

**Eduardo Dávila Garza –Eduardo I:
Pope and Supreme Pontiff of Mexico and the Americas**



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Introduction

In 1933, Eduardo Dávila Garza (1908/9–1985) was elected Eduardo I, ‘Pope and Supreme Pontiff of Mexico and the Americas.’ Still, his plans were grander than that; he would soon replace the Roman pontiff, too, leading the whole church, not only the American double continent. Dávila is not an easy person to study. Not only is the source material fragmented, but he also had a well-developed ability to reconstruct his autobiography and fill it with contradictions.

From the late 1920s, Eduardo Dávila was part of the Iglesia Católica Apostólica Mexicana (ICAM; the Mexican Catholic Apostolic Church), founded in 1925 and also called Iglesia Católica Ortodoxa Apostólica Mexicana, which was led by Patriarch José Joaquín Pérez Budar. For many Mexicans, the church was only known as ‘El Cisma,’ the Schism. Due to the Mexican government’s enforcement of strict anti-religious laws, the Roman Catholic episcopacy decided to suspend its cult entirely. For three years, between 1926 and 1929, no public Roman Catholic services were held in the republic.

Being pro-governmental and fiercely anti-Roman, ICAM assumed a relatively strong position in indigenous villages in states like Veracruz and Puebla during these three years. However, they were present in places like Mexico City and San Antonio, Texas, too. After the patriarch’s death in 1931, the church fell apart into small contending groups, each claiming that they constituted the true continuation of ICAM. At that time, young Eduardo Dávila suddenly appeared on the scene and stepped forward as the leader of one faction. Though his ecclesiastical credentials

were questionable, he claimed to be Pérez's successor as the patriarch, and in the end, he was elected the Pope.

Though ICAM has been the subject of several scholarly studies, most only mention Dávila *en passant*, if at all. The only monograph on the church to date is Mario Ramírez Rancaño's *El patriarca Pérez: La Iglesia católica apostólica Mexicana* (2006), which also devotes a chapter to Pope Eduardo I. Though hardly bringing up Dávila, Matthew Butler's series of articles focused on ICAM's work in indigenous villages during the second half of the 1920s are indispensable for any study on the ICAM.¹ From another direction, Luis Arturo Sánchez Domínguez's 1997 licentiate dissertation on one of the new versions of ICAM that grew from the 1980s onwards includes many data that are helpful for the reconstruction of the later parts of Eduardo Dávila's life and ministry.² With some exceptions, this preliminary report is not built on a study of primary sources but earlier research.

The Mexican Catholic Church

In mid-nineteenth-century Mexico, under President Benito Juárez (1806–1872; r. 1858–1872), most of the Roman Catholic Church's traditional rights and privileges were removed. Among other things, church property was confiscated, clerics expelled, religious orders outlawed, and the church's influence on education

¹ Ramírez Rancaño 2006, Butler 2009a, Butler 2009b, Butler 2014, cf. Lisbona Guillén 2009 and Miller 2009. See also, two classic studies on independent Catholicism/Orthodoxy: Brandreth 1947 and Anson [1964] 2006.

² Sánchez Domínguez 1997.

drastically diminished. There were plans to establish a national Catholic Church in line with the 1857 liberal Constitution. Still, while a Mexican Catholic Apostolic Church was founded in Tamaulipas in 1861, it did not last long.³

Four decades later, there were new plans towards the same end. In 1896, Eduardo Sánchez Camacho (1838–1920) left his office as bishop of Tamaulipas, protesting against what he saw as the increased Romanization. Sánchez Camacho was approached by Episcopalians and radically minded Roman Catholic priests who wanted him as a church leader. Despite being fiercely anti-Roman, the ex-bishop did not found any alternative church but lived an almost eremitical life. Though there were independent bishops who claimed that he consecrated them around the turn of the century, the documentation was falsified. There is no credible evidence that he consecrated any bishop after leaving the see of Tamaulipas.⁴

Inspired by the Philippine Independent Church, founded after the country's independence in 1898, new initiatives towards establishing a Mexican national church were made during the revolution in the 1910s. Still, the first successful attempt at founding a lasting Mexican Catholic Church came in the mid-1920s, with José Joaquín Pérez Budar (1851–1931) as its leader. After a career in the army and becoming a widower at an early age, Pérez entered the seminary and was ordained a Roman Catholic priest. He was liberally inclined, became a freemason, and defended the position that the Catholic Church should change according to the Constitution. At the end of the 1890s, he was suspended, spent time in prison, and joined the army again. However, by 1913, Pérez was again serving as a priest.⁵

³ Téllez Aguilar 1990.

