

## ‘Freedom is Our Lives’

The new movie, **For Greater Glory: The True Story of Cristiada** unveils a time when Mexican Christians, in the pursuit of religious freedom, had to choose between their faith and their lives. It was directed by the Titanic and Lord of the Rings special effects genius, Dean Wright. Therefore it contains gripping and spectacular action with breathtaking scenery. But it is the story of heroic martyrdom that will draw crowds to theaters. The talented cast includes Andy Garcia, Peter O’Toole and Eva Longoria.

The Cristero War is a conflict that lasted from 1926 to 1929. This often forgotten era of Mexican history is captured in [this] film comprised of an ensemble of talented and award-winning actors.

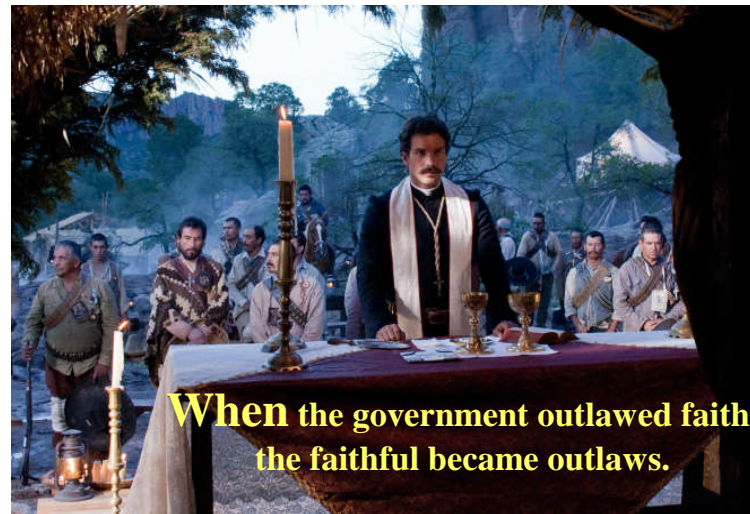
The persecution of the Catholic Church in Mexico began when the administration of Mexican President Plutarco Calles took punitive measures to silence priests and bishops, confiscate Church property and close Catholic schools. When the archbishop of Mexico City spoke out against such measures, his residence and the chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe were bombed.

### RECLAIMING HISTORY

For the filmmakers, bringing the dark era of the Cristiada years to life was largely motivated by the silence that surrounds it. As the story unfolds, the audience witnesses the various ways in which committed Catholics responded to their plight. Some, such as Blessed José Anacleto González

Flores — who is sometimes referred to as the “Mexican Gandhi” — favored civil disobedience. Others, like Father José Reyes Vega and Victoriano Ramírez, known as “El Catorce,” resorted to armed resistance, beginning a grassroots rebellion of Mexican Catholics from which the term “Cristiada” originated.

The history of the Cristero War remains largely unknown, even to Mexicans. Eduardo Verástegui, who portrays González Flores in



**When the government outlawed faith, the faithful became outlaws.**

the film, experienced this silence first hand. “When I grew up in Mexico I didn’t know anything about the Cristiada. I went to public school; I had never heard anything about it — until I turned 30 years old ...”

Wright and Barroso also sought to create an accurate depiction of the violence carried out against Mexican Catholics. Although never gratuitously, the film depicts priests being executed, churches pillaged and worshippers massacred. One of the more chilling scenes

involves the execution of St. José María Robles Hurtado, a martyred priest and Knight of Columbus who blessed and forgave his killers in the face of death. Although the film is about specific historical events, the filmmakers believe that its message about religious freedom is universal.

“We live in a time where religious freedom is as tenuous as it’s ever been,” said Wright.

The Untold Story of the Knights during the Cristiada

On an ordinary January day in 1927, as Yocundo Durán walked home in Chihuahua, Mexico, he crossed paths with Federal Gen. Miguel Valle, who was walking out of a local tavern. The general recognized Durán and had one of his soldiers detain him and ask, “Are you a Knight of Columbus?”

Durán confirmed that he was a Knight and asked whether there was any evil in it. Considering this an indictment, Valle pronounced Durán a “subversive Catholic” and ordered him shot on the spot. Durán’s body was later delivered to his family in a bricklayer’s cart.

