

8-31-1990

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Recommended Citation

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Guatemala: Catholic Church & Rightist Parties Exchange Accusations About Mixing Politics & Religion

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, August 31, 1990

On Aug. 15, Archbishop Prospero Penados criticized the National Liberation Movement (MLN) and United Action Movement (MAS) for using religious forums in their political campaigns. Representatives of the two parties announced candidates for the November elections in the Esquipulas basilica, located in eastern Guatemala. Penados' statements were also a response to criticism of a blessing by Bishop Ramiro Pellecer on Aug. 12 for Christian Democrat presidential candidate Alfonso Cabrera, and his running mate Marco Antonio Villamar. The archbishop characterized the blessing as a personal act, although he suggested that Pellecer may have been misinformed. Penados asserted that the Catholic Church does not support any particular candidate for president, and denied allegations that the church supported the Christian Democrat Party to counter the campaign of former general Efraim Rios Montt, pastor and member of the Council of Elders of the Church of the Word. In an editorial published Aug. 14, Prensa Libre described Penados' statements as "the greatest error committed by a bishop in many years." On Aug. 13, a Prensa Libre editorial criticized Pellecer, and Catholic priests Andres Giron and Jose Maria Ruiz Furlan ("Father Chemita"). Ruiz announced his candidacy for mayor of Guatemala City several months ago. Giron has resigned his ministry in the Esquintla diocese to run for congress. (Basic data from Cerigua weekly briefs, 08/13-19/90)

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