⁴ Romero de Solís 1991.

⁵ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 25–41.

The 1917 Mexican Constitution included several articles that limited religious activities in concrete ways. It was not least directed against the great majority religion, Roman Catholicism. According to the Constitution, religious entities were denied legal personality; they had no legal status as groups and could not own anything. Thus, the state was in control of all church buildings. Furthermore, the goal was that religious activities should be removed from the public space and be restricted to the home and the church buildings. Another effect was that priests were not allowed to wear clerical garb outside the church. Article 130 gave the state the power to determine the number of priests ‘necessary for local needs.’

During Plutarco Elías Calle’s presidency (1924–1928), the anti-religious articles were actively implemented and made stricter through the so-called Calles Law of 1926. The presidential decree enforced the rules of limiting the number of priests and made it obligatory for them to register and obtain the authorities’ license to function as a priest and to serve at a given place. These limitations and requirements were unacceptable to the official Roman Catholic Church. As a response, and with the support of Pope Pius XI, the Mexican bishops suspended all public cult, i.e., all religious services, until further notice. The church went into the catacombs, working secretly. The promulgation of the Calles Law also gave rise to a violent insurrection, the Cristero War, which had its epicenter in Jalisco, but spread to neighboring states. In 1929, the state and church reached a feeble *modus vivendi*. The Roman Catholic hierarchy opened up the cult again though the state severely curtailed its activities while the Calles Law was not strictly enforced any longer.⁶

⁶ For a classic study on the religious conflict 1926–1929, see Meyer 1976.

In this context, Luis N. Morones (1890–1964), the influential CROM trade union leader, approached Joaquín Pérez Budár, suggesting the foundation of an independent Catholic Church. The initiative could also count on President Calles’s informal support, though he was hardly enthusiastic, being a convinced atheist. In a short time, Pérez gathered half a dozen like-minded Roman Catholic priests. The Mexican Catholic Apostolic Church (ICAM) was formally established on February 18, 1925.⁷ Then, the founding fathers signed a *Manifiesto*, which explained their fundamental beliefs. Their vision was to return to what they saw as apostolic Christianity, to a kind of church

that its Divine Founder established, and which the apostles and the first Christians preached and practiced and could be read from the Sacred Scripture, without the innovations, fanaticism, and errors introduced by Rome.⁸

They declared the church free from Rome and that a Mexican patriarch should lead it. According to the *Manifiesto*, the adherents could ‘freely interpret the Sacred Scriptures, Tradition and Liturgy.’ They banned sacramental fees and tithing. Latin was eradicated as a liturgical language, and all the church’s rites would be celebrated in Spanish. At the same time, they abolished mandatory clerical celibacy, encouraging its priests to marry. The celibate was considered ‘unnatural.’ The *Manifiesto* regarded the veneration of the Virgin Mary and the saints as essential but abolished the dogma of eternal punishment in hell as well as auricular confession. Still, they endorsed the Nicene Creed and did not question fundamental doctrines

⁷ For details about the foundation process, see Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 57–103.

⁸ Ramírez Rancaño 376–377. [My translation].

such as the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. The criticism against the Roman Catholic Church was nothing but fierce. Rome had nothing to do with the ‘pristine, early Christianity,’ and the Roman Church had only degenerated through the centuries to reach an all-time low in the contemporary era.⁹ Not surprisingly, after the new church’s foundation and following warnings, on February 25, 1925, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Mexico, José Mora y del Río (1854–1928), excommunicated the priests for being ‘schismatics, heretics and true protestants.’ Through an interdict, he prohibited the faithful from attending the schismatics’ services and pledged those who had joined the movement to recant.¹⁰

As the Mexican state controlled all church buildings in the country, ICAM first got the civil authorities’ permission to use the Soledad church in central Mexico City but soon moved to the nearby Corpus Christi church, which became their cathedral. ICAM claimed church buildings in other parts of the country, too. Though they tried to get access to many more, they had access to eight temples within a year, and while they counted with a dozen priests, the adherents’ number remained low. The ‘taking of churches’ was not a smooth affair. Most often, conflict ensued, and on several occasions, led to violent confrontations. In this situation, ICAM founded the Caballeros de la Orden de Guadalupe, the Knights of the Order of Guadalupe, which guarded the churches and clashed with opponents.¹¹

ICAM’s role and influence would change dramatically with the implementation of the Calles law and the Roman Catholic general suspension of

⁹ The manifest is published, Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 369–377; for a study, cf. pp. 57–96. For a perceptive analysis of ICAM’s early teachings, see Butler 2009b.

