

# MEXICO'S ATTITUDE TO THE CHURCH

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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To the Editor of The New York Times:

I was amazed on finding on the first page of THE NEW YORK TIMES yesterday a special cable dispatch from Mexico, headlined "Mexico Will Seize Church Property," and in a smaller headline, "Nationalization Orders Issued and Priests Arrested."

It is extremely regrettable that THE TIMES, which has shown such special enterprise in sending an excellent correspondent to Mexico to secure at first hand the facts in the present controversy between the State Department and the Mexican Government, should fall into the error of publishing a dispatch so misleading. The facts, briefly, are these:

Mexico cannot "seize" any church property, because there has been no church property since the reform laws passed in the '50s of the last century, and added to the Constitution of 1857 in 1874, by which all church property was nationalized and church and State were definitely separated.

The church has legally owned no property since that time. Occasionally the Mexican Government has discovered illegal accumulation of property, clandestinely acquired and in violation of the laws of the land. When such property, illegally acquired and held, has been discovered, the matter has gone into the courts, as in the famous "La Piedad case" in 1921. When the courts find that this property is actually held by ecclesiastical corporations or by dummies acting for them, it, of course, reverts to the national domain. So much for the alleged seizure of church property.

As to the "deportation" of priests, the Constitution of 1917, Article 130, Paragraph 7, provides only Mexicans by birth may be ministers of any religious creed in Mexico. The reasons for this legislation are derived from

the facts of Mexican history, which we need not go into here, except to mention that the historical rôle of the hierarchy has been to support every attempt of foreign intervention, including the French conquest in the '60s, when Napoleon II, with the aid of the Mexican clergy, succeeded in installing a Hapsburg Prince, Maximilian, as "Emperor."

Under the 1917 legislation the church in Mexico should nine years ago have removed from the active professional service the Spanish priests functioning. It did not do so, and despite repeated admonitions on the part of the authorities has maintained them. The law is now merely being enforced.

To say, therefore, as your dispatch does, that these functioning priests were "taken into custody without warning and time was not even allowed them to get their overcoats," is obviously ridiculous. These priests had nine years, in which to get their overcoats.

It should be understood in this connection that this delay on the part of the Government has been due to a hope that the clergy in Mexico would cease obstructionist tactics against every Government program, against public schools and against the Government's efforts to ameliorate the lot of the peon and city worker. Unlike the Catholic clergy in the United States, who rigidly support constituted authority and are wholly patriotic and public spirited, the Catholic clergy in Mexico have consistently fought the constituted authorities, neglected their spiritual mission and been the uncompromising foes of all progress—spiritual, political and social.

ARTURO M. ELIAS,  
Consul General of Mexico.  
New York, Feb. 13, 1926.