

Clashing Kingdoms

The administration of Andres Manuel Lopez-Obrador is at hand.

Lopez-Obrador, populist candidate for Mexico's presidency, lost last summer's election but claims that his rival Felipe Calderon used new math to tabulate the votes. He figures he's the nation's rightful leader and the only one who will speak up for Mexico's millions of poor citizens. So he's sworn himself in as president, named his own cabinet, and begun drafting a new constitution.

All of a sudden, Mexican citizens find they can choose the administration under which they want to live. Of course, though Lopez-Obrador has a cabinet and a constitution and even a red, white, and green presidential sash, there are a few things his new government lacks: he has no army to enforce his reign and no taxes to fund it. Anyone who lives under this new rule will do so voluntarily.

But he believes plenty of people will. Not the fresas, perhaps- the privileged few of Mexico's citizens who control about a third of its wealth. They live in self-walled communities with their own police forces. But the nacos, the half of the populace that survives on less than four bucks a day. They know of only one wall – the one President Bush wants to slap up to keep them out of El Norte.

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The Kingdom of Jesus of Nazareth is at hand.

Mark 1.15 contains a bumper-sticker summary of Christ's earliest sermon: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." The current crisis in Mexico helps bleach two millennia of stained glass out of that text and allow us a clear glimpse into the original message. "The legitimate ruler has arrived," Jesus explains. "Caesar's anointing was a sham. Consider living under my rule." It isn't about going to heaven when you die; its about how you'll live today.

Like his modern-day counterpart, Jesus names his own cabinet: twelve bozos who couldn't get elected as pooper-scoopers in a down-market Roman triumphal procession. Jesus has his own inaugural ceremony: a dunking in the Jordan by a half-crazed, camel-toga-clad, locust-lunching hermit. Jesus has his own constitution: it begins, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Again like his Mexican doppelganger, he has no army to enforce his will, and his

only relationship to the IRS is to order tax collectors to leave the books unbalanced and follow him. His kingdom is at hand; it is also voluntary.

So who would sign on for this doomed enterprise? Not the fresas, the privileged few of the present world, sitting comfortably behind self-generated security measures. Only the nacos, the Walmart Kmart down-market of the unwashed who crowd the teeming physical and intellectual ghettos of every city in the world. No wonder he warned that this kind of thing could get you killed; he predicted the same fate for himself, and he was right.

I don't claim to know the truth behind Mexico's complex politics, and I know any merely human analogy to Christ is ultimately flawed. I do claim to know the truth behind Jesus' simple theology: the kingdom is now, the choice is clear, and the outcome is eternal.

The Kingdom of God is at hand.

Naco Libre!

Doug