¹⁰ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 83–87.

¹¹ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 127–223.

public religious activities between 1926 and 1929. During this period, it was much easier to access churches, and there was a growing demand for sacraments and other clerical services, not least in the countryside. To develop its formal organization and secure the apostolic succession, ICAM needed bishops of their own. At a ceremony in Chicago in October 1926, Carmel Henry Carfora (1878–1958), Supreme Primate of the North American Old Roman Catholic Church consecrated three bishops for them José Joaquín Pérez Budar, who became the archbishop and patriarch, Macario López Valdés and Antonio Benigno López Sierra.¹²

The three bishops were all former Roman Catholic priests. As such, they represented one part of the ICAM clergy. Some had left the ministry several years ago and often married, while others went directly to ICAM. The other group that soon became the majority did not have a clerical background. Though some had been seminarians or lay church officials, the group was very diverse. At its peak, in the late 1920s, ICAM had about 40 priests.¹³ Although there were adventurers among their ranks, as a group, the Mexican Catholic clergy cannot be seen as uneducated, or mere political agents, which was the general image presented in older literature. Most seem to have been politically engaged while emphasizing the importance of their pastoral mission, too.

Though ICAM could use some church buildings in cities and towns, most priests served in small villages in the highlands of Veracruz, Puebla, Tlaxcala, and Estado de Mexico, the majority dominated by indigenous people, not least Nahuas, Totonacas, and Otomís. They were also present in states like Guerrero and Chiapas.

¹² On Carfora, see Anson [1964] 2006: 427–434 and Trela 1979.

¹³ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 225–283.

In most cases, the ICAM clerics were not resident parish priests but came when asked to. It was, e.g., of utmost importance for the village councils to have a priest present at the feasts for the local patron saints and access the sacraments. In general, the ICAM priests seem to have been much less critical to the popular ways of celebrating the feasts than the Roman Catholic curates; they were often open for far-reaching accommodation.¹⁴

Among the Mexican Catholic clergy were two foreigners. One was Armin von Monte de Honor (1900–1988). He was an Austrian count, originally called Armin Anton von Ehrenberg, who, after a military career in his home country, arrived in Mexico about 1923. According to some sources, he was briefly a Roman Catholic seminarian, and this might be true. Later he was a translator for the Ministry of Defence, becoming a Mexican citizen. Jorge Mariano Hank, the other foreign cleric, was a German who had arrived in Mexico in 1923. His career followed Monte de Honor's. Hank seems to have studied at the seminary and then became a teacher at the Military College. By 1929 both were affiliated to ICAM as priests. While Hank's later life is little known, Monte de Honor would continue his work as an independent Catholic-Orthodox priest until his death¹⁵

In 1929, the Mexican government and the Roman Catholic Church reached a compromise. This accord opened up for the Roman Catholic cult. Though the effect was not immediate, it meant the rapid decline of ICAM as Roman Catholic clergy re-took the parishes and conflicts between the two churches centered around villages

¹⁴ Butler 2009a, Butler 2009b, and Butler 2014.

¹⁵ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 270–296, 305–306, 324–331. On Monte de Honor, see also Bello López 2016: 181–202 and Anson [1964] 2006: 440–441.

north and east of Mexico City.¹⁶ For some time, the patriarch and a group of others clerics established themselves in San Antonio, Texas, where they had a relatively successful mission among Mexican immigrants.¹⁷

In 1931, Patriarch Pérez returned to Mexico but was severely ill and died in October at 80. Before that, he had convened a council to discuss the future of the church. At least three bishops took part: López Valdés, Gómez Ruvalcaba, and José B. Emeterio Valdés. The third of the original bishops, Antonio López Sierra, was not present, as the patriarch had expelled him, and as a result of the council, he was excommunicated. Still, López Sierra was adamant about becoming Pérez's successor and declared that the patriarch was 'mentally incapacitated' and could not lead the church any longer. After the patriarch's demise, the Roman Catholic archdiocese made public that Pérez had recanted his earlier beliefs on his death bed and died a Roman Catholic. However, there is good reason to believe that the patriarch was not conscious at the hospital when his fingerprint was put on the abjuration document. No ICAM clergy were present.¹⁸

Patriarch Pérez's Successor – the Contenders

The years preceding the patriarch's death had been filled with internal conflicts in ICAM, and the situation only worsened afterward, as several men claimed the patriarchal office, getting support from parts of the clergy and laypeople. At the

¹⁶ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 261–283. Butler 2009a, Butler 2009b, cf. Lisbona Guillén 2009.

