *Accion Social Cristiana*, broadsides and pastoral letters of Archbishop Mariano Rosell y Arellano. For a comprehensive review of items in the Collection beginning with the Arevalo presidency to 1962, the researcher needs to consult Ann-Hartness-Kane's recently published

work on the holdings in the Benson Latin American Collection. Our focus is on TFC imprints from 1945-1954, relating to Church and State issues.

TFC imprints authored by President Arevalo are mainly two kinds: speeches and writings. His discourses include those he delivered prior to becoming president and the ones he gave while president. The first group mainly treats pedagogical and philosophical subjects. Included among his presidential addresses are his inaugural speech in 1945 and reports he gave to congress. Actually these are a very small sampling of his numerous talks he gave during his presidency. Many of his other addresses can be located in the other holdings of the Benson Collection. The same is true for his writings; in fact, there are few imprints carrying the designation TFC. Again most of Arevalo's published writings are available in the other Benson Collection holdings.

The religious issue in the president's inaugural address received scant attention. He repeated the conventional Liberal sentiments of the 19th century; namely, the Catholic Church should not engage in politics. Catholics who wish to improve socio-economic conditions should do it, not through the institutional Church, but through the formation of political parties and the election of candidates committed to the desired changes.

Only two of Arevalo's writings are cited as TFC items. Both treat the topic of imperialism confronting Latin America, especially Central America. Of these the better known is his *Fabula del tiburón y las sardinas* (1956). The other is entitled *Guatemala, la democracia y el imperio* (1954). Both publication dates reflect the ex-president's concern about U. S. involvement in the overthrow of the Arbenz administration in 1954.

Arevalo was a prolific writer and being a teacher many of his earlier works focused on pedagogical and philosophical themes. Church and state issues are not primary concerns in these publications. In fact, a reading of these works and his speeches leaves the impression that religious issues have a low priority.

Jacobo Arbenz became president in 1951. His background was a military one and he was not a speech maker or a writer as was the case with his predecessor. The TFC has only three of his addresses. Of importance to the Church and state question is his address on May 1, 1953, the Day of the Workers, in which he was critical of

Archbishop Mariano Rossell y Arellano for raising the issue of Communism whenever the government attempted to bring about reforms. The fear of President Arbenz's being a Communist had already been voiced the previous year with the promulgation of the Law of Agrarian Reform. Passage of the law aided the spread of rumors, which aroused fear about the expropriation of Church property. In his radio address of June 20, the president sought to dispel the rumors by reminding his listeners that the agrarian reforms have nothing to do with Church property. Furthermore, he pointed out that churches cannot be expropriated since according to the constitution they are national monuments. Despite these references to Church issues, the president did not give primary importance to them in his presidential remarks. Frequently, they merited at best only a passing reference. The presidential talks of both Arevalo and Arbenz do not show that the relationship of Church and state was a major national problem. A different picture emerges when we look at the writings of the archbishop and Catholic lay leaders.

Among the most valuable holdings in the TFC are the broadsides. In these there is missing the atmosphere of tranquility in Church and state relations that characterized the presidential remarks. Here tranquility gave way to the battle of the broadsides, especially when the issue of Communism was raised. The denunciations in the broadsides leave the impression of a developing national hysteria over the issue of Communism. Here I can offer only a sampling of the valuable collection of broadsides that Mr. Taracena collected for the period. The TFC has a total of 1,880 of these for the two presidential terms.

The presidential campaign of 1944 was an ideal time for broadsides. Arevalo used them to explain his "spiritual socialism". His opponents retaliated with charges that he had close ties with the Nazi movement. The remark refers to Arevalo's exile in Argentina where there were Nazi activities during WWII. Other broadsides reminded their readers that the protection of freedom of religion would be better guaranteed under Adrian Recinos, a conservative candidate, who was a Catholic and respected religious freedom. The broadsides opposing the candidacy of Arevalo are frequently reprints of newspaper editorials which expressed traditional Catholic concerns and do not appear to be favorably disposed to change, be that political or socio-economic.

The year 1945 witnessed the drafting of a new constitution, which retained many of the anti-clerical provisions of the 1879 one and introduced socio-economic reforms, similar to those in the Mexican Constitution of 1917. Broadsides authored by Catholic lay groups protested the inclusion of the old Liberal anti-religious articles and argued that true separation of Church and state requires that the Church lawfully own property. There also was fear that the government might restrict freedom of the press, thereby adversely affecting publications by Catholic groups.

Broadsides defending the government urged Catholics to be calm and patient during the constitutional deliberations. *Nuestro Dario*, a government mouthpiece, leveled attacks against the Church and the clergy, which immediately brought a rebuttal from the archbishop in his *Verbum*, the official organ of the Church. Although the articles originally appeared in the newspapers, they were frequently published later as broadsides. They were authored either by one writer or a group of writers or at other times the authors referred to themselves as "Defenders of the Church" or "Authentic Catholics".

