A Shepherd to Mexico's Saints: Arwell L. Pierce and the Third Convention

National pride, local suspicion, and perceptions of insensitivity were overcome as a group of Mexican Saints were lovingly returned to the fold.

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The series of events that split the Church in Mexico and swept into existence the schismatic group known as the Third Convention began with the Mexican Revolution (1910–17) and continued through the early 1930s. Motivated by isolation, intense feelings of nationalism and pride resulting from the revolution, and a perception of insensitivity shown toward Mexicans by some Anglo Latter-day Saints, a large number of Mexican Saints became dissatisfied with the leaders chosen to guide the Church in Mexico.[1] This dissatisfaction caused a strain between the mainstream Church and these central Mexican Saints.[2] By 1936 the strain was stretched to the breaking point, and an apparently irreversible schism occurred—the Third Convention was born, taking one-third of Mexico's members from the main body of the Church.

Relationships between members of the Church in Mexico and the dissident Conventionists were filled with suspicion, acrimony, and, in many cases, a loathing reserved for only the very incarnation of evil. These antagonistic feelings remained unchanged until the Church called a remarkable man to serve as president of the Mexican Mission. From 1942 through 1946, Arwell L. Pierce carried out a persistent and inspired crusade to undo the schism and bring the Mexican Saints back into a harmonious relationship with each other and with the Church. Through patient self-effacement, spiritual commitment, and diplomatic tact, Pierce accomplished that

daunting task. He counseled with mainline members, dissident members, General Authorities, and even the prophet, President George Albert Smith. Pierce softened hearts and helped to make extraordinary ecclesiastical decisions. The direct result of his labors was a reunification in 1946, which made possible the Church's subsequent rapid growth in Mexico. The story of Pierce's ordeal and his subsequent success should never be lost from memory.

Events Leading to the Schism

The Revolution and the Cristero Rebellion. The Mexican Revolution and related intermittent rumblings lasting into the 1930s set up the initial conditions for the Third Convention. One consequence of the war was the Cristero rebellion of 1926, which disrupted the country's religious life for nine years and forced all foreign clergy, including Latter-day Saint leaders, out of Mexico. The ensuing isolation of the Mexican Saints from Church headquarters in Salt Lake City resulted in an understandable independence among them. This independence, along with strong feelings of nationalism and ethnic pride generated by the revolution, were factors that led to the impending schism.

A Change in Mission Leadership. A second significant event, independent of the revolution's effects, played into its disruptive influence by accelerating independence and pride among many—perhaps most—Mexican Saints. In 1924 the Church decided to send Mexico's much beloved mission president, Rey L. Pratt, out of Mexico temporarily to help open the Church's mission in Argentina. Before he left Mexico, Pratt empowered the Mexican leaders to act on their own, which they began to do, basing their actions on how they thought Pratt would have wanted them to function. Pratt's absence and the subsequent Cristero rebellion brought Mexican members into leadership positions at a dizzying pace. When some of these leaders asserted themselves with nationalist and prideful sentiments, they complicated their relationship with Church headquarters in Salt Lake City.

Because of the Cristero rebellion, matters changed little when Pratt returned from Argentina to take up his duties again in the Mexican mission. The Mexican government prohibited his

functioning in any official religious capacity in Mexico; thus, Pratt did the only thing he could—he empowered the members to govern themselves to a greater extent while he gave them what guidance he could, mostly in absentia from the United States. The Mexicans did, in effect, what Pratt and other missionaries from the U.S. had done—they coordinated, advised, and tried to preserve and enhance faith and brotherhood within the Church.

Pratt appointed Isaías Juárez to preside over the Central Mexico District, with Abel Páez and Bernabé Parra as his counselors. These three men brought stability and confidence to the small branches in central Mexico. The branches survived their isolation from Salt Lake City, and some even flourished. Nevertheless, Church members and leaders alike depended emotionally and otherwise on Pratt's arm's-length guidance, which he sought to provide at every conceivable opportunity.

Then disaster struck. On April 14, 1931, following an operation for an intestinal rupture, Rey Pratt died. With Pratt's death and the appointment of a new mission president, the very independence that had allowed the Saints to survive provoked severe strains in the Church in Mexico. Subsequent Church leaders in the United States were unaware of how the revolution, its aftermath, and Rey Pratt's sojourn in Argentina had affected Mexican members. The consequences of leadership decisions made during the years following Pratt's death incited dissident sentiments among many of the Church members in Mexico.