¹⁷ Miller 2008, cf. Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 285–296.

¹⁸ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 285–318.

patriarch's demise, Bishop Macario López Valdés was made the church's administrator. In August 1932, he was elected patriarch and wrote to the government to be recognized as such. However, a month later, he informed the authorities that ICAM was falling apart and had no future. He would not continue functioning as a priest. With time, he returned to the Roman Catholic Church, and though he was married, he was allowed to serve as a priest.¹⁹

After López Valdés's very brief patriarchate, the third of the original bishops, Antonio López Sierra, appeared as a claimant. López Sierra had been seen as a natural successor in the patriarchal office but had been suspended by Pérez in 1929, and shortly before the patriarch's death, he was excommunicated. In October 1932, López Sierra convened a council to elect a patriarch for his branch that formally registered under the original name: Iglesia Católica Apostólica Mexicana. Sixteen representatives from different parts of Mexico were present. However, it is unknown who they were, but probably no other bishops took part. The council unanimously elected López Sierra, who assumed Juan Crisóstomo I as his patriarchal name. He remained in office until he died in the late 1930s.²⁰

If López Valdés and López Sierra both were among the founders of ICAM, this was not the case of the third person, who, in 1932, also claimed to be the valid patriarch of the Mexican Church: Eduardo Dávila, also known as Eduardo Dávila Garza. He was still a young man, born in Mexico City, most probably in 1908 or 1909. Sometimes, however, Dávila claimed that it was in 1905. He asserted that he

¹⁹ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 318–320.

²⁰ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 321–324

attended a Roman Catholic seminary and was ordained a priest already in 1926. Apart from his assertions, there are no sources that prove the claim. Even if he had been born as early as 1905, by 1926, he would not have reached the canonical age for the ordination, i.e., 24 years.²¹

By 1928, Dávila was a member of the ICAM and served as a cantor or acolyte in the Corpus Christi Cathedral in Mexico City. However, in 1930, he registered as a priest with the state authorities and stated that Bishop Armin von Monte de Honor had ordained him on May 5, 1930. According to another version, it was a ‘Fr. Jerome Mary’ who ordained him, but that is nothing more than an English version of Monte de Honor’s ecclesiastical name, Hieronymus Maria. The problem with this assertion is that Monte de Honor did not receive his episcopal consecration until June 26, 1932, when Archbishop Carfora laid his hands on him at a ceremony in Chicago, where two other Mexican bishops were consecrated, too.²²

Whether he was ordained, and in that case, by whom, in May 1931, Dávila served as a priest in the Corpus Christi Cathedral. However, soon, he went away to an undisclosed place but returned, claiming that a Roman Catholic bishop had consecrated him at a secret ceremony. That any Roman Catholic prelate would have made Dávila a bishop is highly implausible. According to yet another version, Archbishop Carfora consecrated him in Chicago in 1931. On May 25, 1932, after a meeting with only laypeople present, at the age of 22 or 23, Eduardo Dávila assumed the title of patriarch. He also stated that Pérez Budár, shortly before his death, had assigned him his successor or that there had been a secret council that elected him.²³

²¹ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 336.

²² Sánchez Domínguez 1997: 93–94, 170.

²³ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 337–343, cf. Sánchez Domínguez 1997: 94–96, 170.

By the end of 1932, two men thus claimed to be the patriarch of ICAM: Antonio López Sierra and Eduardo Dávila. The conflict led to both harsh words and direct violence: López Sierra's son beat and tried to strangle Dávila when the latter claimed the cathedral for his use. As a result of the subsequent publicity, the government took the opportunity to remove ICAM's right to use the church building. They had no interest in a small and rapidly disintegrating religious organization. Having made his patriarchal claims, a group of clergy gathered around Dávila. However, in May 1933, he suddenly renounced the office and assigned his vicar-general José N. Cortés Villaseñor his successor. He made himself a missionary archbishop and went away to Tamaulipas.²⁴

Eduardo Dávila, the Papal Claim and Beyond

Nevertheless, at the end of 1933, Eduardo Dávila was back in Mexico City, re-taking the church's leadership. He proposed that the ICAM needed cardinals and was elected one, the only one. In the next step, he was elected the Pope. As much else, the reports on the papal election are contradictory. According to one document, Dávila was elected on April 27, 1933, before he left for Tamaulipas. The same record claims that Cortés Villaseñor was made patriarch at the same occasion.²⁵ However, according to a second version, Dávila was elected on December 12, 1933. *In extenso*, this document reads.

²⁴ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 343–345.

²⁵ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 347.

