

CHURCH POLITICS IN PUERTO RICO

by
BRO. NORMAN S. MEESE

Ed. Note. The following editorial by Bro. Meese, in the *New Age*, November, 1960 tells the inside story of the present politico-religious disturbance in Puerto Rico, an island possession of the United States. The political actions of the Roman Church here can be understood when one reads *Vaticanism — Political Principles of the Roman Catholic Church* by Judge & Bro. Dr. Albert Levitt, who points out in a very interesting fashion that, "while communism, facism, and the Vatican may fight each other at other times, they join forces in their attacks upon American Constitutional freedoms." Moreover, because "the Roman Catholic Church is also an enormously wealthy business organization, it is a very active and powerful political force and constitutes a very real and present danger to our Constitutional freedoms."

Never more than today has the Roman Church hierarchy been so persistent in its claim that it takes no part in politics but is concerned only with matters touching on faith and morals. Recent news from Puerto Rico, however, indicates that the disclaimer has no basis whatever in fact.

The Christian Century for September 28, 1960 states that the organization of the Christian Action Party in the island earlier this year is "the first instance of creation of a Roman Catholic political party under the American Constitution." Its organizers have obtained in their petition the names or more than 10 per cent of the registered voters and hence may propose candidates for ballot at the next insular election. It cannot yet obtain money from the "public election campaign fund", but it has asked the governor to call a special session of the legislature to amend the present law to permit it to have access to that fund.

The sponsors of the new political party, composed of members of a single religious denomination, are

Archbishop Davis and Bishop McManus of Ponce. In their published pastoral letters of July 2, 1960, they severely criticized all three existing parties for favoring laws "which de-Christianize our society" by approving birth control, sterilization and divorce. *El Mundo*, the island's leading daily newspaper, as well as Governor Munoz Marin, have strongly protested the entrance of the Roman Church into Puerto Rico politics. The Governor has, however, cautioned the people against outbursts of anti-clericalism, of which there have been several.

Reports indicate that a number of the Roman clergy have attacked not only the existing recognized parties and their leaders but have stirred up the politico-religious issue. Their statements have made it clear that the church will not surrender the right to instruct its flock on political matters and that it is the duty of the layman, as either voter or office holder, to obey the church. Others of the clergy however, have either remained silent or expressed opposing opinions privately.

Here, apparently, is direct and positive evidence that the nonpolitical pretensions of the Roman church cannot be factually supported. For many generations European political life has been cursed with this sort of shenanigans and history records its tragic outcome, but never before has any part of this Republic had to contend with these disruptive forces. This new mongrel organization, which has torn the island's Republican statehood party asunder, demands an Ambassador to the Vatican, church control of education and censorship curbs on birth control and other restrictions. Already established on United States soil, might not

this be the precursor of a similar cancer intended for trans planting into the continental United States?

The formation and growth of a church-affiliated party, no matter what the church or the name by which it is known, would be disastrous to the unity of this Republic. It could under no circumstances avoid causing the complete disruption of our domestic peace and might well lead to open hostile action against the church. The formation here or elsewhere of any such bloc for the purpose of achieving completely selfish institutional objectives should not be tolerated by those who value their freedom.



Here & There...

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