The First Convention. Antoine R. Ivins succeeded Rey L. Pratt as president of the Mexican mission. After Elder Ivins's appointment, Mexican members waited several months to see what he would say or do with respect to them. When nothing seemed to be happening,[3] a group of Mexican members under district president Isaías Juárez met on the outskirts of Mexico City—probably in San Pedro Mártir—in late 1931 or early 1932 to discuss problems such as the lack of missionaries in Mexico and the inadequacy of Church literature in Spanish. They also discussed the mission leadership. Who was in charge? What should they do? Some of the members, feeling a need to take the initiative in some action, deliberated and prayed together at this meeting, which has come to be known as the "first convention."[4]



Leaders of the Central Mexico District with the American Ambassador, J. Reuben Clark Jr., c. 1931-32. Two of the earliest native Mexican Church leaders, Abel Páez, left, and Isaías Juárez, right, faithfully guided their fellow Saints at a time when the mission president was prohibited from functioning in Mexico. Both men also served after the Third Convention Saints reunited with the Church. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.

The group determined that they would write to Salt Lake City, petitioning Church leaders for one of their own nationality as mission president—one who could both understand and represent them. This course of action seemed reasonable to them. The political situation in Mexico made it illegal for a North American to be their president. Besides, they felt that President Ivins seemed uninterested in Mexico—certainly, he had never paid them a visit or communicated with them.

The Second Convention. Beneath the surface of this petition ran a strong emotional current. Historically abrasive relations with the United States had made the Mexican Saints sensitive—even touchy. President Ivins's perceived lack of attention fanned the fires of Mexican nationalism.[5] The fact that they received no response to their petition provided additional fuel. The members met again in San Pedro Mártir to renew their request. This meeting, probably held in the early spring of 1932, is known as the "second convention."

Word of the second convention and a renewal of the original petition for a Mexican national as mission president reached President Ivins. Following the second convention—nearly a year from the time of his appointment as mission president—he traveled with Elder Melvin J. Ballard to Mexico City to meet with the first- and second-convention Saints.[6]

President Ivins's approach to the problem was aggressive. He reprimanded the members for their assertiveness, their holding of extraofficial meetings, and their drafting of petitions. Petitions of the kind they had sent to Salt Lake City were out of order, he informed them. Unlike the Mexican political system, which encourages the gathering of signatures for petitions to capture the attention of aloof public bureaucrats, in Utah such procedures were viewed as inappropriate. He softened his reprimand by assuring the members that, with the Lord's inspiration, the First Presidency would meet the Mexican members' desire for local leadership in due time. In the meantime, the Saints were obligated to support the President of the Church in his decisions and actions.

In time the strain between President Ivins and the first- and second-conventionists subsided, mostly because President Ivins returned to the United States and left them alone once again. They

seemed to set the whole leadership problem aside, carrying out their normal Church activities for the entire period of Ivins's 1931–34 administration. President Ivins did not help them, but neither did he hinder them by interfering with their programs. The silent arrangement between President Ivins and President Juárez seemed, in the short run, acceptable to all parties.

Another New Mission President. While the Mexican section of the mission remained officially under President Ivins's leadership, in actuality Isaías Juárez continued to lead the Mexican Saints as he had before Rey L. Pratt's death. Following Antoine R. Ivins's release as mission president in 1934, Church headquarters moved to meet the Mexican Saints' growing needs by appointing Harold W. Pratt, Rey L. Pratt's half-brother, as the new mission president.

Given Harold Pratt's dedication and high principles, his severe trials as a mission president seem both unfortunate and unjust. Following Mexican law, Pratt quickly registered in Chihuahua as a cleric, an action he was able to take because he was a Mexican citizen from the Mormon colonies. He proceeded to tour the Mexican part of his mission. He worked efficiently, forcefully, and very visibly in his Church position—presiding over conferences and reorganizing branches, purchasing land for chapels, and directly resolving numerous ecclesiastical difficulties. He handled many long-standing problems that Juárez had lacked the time and travel money to resolve. Pratt believed that the Saints in Mexico clearly needed a strong ecclesiastical leader, and he tried diligently to meet that need through his service.