Realizing that the successor to the ex-patriarch had not done anything for the benefit of our holy cause, the clergy of the Mexican Orthodox Catholic Church met and decided to consecrate the Most Excellent and Reverend Archbishop don Eduardo Dávila the first pope and Supreme Pontiff of Mexico. It was not possible to have two patriarchs as their office did not end until their death. For on December 12, the feast day Our Queen and Mother, Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of Mexico and the Mexican, [the clergy of ICAM] bestowed the fore-said ex-patriarch to the dignity of the first pope of Mexico, [taking] the ecclesiastical name Eduardo I.²⁶

Dávila was coronated in a chapel in the small village of San Simón de Bravo in the Puebla highlands on December 12, 1933. Following his ascent to the papacy, Dávila reintroduced the mandatory clerical celibacy in what he now called the Iglesia Ortodoxa Católica Apostólica Nacional Mexicana, and made Latin the sole liturgical language. That meant that he contradicted two essential reforms that had constituted ICAM from its foundation. Still, in other ways, he was in line with the original ICAM teachings.²⁷

As a reaction to the election of Dávila as patriarch, on June 29, 1933, the Supreme Primate of the North American Old Roman Catholic Church Carmel Henry Carfora consecrated José Pedro Ortíz bishop and named him Primate of the Mexican Old Roman Catholic Church.²⁸ Yet another patriarchal claimant was José Vicente Liñán, who had been a priest in ICAM but was expelled by Pérez. However, Carfora consecrated him in 1932, assisted by two bishops of the Universal Christian

²⁶ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 347. [My translation].

²⁷ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 348.

²⁸ Anson [1964] 2016: 441.

Communion. Liñán's main argument against Dávila was that he was not a validly ordained priest, much less a bishop. A group of clerics elected him the patriarch of ICAM on July 6, 1934.²⁹

To summarize, by 1934, four men claimed to be Patriarch Pérez's successors leading churches with slightly different names: Antonio López Sierra (Mexican Catholic Apostolic Church), Eduardo Dávila (Mexican Orthodox Catholic Apostolic (National) Church), Juan Pedro Ortíz (Mexican Old Roman Catholic Church), and José Vicente Liñán (Mexican Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Church). As noted, López Sierra died in the late 1930s. Liñán soon left Mexico and settled in San Antonio, Texas. Ortíz, however, remained in Mexico and held the patriarchal office until 1958, and Eduardo Dávila, too, stayed as Pope and patriarch.³⁰

By the second half of the 1930s, Eduardo I combined his ministry with an active membership in *Acción Revolucionaria Mexicana*, a movement with clear Nazi influences popularly known as *Camisas Doradas*, the Gold Shirts. The movement, also called a paramilitary group, led by Nicolás Rodríguez Carrasco (1890–1940), was virulently anti-Semitic and protested against the nationalizing efforts of President Lázaro Cárdenas (r. 1934–1940). Members attacked and extorted Mexican Jews as well as Chinese immigrants. They were also involved in violent fights with groups of Communists, including one massive and particularly fierce one at the *Zócalo*, Mexico City's main square, in late 1935, which resulted in several deaths and many injured. Eduardo Dávila was present but escaped unharmed.³¹ Dávila's

²⁹ Brandreth 1947: 28, Anson [1964] 2006: 430–432, 440–441, and Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 258–259, 291–292.

³⁰ Brandreth 1947: 28, and Anson [1964] 2006: 440–441.

³¹ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 349–350.

affiliation with the Gold Shirts might have been out of conviction, but it indeed had strategic reasons, too. Through cooperation with the movement, he thought that his church would grow, and, at least during a period, there was a mutual interest.

Mexico-based journalist J.H. Plenn's article "A Nazi Church in America" (1939), published in the Marxist magazine *New Masses*, focused on Dávila and his church's association with Nazi networks in both the United States and Mexico.

In Mexico Nicolas Rodriguez 'supreme commander' of the Gold Shirts, gave Pope Eduardo a letter 'authorizing' him to make convert in the state of Puebla. The converts are usually made among persons who formerly attended the Roman Catholic church. The 'bishop of Texas' for the schismatic church is a Nazi who calls himself Father Jeronimo Santamaria. The 'secretary general and chancellor of the Archbishop of Mexico' is Manuel Darvell Chavarri, an active Gold Shirt propagandist.³²

In 1936, President Lázaro Cárdenas disbanded the Gold Shirts and sent Rodríguez into exile. Still, members in Mexico formed new associations. Chavarri, a convinced Nazi and Pope Eduardo's brother-in-arms, had a role in these movements.³³

After becoming the Pope, and aside from the engagement in the Gold Shirt movement, Dávila became a freemason. As with everything else during these years, the stories about his freemasonry are hard to evaluate and somewhat contradictory. After joining a loge of the Rito Nacional Mexicano, he started several independent loges of 'the Mexican rite,' collectively known as the Gran Logia Anahuác, which in 1937 allied with the much more prominent Mexican rite.³⁴ Like his affiliation with

³² Plenn 1939a.