The tempo of the battle of broadsides involving Church and state matters picked up in 1947. Defenders of the Church warned the people about anti-Catholic attacks in the press and on radio. In a broadside authored by the "Cadets of Christ", Catholics were urged not to participate in manifestations supporting the government. There were additional warnings directed at Catholic workers, who in their unionizing efforts were told to adhere to the Church's social justice teachings and not be exploited by Communists. The archbishop's own admonition to his flock not to drag the Church into politics must have fallen on deaf ears.

The attacks on the Arevalo government were answered by pro-government broadsides. Many of these accused the defenders of the Church of being reactionaries and Falangists. Women's groups were especially active in making denunciations and warning Catholics not to be misled by reactionaries. To show that the 19th century Church and state issue was far from dead, a broadside appeared that was a reprint of Lorenzo Montufar's *Dualismo imposible*. Montufar had been one of the chief architects of La Reforma in the 1870's and the Constitution of 1879.

According to him, the Church as an institution could enjoy no juridical recognition.

The ensuing two witnessed a diminishing number of broadsides devoted to Church and state conflicts. On the Catholic side, there were the usual complaints about attacks on religion. Especially critical were the broadsides condemning the insults hurled at the Church by students during the Huelga de Dolores activities. The most serious bone of contention was the closing of the Catholic radio station, Pax, in Huehuetenango. Both the archbishop and Catholics in Huehuetenango sent a message to President Arevalo complaining about the closing.

In defense of the government, broadsides reiterated their warnings to the Catholics that they should not be misled by reactionaries. The people were assured that the Arevalo government had no intention of attacking their religion.

The year 1950 was an election year and this made the issue of the Church in politics a very pressing one despite the warnings of the archbishop not to drag the Church into politics. Broadsides authored by Catholic laymen came out in support of General Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes who pitched his campaign to gain Catholic support, even promising, if elected, to send an ambassador to the Vatican.

With the election of Jacobo Arbenz, who took office on March 15, 1951, the battle of the broadsides became more heated. Broadside after broadside came out warning about the Communist threat to the nation. On the other side, women's groups came to the defense of the Arbenz administration, arguing that the Church's interests are not threatened and the Church must not become involved in politics. The issue of Communism continued into the closing years of the Arbenz administration and became even more intense with the passage of the Agrarian Law of 1952, which the opposition broadsides saw as another step towards Communism. President Arbenz's meeting with the papal nuncio was reported in opposition broadsides as a front to cover his Communist sympathies. At the same time the Archbishop gave his warnings to Catholics not to be misled by the false peace rallies sponsored by Communists. One broadside even accused the opponents of religion of using ex-priests to promote anti-religious causes. The writers in the condemnation of Communism frequently accused their opponents of attacking religion. One broadside in 1953 departed from this

tactic and stressed the social doctrines of the Church in the fight against Communism. The growing concern over Communism reflects the increased activities of Communist parties and leaders, who were very active in urban and rural labor associations, women's movements and the educational area, just to mention a few.

The overthrow of the Arbenz administration in 1954 became an opportune time for broadsides to call for a new constitution that would provide full protection of the rights of the Church. At the same time, the victory of Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas was viewed as the salvation from Communism. Some of their demands were heeded in the passage of a new constitution in 1956 and in the Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes administration after the assassination of Castillo Armas on July 26, 1957.

During the period under review, there were close to one hundred broadsides touching an issue involving Church and state issues, chief of which was Communism, especially under the Arbenz government. The TFC imprints are very valuable in showing the intensity of the debate and may well have contributed to the overthrow of Arbenz in the summer of 1957.

Other valuable sources in the study of Church and state relations from 1945-1954 in the TFC are two newspapers, *Accion Social Cristiana* and *Verbum*. *Accion Social Cristiana* was a weekly bulletin of the Seminario del Social Rerum Novarum, a Catholic lay group devoted to promoting of social justice teaching of the Catholic Church. The director of the association was Juan Alberto Rosales F., who wrote the editorials and many other feature articles for the weekly. The initial issues of the publication stated its purpose as promoting social justice and fighting Communism. Not surprisingly, many of its pages were devoted to informing the readers about the threats of Communism to Guatemala. For instance, the archbishop's letters against Communism were carried in full as well as a lengthy series of translated articles on fighting Communism by Louis Budenz and J. Edgar Hoover. The publication was also very critical of the Constitution of 1945, which retained the anti-religious provisions of the 1870 one. Other government actions which drew criticism from the weekly were restrictions of the press. President Arevalo's labor reforms and the agrarian reforms of President Arbenz. On a more positive note, the Catholic laymen pushed Christian syndicalism and

the newspapers frequently carried news about these movements in Europe.

The official mouthpiece of the Guatemalan church was *Verbum*. The TFC's holdings of the weekly publication are very limited, numbering only some eighteen issues for the years 1947 through 1955. Despite the limited numbers, Mr. Taracena selected issues that are very telling for studying the Church's positions during the Arevalo and Arbenz administrations.