By the early 1930s, Anglo-American Latter-day Saints could once again enter Mexico and, although not officially registered as missionaries, do missionary work there.[7] As had been done before, President Pratt called these Anglo-Americans to fill almost all the leadership positions in central Mexico. This move augmented Mexican members' anxieties about their own standing with the Anglo leadership and wounded some Mexicans' personal and national pride. They began to resent the dramatic constriction of local leaders' activities. First, President Ivins had not given the Mexican Saints much help; then, suddenly, as soon as the Anglo members returned to Mexico, President Pratt called them to most of the local leadership positions. Mexican leaders were frustrated and

confused. Tension developed between them and the mission leadership. Concerned, Pratt decided that he needed to spend even more time in Mexico. He requested that the Church divide the mission and appoint someone else to supervise the Spanish-speaking mission in the southwestern United States, thereby freeing him entirely for service in Mexico.

When the Mexican members heard that the mission might be divided, they were stimulated at the prospect of having their own mission. They did not, however, see Harold Pratt as its president. First- and second-convention rhetoric about having a "real Mexican" (*de pura raza y sangre*) as president caught hold among the members and circulated widely.

The Mexican Saints' optimism was not without reason. Missionary work had begun painfully and slowly in Mexico. However, by 1935 the Church's endeavors had gained important momentum despite past problems. Several new chapels had been built. Membership had grown substantially, reaching approximately 2,800.[8] Parts of the Doctrine and Covenants had been translated into Spanish. A new Spanish hymnal was being printed. A beautiful, modern chapel was to be constructed only five miles from the center of Mexico City. It seemed that the Church had achieved a substantial presence in Mexico.

Margarito Bautista and Ethnic Identity. But a problem—ultimately a large problem—was poised to disrupt the Mexican members. Margarito Bautista was one of the most articulate members of the Church in Mexico. Bautista, a member for many years, was an experienced leader in the Church and was an ordained high priest. He had known and admired Rey L. Pratt.[9] Bautista was an uncommonly literate man and a gifted orator who had worked to educate himself, studying English and living for many years in Salt Lake City, where he taught the Spanish-American branch's Gospel Doctrine class in Sunday School. He had observed Church government over a number of years and had done ordinance work in the Salt Lake Temple. Like many temple workers, Bautista had become an expert genealogist.[10] After 1934 he was back in Mexico helping the Mexican Saints trace their ancestry.[11]

Bautista took to heart many Book of Mormon prophecies that speak of the rise of the Lamanites. An avid scriptorian, he agreed with Rey L. Pratt and numerous other leaders that Mexican history

was inseparable from Lamanite history and that Book of Mormon promises were inseparable from both.[12] Rey Pratt had often expressed this theology to the Mexican Saints, many of whom took great pride in their mighty Lamanite ancestors. Bautista, stimulated by Rey Pratt's sentiments, decided to write a book correlating Book of Mormon teachings with the Old Testament.[13] Pratt, who was anxious to see more literature become available to the Mexican members, encouraged Bautista.[14] Even after Pratt's death, Bautista persisted, completing his manuscript in 1934.

Aside from other doctrinal problems, Bautista's book spiritedly argued that the "chosen people" were the Latin Americans, particularly the Mexicans. "Gentiles"—by which he meant those who were of the House of Israel not by descent, but by adoption—were considered second-class. Bautista argued that being a son or daughter of Israel by direct descent (which he interpreted as being of Native American lineage, however diluted) was decidedly better than being adopted (which he thought included most Anglo-American members).

Bautista proudly presented his manuscript to the authorities in Salt Lake City, expecting the Church to publish it. The Church, of course, could not publish the book. Bautista was stunned by the rejection. He took the book back to Mexico, where it was published by Apolonio B. Arzate, a member who owned a printing establishment in Mexico City.[15] It quickly became a bestseller among Mexican Saints.

Harold Pratt, as mission president, crusaded to delegitimize the book in the minds of the Mexican members, many of whom read it with a passion reserved for scripture. A missionary who served in Mexico at the time remembers that many Saints preferred to quote from Bautista's work rather than from the Book of Mormon.[16] As Harold Pratt continued to try to diffuse the book's divisive influence, his relationship with Margarito Bautista deteriorated markedly, and their discussions were often agitated. The more heated their conversations became, the more interest in the book was generated.