During this time, the government seized Catholic schools and seminaries, expropriated Church property, and outlawed religious education. It closed Catholic hospitals, orphanages and homes for the elderly. It also banned

orders, expelled foreign-born clergy and prohibited public worship. Priests and nuns were barred from wearing religious garments, from voting, and from criticizing the government or commenting on public affairs either in writing or in speech. If charged with a violation of the law, they were, like Durán, often denied a trial.

Mexico's bishops were expelled, and many of the clergy were exiled for years; those who remained or returned in secret were forced to work and minister "underground." Many seminarians were also exiled to Spain or the United States.

Although the Knights as an organization did not provide support to the Cristeros' military efforts, it remained a target for the Mexican government, explains historian Jean Meyer.

According to Meyer, more than 200,000 people from every socioeconomic background were killed or martyred by 1930. On May 21, 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized 25 martyrs — including six Knights — from the Cristero period. Thirteen more Mexican martyrs — including three Knights — were beatified in Guadalajara, Mexico, on the Solemnity of Christ the King on Nov. 20, 2005.

The May 2012 issue of *Columbia* magazine explores the history of the persecution of the Catholic Church in Mexico during the 1920s and '30s. This history has been hidden from the people of Mexico, and the real causes of the conflict have been ignored by many scholars.

The articles in this issue set the record straight, both as to the real cause of the violence and the peaceful efforts of the Knights of Columbus on both sides of the border to defend religious liberty in Mexico.

Today in the United States, it is impossible to recall these events without thinking of current threats to religious liberty, including the Obama administration's insistence that contraceptives, sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs be included in the health insurance programs of Catholic organizations. This federal mandate is backed by the threat of millions of dollars in fines if Catholic organizations refuse to comply as a matter of conscience.

The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, earlier this year stated, "We have become certain of two things: religious freedom is under attack, and we will not cease our struggle to protect it."

Cardinal Francis E. George, the past president of the bishops' conference, has concluded from the intransigence of the Obama administration that it wants Catholics to "give up" our schools, hospitals and charitable ministries.

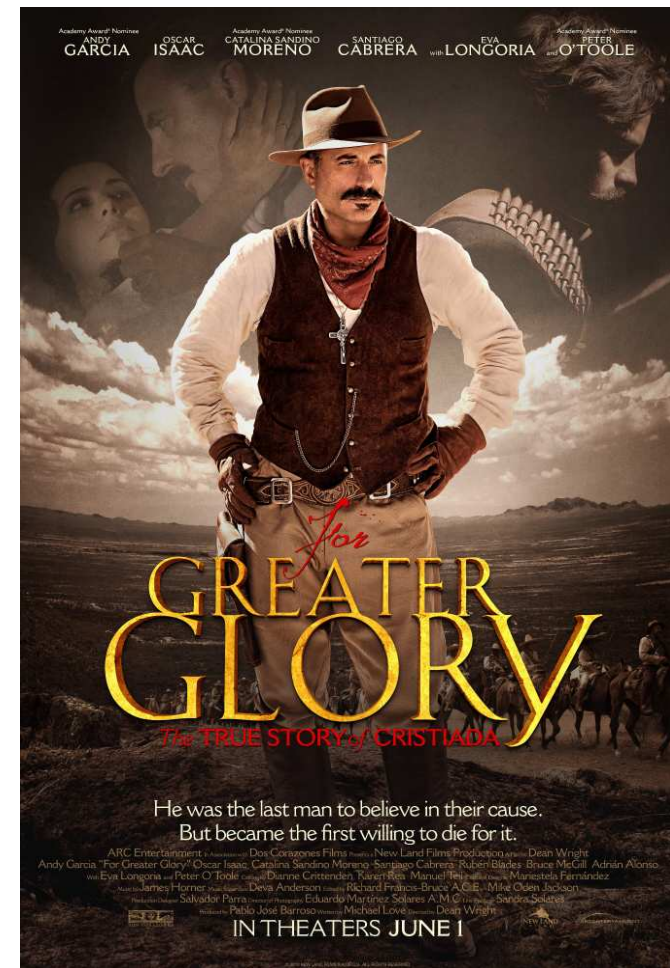
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***“For Greater Glory is a powerful film ...***

**and is ‘must-see’ viewing for all who care about faith and liberty today.”**