Editorials reminded the Catholic flock of their obligations to vote but at the same time Church leaders insisted there is no such thing in Guatemalan politics as a Catholic party. There were also the usual criticisms of anti-clerical Liberalism of the past century, especially under the administrations of Francisco Morazan and Justo Rufino Barrios. Much of the space in the collected issues in the TFC is devoted to attacks on Communism. The readers are kept informed about communist persecutions in satellite countries such as the imprisonment of Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty in Hungary. One issue carried banner headlines informing the public of Communist leaders who entered the country. One of the more interesting, and perhaps amusing, on the subject was an editorial in the June 17, 1951 issue. In a very tortuous reasoning process, the editorial proceeded to inform its readers of the continuous threat of Mexico to Guatemala. In the 19th century, Guatemala suffered the loss of Chiapas and Soconusco and in the 20th century Mexico threatens to take over Belice. Fortunately Mexico has not succeeded in all of its designs, especially in the long range goal of annexing Guatemala and eventually all of Central America. According to the U.S. has foiled these plots, but the U.S. may be forced to re-examine its policy of protecting Guatemala after facing continued Communist criticism in Guatemala about North American imperialism. If this should happen, then Mexico will be able to exercise a free hand in Central America and fulfill its dream of annexing the region as it had done under the imperial rule of Agustin de Iturbide, 1821-23. The rationale of the traditional Mexican menace and the Communist threat going hand must have raised eyebrows among the more critical readers.

After the downfall of President Arbenz's government in the summer of 1954, front page headlines greeted the archbishop as the hero of resistance. On July 3, 1954, the prelate received

the Gran Cruz de la Liberacion from Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas.

A final set of documents in the TFC that pertain to our study are pastoral letters and other sundry pronouncements that came from the archbishop's desk. Many of these later appeared in broadsides, *Verbum* and *Accion Social Cristiana*.

With the overthrow of the Jorge Ubico government in 1944, the prelate immediately called for true liberty and urged his followers to practice charity to all. Another directive urged the clergy to remain cut of politics and promised that the Church will cooperate fully with the new government. A number of pastoral directives stressed social justice themes, which covered such topics as Catholic Action, labor and social welfare. Two pastorals touched on the obligations of voting, family duties and education. Included here is the pastoral letter on Communism in 1954, which scholars judge to be a contributing factor in the downfall of the Arbenz government. Pertinent to our study are the publications of the prelate's funeral orations of the soldiers who had died in 1954 in the struggle to liberate Guatemala from Communism.

The foregoing brief survey of imprints collected by Mr. Taracena again shows the invaluable work this collector did for the study of Guatemala. These sources help fill gaps in the Benson Latin American Collection for the study of the governments of Arevalo and Arbenz in the area of Church and state relations. Especially valuable are imprints of broadsides, *Accion Social Cristiana*, *Verbum* and pastoral communications.

Much of my study in the TFC is complete. More sources relating to my investigations need to be consulted and most of these are available in the other holdings of the Benson Latin American Collection. The study provides an opportunity of studying the Church's behavior in facing the revolutionary period from 1945 to 1954.

Today the Church faces revolution again and there are clergymen and Catholic laymen who question the wisdom of following in the footsteps of Archbishop Rossell y Arellano, (10). In short, those no longer wish to see the struggle purely in terms of an east-west conflict. The roots of the revolution they see as home grown. The archbishop already saw some of this in the 1940's and 1950's, but his vision was obscured by the east-west struggle, a perception that was not only widespread in Guatemala but also in other areas of the world, especially the U.S.

NOTES

(1) Nattie Lee Benson, "The Arturo Taracena Flores Library" *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas* 7 (Spring 1964): 39.

(2) Ibid., p. 37.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid., pp. 37-38.

(5) Ibid., p. 38.

(6) Ibid.

(7) Ibid., p. 39.

(8) Ann Hartness-Kane, *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Guatemala 1944-1963, Annotated Bibliography of Materials in the Benson Latin American Collection* (Austin, TX: Publication: The General Libraries, 1984). I want to take this opportunity of thanking Ann Hartness-Kane for her most gracious help in the study of the Taracena Flores Collection during the

summer of 1984. Her bibliographical guide to the Collection made my task of the study of the Arevalo and Arbenz administrations much easier and less time consuming.

(9) For a detailed study of Communism see Ronald M. Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala*, (N. Y.: Praeger, 1958).

(10) A more flexible approach to the issue of Communism was the policy adopted by the Costa Rican Catholic Church, which permitted Catholics to cooperate with Communist groups to achieve needed socio-economic reforms. For a more detailed study of this approach see Thomas M. Leonard, "Costa Rica: The U.S. Perception of the Church and Communism, 1931-1948" in *The Church and Society in Latin America* edited by Jeffrey A. Cole, New Orleans: Tulane University Latin American Studies Center, 1984, pp. 307-320.