It was difficult for members of the Church in the United States to understand the Bautista book's popularity among Mexican members and to comprehend the Mexican members' concern with

national pride and personal dignity and their preoccupation with ancestral heritage. Since the turn of the century, few Americans had been interested in those subjects. They had forgotten their own postrevolutionary nationalism that had followed the U.S. Revolutionary and Civil Wars. A similar nationalism was very much alive in Mexico. Suspicion, distrust, and prejudice had to be overcome each time a new missionary or Church leader from the U.S. entered Mexico. Remarkably, however, the Mexican Saints always grew to love the foreign missionaries.

Margarito Bautista and his book fit perfectly into this growing Mexican nationalism. Mexican members thrilled as they read Bautista's interpretation of Book of Mormon promises to them—giving them a proud past and a glorious future. Bautista became a kind of charismatic leader among them.

Bautista called for an ethnic Mexican mission president as a lineage right for his people. Otherwise, he said, the actions of authorities in Salt Lake City could only be interpreted as an attempt to stunt Mexican leadership opportunities. A good many members were persuaded that Bautista was right. In the words of one Mexican Saint, "It would be a most splendid privilege for our people to have a man of our own race to govern the affairs of the Church in this choice part of the continent."[17] Others added:

> If the Church does not give us the means as well as open the way for us to officiate with authority among our own people for their complete development, we will never be able to carry forth this important work for ourselves and our people. . . . It will be impossible for us to make the necessary progress without this leadership opportunity.[18]

Once people knew that Harold Pratt's recommendation to divide the mission might be acted upon, predictions about what would happen diverged sharply. An embittered Bautista and those who joined with him said that the division would bring no good to Mexico because of the certainty that the Church, out of mean-spirited racial prejudice, would not appoint a Mexican as president. Others were not so sure and patiently waited to see if an ethnic Mexican would be selected. It was clear that whatever the choice, the implications would be substantial.

The Third Convention and the Schism

In April of 1936, the Church divided the Mexican Mission into the Mexican and Spanish-American Missions, with the Rio Grande forming their common border. Harold Pratt would preside over the new Mexican Mission and would arrange for new mission headquarters in Mexico City.

When the news of Pratt's appointment reached Mexico City, Abel Páez, first counselor in the Mexican district presidency, was at work. Spurred on by his uncle, Margarito Bautista, he summoned the Saints to a crisis conference, where they would once more petition the First Presidency for a *real* Mexican mission president.

Sensing his people's mood, district president Isaías Juárez was alarmed by the preparations for this third convention. He knew that this would be no simple petition: quite a few Mexican members were determined to settle for nothing less than a Mexican leader, however unusual such a demand was for Latter-day Saints, who prize obedience to prophetic guidance. Juárez also sensed accurately the mood of the Church authorities: he knew that no Mexican mission president would be forthcoming. Although he was as frustrated as many other Mexican Saints, Juárez realized that another convention would ultimately part ways with the Church. He refused to align himself with the convention and worked to undermine it. He met repeatedly with Abel Páez, trying to dissuade him, and he counseled Harold Pratt. Despite all efforts to dissuade him, Abel Páez ultimately agreed to preside over the convention. With Bautista's help, he set out to organize the proceedings.

The leaders of the convention decided to form their own congregations, which became known as the Third Convention. Margarito Bautista set apart his nephew, Abel Páez, as the group's president.[19] With a note of finality, Páez claimed all responsibility for the Third Convention and its activities, stating publicly his determination to implement its decisions, which, he felt, were too beneficial and necessary to the Church's well-being to be ignored any longer.[20] If "proper channels" were closed, he would work outside those channels. With equal finality, Church leaders in Salt Lake City carried out their plan to divide the Mexican Mission and invest Harold Pratt with stewardship over the Church's activities in Mexico. The

new mission president entered Mexico with his wife and five children to begin a long and difficult ordeal.

