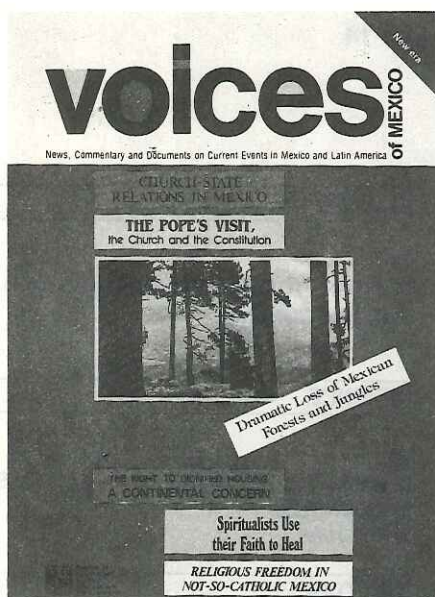


THIS ISSUE



Cover: Photo by Alejandra Novoa
Design by Angélica Hernández

As in many aspects of our lives, the "official" image of Mexico is one thing, and the reality is very different. Official statistics on Mexico report that the majority of Mexicans describe themselves as Catholics. There is no doubt about this. But it is also true that people can say one thing and do another. If as a nation we are multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, there's no reason why we won't also be multi-religious.

In a country which guarantees freedom of worship, lay education and separation of Church and State - following several civil wars and interventions by foreign powers - the thorny issue of re-establishing formal diplomatic relations between the State and the Catholic church, along with modifications to various articles in the constitution which limit the participation of religious institutions in public life, incites diverse and sometimes passionate reactions among the various sectors of Mexican public opinion.

The recent visit made by Pope John Paul II, and the political waves this caused, have had the effect of provoking a great national debate. After the show, the tumultuous crowds, the fervour, we Mexicans are asking ourselves many questions: Who is to gain if diplomatic relations are re-established with the Vatican? The government? The Catholic hierarchy? Political parties? The Mexican people?

These and many other doubts are discussed in this issue of *Voices*, which is dedicated to exploring the different facets of Mexican religious behaviour. Our aim when we planned this issue was to give space to the debate which is just beginning on the State and Church in Mexico. We also wanted to show the great variety of religious cults observed in the country - some officially, some under cover - and to sketch some tentative answers to the questions raised.

From the variety of views and opinions given by our collaborators, one point emerges clearly: up to the present, and apart from the massive religious manifestations seen during the Papal visit, the great majority of the population has not participated in the discussion on Church-State relations.

Mariclaire Acosta