³³ Plenn 1939a.

³⁴ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 352.

the Gold Shirts, the masonic involvement was probably a base for attracting new church members, though he was unsuccessful.



During the late 1930s, Pope Eduardo seems to have said Mass in the San José el Obrero chapel in Mexico City and San Pedro Jalostoc, a chapel close to Villa de Guadalupe. There were state permissions for his clergy to serve in Joquicingo (Estado de México) and San Miguelito (Toluca). He also asked for authorization to

use several chapels in Mexico City for the religious cult, including San Diego, Concepción Tlaxcuaque, and Monserrate.³⁵

In 1938, the Mexico City press suddenly wrote a lot about Eduardo I, the Mexican Pope. Initially, it was a conflict over the mortal remains of Patriarch Pérez that attracted media attention. At this time, seven years had passed since his death. According to Mexican law, the body should be exhumed. Dávila planned to pay homage to his predecessor and erect an extravagant funeral monument. There are different versions of what happened after that. According to the most probable, when Dávila oversaw the unearthing of the remains, Rebeca Gómez, a bishop's widow, who also asserted to be a relative of the patriarch's, appeared at the cemetery claiming the body. The Pope, on his side, contended that he counted with the permission of the patriarch's adoptive daughter. In the subsequent investigation, Gómez claimed that she had presented the necessary documents to the authorities. To her, Dávila only wanted to use the memory of the patriarch for his purposes, taking the opportunity to pressure the membership for money. She also asserted that Pérez had no adoptive daughter.³⁶

In 1938, Dávila decided that there would be no conclaves in the future but that the Pope directly chose his successor. Consequently, he appointed a 21-year-old man Rubén Darío Cano Ballesteros, to succeed him after his death. He was said to be his nephew, but this, like many other things, is unclear. Still, in the same year, he was quoted in an interview as saying that he partially recognized the Pope in Rome

³⁵ Sánchez Domínguez 1997: 93–94.

³⁶ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 352–355.

spiritually but not in matters of administration ... I am infallible and my bishops are infallible ... I have recognized Pope Pius, but he cannot recognize me because his church would go to pieces. But the time will come when we will work out a compromise.³⁷

However, at virtually the same time, he claimed that he would replace Pope Pius XI too. On a smaller scale, in 1938, and without success, Dávila tried to convince the Roman Catholic priest in Tenango del Valle (Estado de Méxio) to join his ranks. As a result, an angry group of villages chased him away.³⁸

In late 1938, a journalist from *El Universal Gráfico* visited the Pope in his residence, which was a small, sparsely furnished apartment in the old parts of Mexico City. He describes the Dávila was tall, thin, dark wearing a dark suit and a broad tie. On his right hand was a ring with a 22-carat amethyst.³⁹

On June 8, 1939, Eduardo Dávila wrote to the government stating that they had asked for a chapel in Mexico five times before and informed that without waiting for a reply, he would establish himself in the Concepción de Tlaxacoaque chapel in the Cuauhtémoc area of the Federal District. The government did not intervene. After that, the chapel became Pope Eduardo's Holy See. Though his number of followers was minuscule, Dávila claimed to have more than 700 church buildings and more than a hundred bishops and priests under his jurisdiction. According to him, ICAM was spread in central and northern Mexico and the southern parts of the United States and had more than a million members.⁴⁰

³⁷ Translation in Plenn 1939b: 193. Cf. Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 348–358.

³⁸ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 358–359.

³⁹ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 356, cf. Plyn 1939b: 193.

⁴⁰ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 350–351.