In the initial years following the schism, Harold Pratt and Church leaders in Salt Lake City worked diligently to bring the dissident group back. By May of 1937, however, the breach was absolute. With no possibility of reconciliation in sight, President David O. McKay, then a counselor to President Grant, became uncharacteristically frustrated and urged that excommunication procedures against Third Convention leaders begin.[21]

On May 6, 7, and 8, 1937, Church courts were convened in San Pedro Mártir, and Conventionist leaders were excommunicated for rebellion (having worked against the mission authorities), insubordination (having completely disobeyed the orders of mission authorities), and apostasy (having failed to recognize the Church's authority).[22] The Conventionist leaders left the Church, along with about one-third of Mexico's members. They took possession of some chapels, furniture, and Church records.

But unlike most splinter groups, most Conventionists refused to part ways doctrinally with the Church or to do other than revere the prophet in Salt Lake City. So when, within weeks of the schism, Margarito Bautista challenged the Convention's leadership on a number of doctrinal points, including his desire to incorporate polygamy and the united order into Third Convention activities, he was thrown out.[23] Bitter and scornful, Bautista left the Third Convention to its "darkness" and went to Ozumba, Mexico, where he set up his own colony, the "New Jerusalem."[24] While Bautista's group was not totally isolated (he kept in touch with other fundamentalist and apostate groups such as the Church of the Firstborn), Conventionists and non-Conventionists alike largely rejected him.

Thus the Third Convention continued without Margarito Bautista, polygamy, the united order, or any other doctrines radically different from the mainline Church.[25] To underline their intention to remain doctrinally orthodox, the Conventionists called themselves The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Third Convention). They organized Sunday Schools, conducted sacrament meetings, established "mutual improvement associations" (MIA) and functioned very much like normal Latter-day Saint congregations.

They blessed infants, baptized children, and ordained men to the priesthood. They sent out missionaries and trained their youth in public speaking—an art especially appreciated in Mexico. They launched an ambitious building program. Donating land, labor, and capital, the Conventionists constructed at least six new meetinghouses and, in accordance with Latter-day Saint custom, dedicated them to the Lord.

The Third Convention also wanted access to religious literature. Some of its members learned English—an effort that at first seems strange, since Conventionists were openly nationalistic. However, anxious to learn more about the gospel and impatient with the slow pace of Salt Lake City's translation work, they wanted to be able to read more than the thirty (out of 136) sections of the Doctrine and Covenants that had been translated into Spanish under Antoine R. Ivins, and they wanted to read and study James Talmage's *The Articles of Faith* and *Jesus the Christ,* both noncanonical but fundamental LDS works. They began translation of several sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, but these were never completed.

The Convention continued to exist for ten years, from April 1936 to May 1946, growing and progressing alongside mainline Church groups. While mainline members did not have an indigenous Mexican mission president, they nevertheless did receive considerable material and organizational help from Salt Lake City, and Harold Pratt worked as hard as he could on their behalf. Thus, both Latter-day Saints and Conventionists grew in stature and organization, parallel in sentiment and structure but passionately divided over who their mission president should be.

Harold Pratt was released in 1938 because of health problems.[26] He was succeeded by A. Lorenzo Anderson. Everything seemed to be stacked against President Anderson and his wife. Dissidents spread rumors about Anderson's alleged militant leadership style and about how some members of his family were said to view Mexicans as racially inferior. Whether the rumors were true or false was beside the point; they were socially significant, damaging Anderson's credibility. He managed to lead the mission for four years, treading water and holding the line. Finally, in May 1942, he was replaced by Arwell L. Pierce.[27]

The Healing Process

The Mission of Arwell L. Pierce. Arwell Pierce was a month short of being sixty years old when he entered Mexico as mission president.[28] Given his age, some wondered if he would be up to the task of holding the Church together in Mexico, a challenge that had taxed a series of mission presidents beyond their capabilities. Actually, Pierce's age may have worked in his favor; the problems in Mexico called for someone with patience, wisdom, insight, and compassion—characteristics frequently associated with maturity and possessed in good measure by President Pierce. He put these attributes and all his other skills to work to try to salvage the Church in Mexico. He was an ecclesiastically experienced man, a diplomat, and a politically sensitive leader. He developed greater understanding of the society of Mexican Saints than anyone the Church had sent to Mexico since Rey L. Pratt. Pierce's success is a story of implementation of Sermon-on-the-Mount principles and an uncommon insight into winning people's hearts and minds so that they desired to do the right things for the right reasons. A vast difference exists between the art of coercion and the art of persuasion. Arwell Pierce knew everything about persuasion and consciously eschewed coercion.

