



## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

### The unchanging character of Rome

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#### Evangelicals Given Ultimatum in Three Mexican Towns

May 29, 2001 SANTA ANA, CA (ANS) -- Local authorities in three small towns in different Mexican states have told evangelical Christians to change their religion to traditional Catholicism or suffer the consequences -- threatening them with jail, expulsion, the removal of public services such as water and drainage, and even death.

In San Nicolas, Ixmiquilpan, in the central Mexican state of Hidalgo, a June deadline is fast approaching on an ultimatum given to 230 evangelicals to renounce their faith or be expelled from their homes and community. State and federal government officials have been unable to resolve the conflict.

Meanwhile, the evangelicals must obtain water from private sources and have no drainage services. The case has attracted wide publicity in the Mexico City press.

In the more southern state of Oaxaca, the town of Arroyo-Arena San Lorenzo La Lana, Choapa, reported similar problems.

On March 4, two recent evangelical converts -- Roberto Antonio Martinez and Domingo Alavez Sanchez -- were jailed for 36 hours and asked to deny their new faith. Then on April 3, four evangelicals were imprisoned for 24 hours, including the two previous victims plus Cornelio Antonio Martinez (father of Roberto) and Simon Antonio Manzano.

Roberto's mother, Cristina, wife of Cornelio, was fined 15,000 pesos (\$1,600) "for damages to the town and authorities of this community for having made them work for questions regarding their evangelical roots." In other words, Cristina was fined for "making them put people in jail," a local source explained.

Six families, a total of 40 church members, are affected by the hostility against evangelicals. Local authorities, all members of the local **Catholic church**, have ordered that the electricity and drinking water be cut off to evangelicals and that the evangelical's houses and animals be burned. Evangelicals have also been threatened with death unless they change their religion.

State and federal authorities have been asked to intervene to try to solve the problem, says Pastor Hector Astorga Martinez of the Interdenominational Christian Church. Meetings were held May 9 and 18, but no solution was reached. Town leaders refused to attend the meetings. "Their position is intransigent, not wanting any evangelicals in the community,"



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said Martinez.

In Mexico's southernmost state of Chiapas, where religious persecution has been a well-known problem for decades, a new case surfaced in the town of Los Llanitos, Teopisca. On May 19, town authorities met to formally declare that evangelicals would be expelled unless they agree to participate in all Catholic festivals. On May 3, two members of the Pentecostal church were jailed for 48 hours for refusing to take part in the Santa Cruz celebration, said Presbyterian pastor and lawyer Abdias Tovilla.

Many of the religious conflicts in Mexico stem from evangelicals' refusal to participate in town festivals -- an important source of income for local authorities. The festivals usually include activities that evangelicals find unacceptable. In some cases, town leaders have allowed evangelicals to cooperate in community projects of equal economic value.