In reality, Dávila said Mass in his chapel in Tlaxacoaque, and some priests administered the sacraments in rural Veracruz and Puebla. After the significant media interest during the last years of the 1930s and what seems to be a period of frantic activity, the traces after Dávila almost disappear. In the late 1940s, he wanted to use a few chapels on the Tehuantepec peninsula for his ministry. Finally, by 1952, there are reports that he and Armin von Monte de Honor were constructing a chapel in Ixhuatlán de Madero in the Huasteca Baja region in Veracruz. In this period, Dávila styled himself Archbishop and Primate of Mexico, of the Mexican Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Church, thus not making any public papal claims anymore.⁴¹

The Huasteca Baja seems to have become a kind of center for the ICAM, though it is difficult if the priests working there were part of Dávila's jurisdiction. Armin von Monte de Honor served as a priest but was foremost a political and social activist, working for road-building and electrification. He was based in the Otomi community Santa María Apipilhuasco for three decades until the 1980s and died in 1988. He ministered to Otomi, Totonac, and Tepehua villagers, who had joined his church, but lots of conflicts between him and the Roman Catholic clergy.⁴²

In 1958, Monte de Honor succeeded José Pedro Ortíz as the Primate of the Mexican Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Church. Thus, he was not in communion with Dávila anymore, if he ever had been it formally. Contrary to Dávila, Ortiz was, for a long time, at least until the early 1950s, representing the North American Old Roman Catholic Church in Mexico, thus being in communion with Supreme Primate

⁴¹ Ramírez Rancaño 2006: 355–360.

⁴² Bello López 2016: 181–202.

Carfora in Chicago. By the early 1960s, Monte de Honor was also connected to the Old Roman Catholic Church, based in London, and its leader, the Archbishop of Cear-Glow, Gerard G. Shelley (1891–1980).⁴³

On his side, in 1961 Armin von Monte de Honor consecrated José Enrique Cortés y Olmos (1923–1983) bishop. He was a former Roman Catholic priest with a doctorate in Canon Law and joined the Mexican Orthodox Catholic Church in 1950. After being made a bishop in the early 1960s, Cortés and other clergy founded the Orthodox Catholic Church in Mexico. In 1968, he was conditionally consecrated by a bishop of the Apostolic Catholic Church of the Americas. Eventually, he established contacts with the Orthodox Church in America, and in 1972, Cortés became part of the American Orthodox Exarchate of Mexico, conditionally consecrated once more.⁴⁴

Since the 1930s, there existed another ICAM in Los Angeles, led by Bishop Alberto Luis Rodríguez y Durand (1901–1955), who Macario López y Valdes had consecrated. Rodríguez y Durand ordained and just before his death, also consecrated, his brother Emile Federico Rodriguez Fairfield (1912–2005), later claiming to be the patriarch. Rodríguez Fairfield was a central person in the Catholic-Orthodox independent world, conditionally consecrated at least eight times, thus combining most of the lineages in independent Catholicism, including Mathew Harris, Vilatte, and Costa Duarte. He also consecrated many bishops and ‘exchanged apostolic lineages’ with others, i.e., they consecrated each other.⁴⁵

⁴³ Anson [1964] 2006: 338–340, 437–441.

⁴⁴ Bello López 2016: 186. For a more detailed, though selective, biography see www.oca.org. For the consecrations, see www.sites.google.com/site/gnostickos/bbishops cortesyolmos.

⁴⁵ www.sites.google.com/site/gnostickos/bishopsrodriguez and www.tboyle.net/Catholicism/The_Costa_lines-_F-J/The_Fairfield_lineage.html

Thus, neither Monte de Honor nor the Los Angeles-based ICAM accepted Eduardo Dávila's claims to the patriarchal office. Still, the sources of the latter's activities are few. One rare trace from the early 1960s is somewhat unexpected. In 1960 Dávila's General Secretariate wrote to Fidel Castro congratulating him on the revolution's success, and the church voiced a 'sincere and ardent desire to assist in the liberation.' He also warned Castro of a common enemy, 'the Roman Catholic Church is working tirelessly to overthrow your Government.' ICAM, therefore, offered to help the Cubans to establish an independent revolutionary Church.⁴⁶

In late 1960, U.S. news media reported about José Javier Cortés, a former Roman Catholic priest, who joined ICAM and was Eduardo Dávila's vicar general. The article claimed that Cortés had recently returned from 'Red China,' where he had been in contact with a 'schismatic Catholic bishop' who wanted a fusion between Catholicism and Communism, but realized it could not happen through Rome but with the help of independent churches.⁴⁷ *The Voice*, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Florida's journal, referred to an interview in the Mexican Magazine *Siempre* and said that Cortés was

praising 'Chinese popular Catholicism' ... *Siempre* quoted Cortes as saying that the communist attempts to take the Catholic Church in China into schism are in fact efforts to bring about the unity of Catholics in the communist countries. But the program, Cortes is quoted as saying, 'has not yet been accomplished due to opposition on the part of the Vatican, which is in the service of Yankee imperialism.'

⁴⁶ Keller 2017: 23–24. The letter was issued from the Secretaría General de Cámara y Gobierno del Arzobispado Metropolitano, September 18, 1960.