Pierce's assigned task was to bring Third Conventionists back to the fold. President David O. McKay had told him that "we don't have a divided mission; we have a big family quarrel," adding that "you are the Abraham Lincoln who must save this union."[29] Pierce got his inspiration not only from this mandate, but also from the Savior's Sermon on the Mount, "Agree with thine adversary quickly" (Matt. 5:25; 3 Ne. 12:25), and other scriptures that he cited often—for example, "And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also" (Luke 6:29).[30] So he persuaded, loved, and gathered in the Saints and former Saints.[31]

But Pierce's work in Mexico was not easy. He was not Mexican, either by race or birth. Special arrangements had to be made for him legally to serve as president of the Mexican Mission.[32] Feeling a compelling immediacy, Pierce began working enthusiastically and vigorously, changing procedures, establishing new policy

guidelines, and generally turning the mission upside down. After evaluating his missionaries, he concluded that they understood the gospel insufficiently and were teaching what little they did know ineffectively. He immediately set up a strict regimen of work and study for them, eventually winning their respect and admiration.[33]

Pierce and the Third Convention. Next he approached the Third Convention. The Convention genuinely puzzled Pierce. The more he looked into it, the more he realized that its members were energetically carrying out Church programs. The Conventionists were building chapels, sending out missionaries,[34] and teaching Latter-day Saint doctrine faithfully. Their reasons for apostasy, he concluded, were certainly not doctrinal—yet Conventionists were outside the community of the Church. As he studied the situation, he wondered how brotherhood could have decayed so completely.

During the five years since the schism, the issues had become clouded, remembrances diffused or altered, and passions changed. If Pierce could not initially see the issues involved, he had no difficulty in recognizing that the Convention's return to the Church would bring great strength to the Church in Mexico. And so, slowly and painstakingly, he put all his diplomatic skills to the task. Realizing that feelings had been hurt, he set out to heal those wounds. Although the Conventionist's initial response was antagonism,[35] that soon changed—first to respect and later to admiration, in part because Pierce met every travail with kindness and understanding.

Pierce began by attending Third Convention meetings and conferences. Slowly and carefully, he introduced himself and built friendships with Third Convention members and leaders. He even tried to assist the Convention in its own programs, inviting its members to the mission home to pass on information from Salt Lake City, giving advice when asked, and distributing recently translated Church literature.[36] And he talked with Abel Páez and his wife, with Othón Espinoza, Apolonio Arzate, Julio García, and even Margarito Bautista, all of whom had been principal leaders in the Third Convention. Always ready to listen and to understand, he extended personal hospitality and acceptance unconditionally.

After weighing all that he had heard, Pierce concluded that the Third Convention problem could have been handled better. Given the circumstances, he even thought that some of the Convention's complaints were justified.[37] Although having an ethnic Mexican mission president was the Third Conventionists' primary concern, they also wanted a building program for chapels, access to Church literature, and an opportunity for their young people to go on missions—all privileges that members in the U.S. had. They also wanted an educational system for their children like the system that the Anglo members had established in northern Mexico.

Pierce realized that he did not object to the Conventionists' goals, although one could legitimately wonder how programs to achieve them could possibly have been funded in the 1930s. On the other hand, he saw how the Third Conventionists' methods for achieving their goals had brought them trouble. Pierce did not approve of the Third Convention's rebellion and withdrawal from the Church. Because of his willingness to listen, however, disagreeing people, for the first time in nearly a decade, were discussing the issues rather than shouting about them.

