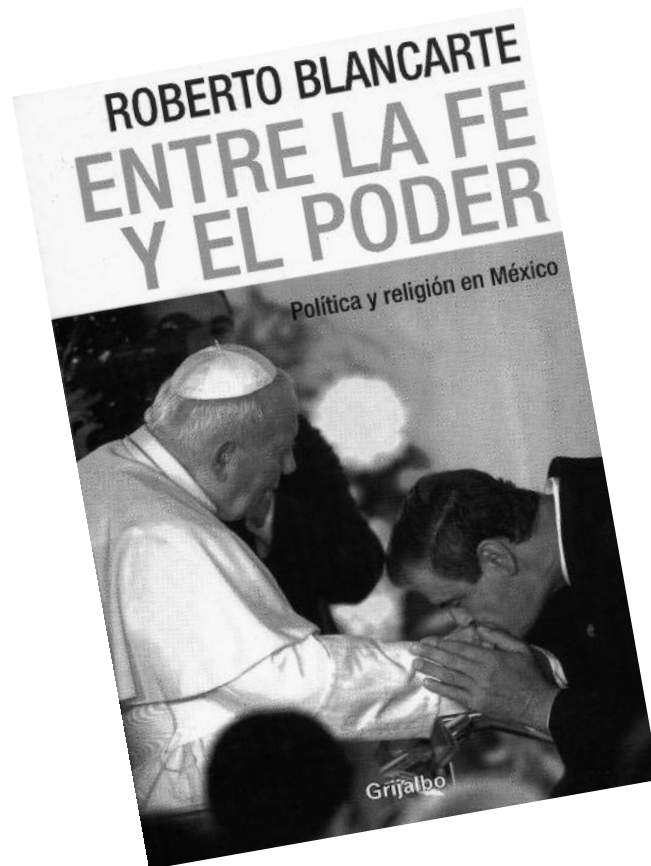


Reviews



Entre la fe y el poder.
Política y religión en México
(Between Faith and Power. Politics
And Religion in Mexico)
Roberto Blancarte
Grijalbo
Mexico City, 2004, 351 pp.

Writing a weekly commentary on current events requires the author to pay constant attention to what is going on and to be enormously creative so that the piece can always offer the reader a chance to think on his/her feet, a way of increasing his/her information, vision and judgment, a means to relate the breaking news he/she has heard to broader processes. In a word, to form an opinion as a citizen. I imagine that this is a task under-

taken with great enthusiasm. But it is a commitment that acquires its true proportions as the weeks go by. In the case of Roberto Blancarte's book, we are dealing with a compilation of more than 200 commentaries that intelligently collate daily events with broader processes like democratization, the construction of a lay culture, the redefinition of public policy regarding religion.

It is necessary to recognize that to carry out this task, the author has acquired human capital both from his academic and political activities. First of all, because of his long academic training under the direction of eminent historians and analysts of religion like Ruggiero Romano and Émile Poulat, with whom he has continued to dialogue throughout his

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own work as a researcher. And in the second place—but no less importantly—because of the perspective he has gained thanks to collaborating in Mexico’s diplomatic mission to the Holy See and in the Ministry of the Interior’s Vice-Ministry of Religious Affairs. I mean that this work has given a unique slant to his vision of the relations between the churches and the state. In his articles, we can hear both the indignation that can be sparked by the innocent invitation of the Pope to President Fox’s inauguration (because it was counter to diplomatic canon) and the technical legal critique of the proposed bill to regulate the Religious Associations Law because it contradicted the spirit of the statute. It is not common to find this combination of experiences.

Thanks to this experience, the author has developed a diagnostic analysis of religion in Mexico, not only in relation to the state, but as a sphere of social life with close links to modernization, democratization and the construction of a citizenry. In his spot-on analyses of specific situations, Blancarte presents some key concepts for interpreting this complex relationship between faith and power in the Mexican context. Probably the most important of these is the secular character of the state and its responsibility in procuring the common good. This word is not only a legal term: it is a principal of optimum social organization that, far from turning the state into the enemy of reli-

gions, is what makes possible the freedom of religion in a new situation of multiple options, and the best guarantee for developing an autonomous individual conscience. Throughout the period he analyzes (which stretches from the beginning of Vicente Fox’s presidential campaign to early 2004), the author presents his position based on applying this principle. To what degree did the shift of the Fox administration from the Mexican liberal tradition as it had been interpreted by the PRI governments move closer to or further away from the point of equilibrium represented by that principle? To what degree did the different public policy proposals made by the religious associations regarding reproductive health or ownership of the media benefit the common good? To what degree do these initiatives represent their congregations or are they rather initiatives from their leaders?

This is an analysis that week by week, and now as a whole, is indispensable for understanding the intense political and social processes that this country is experiencing and in which we discover, thanks to authors like Blancarte, how our historical experience comes into play and what the best way forward for us as a society will be.

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