⁴⁷ See e.g. *The Galveston Daily News*, November 28, 1960.

Cortés traveled to Cuba, where he established contacts with an ardently pro-Castro Roman Catholic ex-priest, Germán Lence. As a token of appreciation, Cortés presented the revolutionary priest with a letter stating: ‘The bishops of the Mexican Catholic Church congratulate Your Reverence for your lofty patriotic spirit.’ Their hope was the establishment of a National Catholic Church, which Castro was said to support.⁴⁸ However, instead, Lence organized a pro-government Christian movement called *Con la cruz y Con la patria*.⁴⁹

Apart from the sources on the Cuban connections, there are few notes about the papal ex-claimant in the 1960s and 1970s. According to a personal testimony in 1985, Dávila regularly said Mass in the Antonio Abad chapel in Iztapalapa in the Federal District between 1960 and 1983.⁵⁰ And in 1980, as the Archbishop Primate for the Mexican Apostolic Catholic Church, he re-appeared on a somewhat larger ecclesiastical scene.

The reason for Dávila entering into the scene was the much-publicized ‘miracle of the bleeding host.’ On March 23, 1978, a Roman Catholic priest José Camargo Melo (b. 1942), a priest in the Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe parish church in eastern Mexico City for three years, experienced that that blood appeared on a consecrated host. Later, the host visibly transformed into body tissue and blood. Melo informed the Archdiocese of Mexico, which did not want to recognize it as a miracle, asked him neither to talk about nor to investigate it forward. After some time, Melo went public, and the Mitre publically denounced the miracle as false.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *The Voice*, December 30, 1960.

⁴⁹ Thompson 2020: 461.

⁵⁰ Sánchez Domínguez 1997: 118.

⁵¹ Sánchez Domínguez 1997: 76–87.

In February 1979, the ecclesiastical authorities decided that Camargo should be moved from the parish, but in March, the community informed the government that they wanted Melo as their priest. On Corpus Christi June 5, 1979, a new Eucharistic miracle took place. Despite several journeys to Rome, the final response of the Holy See, in August 1980, was that the miracles were not supernatural.⁵²

Still, in 1979 an alternative pope, Gregory XVII (1946–2005; sed. 1978–2005) of the Palmarian Catholic Church, contacted Camargo and offered to consecrate him a bishop. The contact did not lead to any consecration.⁵³ But then, after the second Eucharistic miracle, another, at least a former, papal claimant, Eduardo Dávila, suddenly established contact. Camargo Melo writes.

In August 1980, the Patriarch and Archbishop Eduardo Dávila de la Garza y Pardo came to see me. The first, he said to me, was: You have gone to search for the Pope. I have come to search for you. Immediately he offered means to defend the truth about the miracle with the Sacred Host. Understanding that I must be sure about the succession, as in reality that what mattered, he brought forward documents in which the apostolic succession becomes clear. Without any condition's on Monseñor Dávila's part, I accepted that the Episcopal Consecration should take place on October 17, 1980, the Feast of the Martyr Bishop St. Ignatius of Antioch.⁵⁴

The consecration was carried out according to the plans. Consequently, Carmargo informed the ecclesiastical authorities of his independence from the Roman Catholic Church. In 1982, Dávila wrote to the Department of the Federal District to formally

⁵² Sánchez Domínguez 1997: 87–93.

⁵³ On the Palmarian Church, see Lundberg 2020.

⁵⁴ Sánchez Domínguez 1997: 94–95. [My translation].

register Camargo Melo as being in charge, and in 1983, Camargo ordained his first priests. After this, he was officially excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church.⁵⁵

In the next decade, the Mexican Catholic Apostolic Church and the Roman Catholic archdiocese were involved in unending conflicts regarding the right to use different church buildings, not least the cathedral, El Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe y de la Santísima Hostia Sangrante. In May 1985, Eduardo Dávila wrote to the federal government to claim to the church's right to use the Church of San Antonio Abad, where he earlier had said Mass. While this process continued on September 21, 1985, Eduardo Dávila, once the Pope of Mexican and the Americas—and the whole Catholic Church—died.⁵⁶

With the new law in 1992, religious associations could be given legal personality, and on May 31, 1993, the Mexican Catholic Apostolic Church became a registered religious association. It is led by Camargo Melo, who, in 1991, had been conditionally consecrated by a group of independent Catholic bishops, including the patriarch of the Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church, Luis Fernando Castillo Méndez.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Sánchez Domínguez 1997: 96–104.

⁵⁶ Sánchez Domínguez 1997: 114–115.

⁵⁷ Sánchez Domínguez 1997: 128–130.

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