In the meantime, the Conventionists had generally maintained doctrinal integrity, had done a lot of proselyting in central Mexico, and had promoted much interest in the Book of Mormon. Given all of these factors, reunification was possible and desirable. So Pierce listened, argued, lectured, sympathized, persuaded, and worked long hours. On one occasion, he met with the Third Convention committee for three days straight—culminating his many arguments with "the brethren are willing to give you everything you want, but not the way you want it."[38] Because the Conventionists had continued to accept the prophet, this oft-repeated statement softened them. Arwell Pierce loved the gospel, and he loved Mexico. He was confident that the Church could now make giant strides there, if only the members would unite.[39]

In time, Pierce's efforts began to pay off. The Convention recognized him as a friend, its leaders even asking him to speak in Convention conferences. He did so, carefully honoring their confidence in the initial stages by avoiding sensitive issues, speaking instead on "neutral" subjects such as prayer.[40] He spoke of his own desire for reunification only when such talk was appropriate. In

return, Third Conventionists began to visit mainline Church meetings, and Pierce characteristically asked them to sit near the front. In years past, when Conventionists had visited a mainline branch, the seats would empty of mainline members as quickly as the Conventionists sat down. The animosity was so high that no mainline member wanted to be seated even in the general vicinity of a Conventionist. But as Pierce welcomed Conventionists back, the members could not easily find justification for continuing to shun them.

Soothing actions were not the only methods that Pierce employed to bring the Convention around to his point of view. After the Conventionists had accepted him, Pierce began engaging them in various ways. He usually took Harold Brown, his special assistant, on his speaking engagements, often instructing Brown to give them "the word." The word was hardheaded and tough.[41] Then Pierce would follow with his "sweet, loving, come-unto-Zion talk." Thus, Brown, as the "tough man," absorbed the Third Convention's anger, and Pierce, as the "loving and understanding man," received a positive response, which he used to bring the Saints back into the fold.

Circumstances within the Convention itself aided Pierce's careful wooing of its members. Abel Páez's physical condition was perhaps most important. Páez had long suffered from a severe case of diabetes. Since he was responsible for the spiritual welfare of over a thousand people, he worried considerably. What would happen to them after he died? Pierce could see this thought weighing heavily on Páez's mind, and he began to appeal to Páez's sense of responsibility. Who was going to lead the people after he died? If the Convention was a temporary way of bringing about Mexican leadership, how would the people get back into the Church after Páez was gone? Would future generations be deprived of the Church's blessings, and would Páez want the responsibility for that? Finally, Páez began to soften and warm up to Pierce and started to think with cautious enthusiasm about reunification.

A Change in Circumstance and Attitude. Meanwhile, the focus of Church leadership in Salt Lake City was changing. In 1945, President Heber J. Grant died and was succeeded by George Albert Smith. The Church was growing more stable financially, and World War II was over, enabling President Smith to turn his attention

more fully to other nations, Mexico among them. More Church literature was in translation, and the Church was developing a stronger missionary program. More missionaries would soon be called, some of them to serve in Mexico.

President Smith especially trusted David O. McKay, now President of the Quorum of the Twelve. President Smith asked President McKay to continue on as his counselor in the First Presidency. The continued involvement of President McKay augured well for the Mexican Mission. He had enthusiastically and extensively toured the Church's operations in Mexico two years earlier. Among other things, he wanted to begin an extensive building program in Mexico and had spent time examining possible sites for chapels. During his visit, he had met, made friends with, and counseled individual Mexican Saints and had listened to their hopes and aspirations for the Church in their native land. Listening, President McKay had refrained from arguing. He had accepted their proffered hospitality gracefully, even going to the home of Third Conventionist Othón Espinosa to bless his infant granddaughter.[42] Mexican members were impressed. Conventionists were overwhelmed. President McKay's presence and concern made the Mexican Saints and the Conventionists feel that leaders in Salt Lake City cared about them.[43] If Church leaders were extending the olive branch of peace, why not respond in like spirit? So reasoned many Third Conventionists.[44]

As the Church became more attractive to the Mexican Saints, the Convention became correspondingly less so. In spite of Páez's stature, serious leadership quarrels had developed within the Convention by 1945. Some members who had previously supported Páez began to shift their allegiance to President Pierce, which seemed to him to be the first step in getting Conventionists to return to the Church.

