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MEXICO BEFORE THE

WORLD: PUBLIC

DOCUMENTS AND ADDRESSES

(NEW YORK: 1927)

**THE CHURCH QUESTION**

*(Statement to the New York Herald-Tribune,  
February 23, 1926.)*

The eighth paragraph of Article 130 of the Mexican Constitution says textually:

“In order to exercise in the United States of Mexico the functions of a minister of any form of worship, the minister must be a Mexican citizen by birth.”

Priests of foreign nationality whose presence in Mexico may no longer be tolerated have, with a full consciousness of the fact, been evading this Constitutional provision. They have been repeatedly warned by the government to cease these infractions of the fundamental law of the country, abandon the ministry and take up other occupations if they desired to remain in the country. Without paying attention to these notices the priests to whom I refer have continued to exercise their ministerial functions in violation of the Constitution. With a few exceptions they also have violated Article 3, the second paragraph of which provides: “No religious organization or minister of any denomination may establish or direct schools of primary education.”

For these reasons, and without these measures implying any persecution of any church and without sentiments of antagonism to any foreigner, a government intent upon complying with its Con-

stitutional obligations could do nothing else than require those who were constantly violating the law to leave the country. In contrast with the attitude of the priests who have been expelled, there have been ministers of other faiths who, in obedience to the law, have ceased to exercise their religious functions and who have devoted themselves to other legal activities, such as teaching in the secondary educational institutions or adjusting the services of their churches in accordance with the law, without officiating as priests, and leaving the proper confessional work of their church to Mexican priests. These ministers have not been nor shall they be molested.

As always happens, when matters relating to Mexican affairs are in question, it has been sought to distort to the people of the United States the actual facts, which merely involve the simple question of obedience to the Constitution and to the laws of our country, and which do not constitute a campaign of religious persecution of a nature which naturally would be repugnant and even inexplicable to the public of a country wherein, fortunately, it is seldom necessary to regulate by legislation matters of a religious or an ecclesiastical nature, for the reason that in the United States religion keeps peacefully within the limit of its moral activities, without seeking to mingle spiritual with temporal matters and does not depart from its legitimate sphere for the purpose of meddling in political affairs.

Another distortion of the facts consists in the statement that the government has closed numerous schools in Mexico when, in reality, what has happened has been that in closing various convents, the existence of which is not permitted under the law, schools have been found operating

in connection with these convents, in opposition to Article 3 of the Constitution. These schools have not been closed, but those who conduct them have been compelled to adjust them to legal requirements.

Even had the recent public manifestation of disobedience and opposition to the laws of Mexico, given by the heads of the Catholic church in this country not taken place, the government, in pursuance of its duty to sustain the Constitution, would have proceeded as it has done, upon ascertaining that there were concrete cases of violation of the law.

But it is easily understood, when one considers the history of our country and the painful experiences which have resulted from the interference of the Catholic clergy with the pacific development of national institutions, to which the Catholic church has traditionally been antagonistic, that the exclusion from the country of all foreign priests who are not permitted to function here was necessary, especially in view of the possibility of a fresh intrusion of the Catholic clergy in temporal and political matters. The fact that they were foreigners provided the situation with even a more serious and difficult aspect.

So far as concerns the future attitude of the Mexican government toward Catholic priests or ministers of any other denomination, American citizens must be treated the same as citizens of any other country. But it must be said that the infractions of the law committed by American citizens are less numerous than those of which citizens of other countries have been guilty, for almost without exception American ministers of the Protestant denominations while in Mexico

conform to the laws and consequently are not molested. They develop the prosperity of their churches through the work of Mexican clergymen and live among us tranquilly and respected, so long as they do not preach.

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