Pierce kept up the initiative. He took Church literature to Apolonio Arzate to be printed—and then used the occasion to have long talks with him. He chauffeured Third Convention leaders in his car, talking all the while. He reasoned, argued, and pled—all the time and anywhere.[45]

Perhaps more than any other single characteristic, Arwell Pierce's self-effacing nature enabled him to deal successfully with

the Third Convention. He showed them how to contain and understand their own pride. He never claimed credit for accomplishments, but he always said, "Not I alone, but I with your help and with the help of the Third Conventionists—together we can bring to pass a great work."[46] Never vindictive, punitive, or perceptibly worried about his own place in history, he took abuse without returning it.[47] For that reason, Conventionists remembered him as "a wise man, a very good man, very diplomatic; one who knew how to deal with people of all kinds in the world."[48]

As Third Conventionists began to trust Pierce, they began to see the truth in his arguments: "I don't understand why you want a mission president of Mexican blood," he would say,

> A mission president is actually only a representative of the First Presidency of the Church. He is only in charge of the missionaries and the proselyting work. Mission presidents and missionaries only supervise branches until they are strong enough and numerous enough to be organized into a stake. What you really need here in Mexico is a stake organization,[49] the same as the Hawaiians have. A stake is an independent unit indirectly under the supervision of the First Presidency of the Church. But we cannot have a stake in Mexico until we are more united. Let's all unite under the leadership of the First Presidency of the Church, strengthen our branches and prepare to become a stake. We will never achieve this so long as we are divided and so few in number.[50]

Pierce then would drive his point home relentlessly, advising his listeners that the Church would never give the Third Conventionists a Mexican mission president while they persisted in rebellion. Their cause was hopeless. Moreover, their goal was undesirable. If they wanted Mexican leadership, they should seek a Mexican *stake president.* And in order to build a stake, they must rejoin the Church and build the kingdom in Mexico. Mexico could rapidly achieve stakehood, he affirmed, once the Third Convention returned to the Church.[51]

Given the evolving circumstances, this argument began to make sense to Convention members. Pierce supported his words with action. He got the priesthood manuals and other leadership materials translated, mimeographing some and hiring Apolonio Arzate to print others. He organized new districts under local leadership. He held leadership seminars and told the Mexican Saints

that they must begin taking care of matters on their own rather than coming to the mission president with every little problem. Conventionists began to notice that Pierce was achieving their goals. He was, in a word, a new Rey Pratt—intent on developing local leadership, not because it was required by politics of the time, but because it was the right thing to do for Mexico and its members. Pierce effectively diffused the leadership issue, which was, after all, the only genuine Third Convention complaint.

Steps to Reunification. The Third Convention was becoming increasingly unalluring to its members. Aside from its internal leadership dissension, Abel Páez's health was deteriorating. For many Third Conventionists, the central issue began to shift from "Should we reunite ourselves to the Church?" to "How can we reunite ourselves to the Church without losing our personal dignity?"

Pierce understood this dilemma and the role that personal dignity (*dignidad*) played in Mexican culture. If steps to rejoin the Church were too humiliating for the Conventionists, the resulting loss of dignity would be so unredeemably devastating that they would not be able to function in the Church. Strong and faithful members who also happened to be Conventionists—and their descendants—would be lost to the Church forever. Pierce energetically sought to avoid that loss, "even if some extraordinary measures have to be taken . . . as far as the Church is concerned."[52] He convinced the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve that, in this case, extraordinary measures were both called for and justified.

Perhaps Arwell Pierce's crowning achievement was his initiation of an ecclesiastical review of Conventionist leaders' excommunications. He persuaded the First Presidency to overturn the excommunications, thereby nullifying the original disciplinary councils' decisions. In April 1946, the First Presidency changed the excommunications to disfellowshipment, a less severe sanction that made the Conventionist's reentry into the Church much easier.[53] This decision was no doubt influenced by the First Presidency's view that the Church's trouble in Mexico seemed more like a "family quarrel" than apostasy.[54] In any event, the change from excommunication to disfellowshipment meant a lot in terms of *dignidad.* Most conspicuously, Third Conventionists did not have to be

rebaptized to come back into the Church.[55] Less obviously, it implied that the Church recognized that circumstances had changed, allowing for a different outcome in the Third Convention episode. All these factors smoothed the path to reunification.

The Church made another move that allowed Third Convention members who had been baptized without Church-acknowledged authority to preserve their *dignidad.* They were told not that they had to be "rebaptized," which would ordinarily have been the case, but rather that a "restitution" or "ratification" of their baptisms would have to be made. Whether it was called rebaptism, restitution, or ratification, the effect was the same: members were rebaptized by those holding the proper priesthood authority. But the softer terminology preserved *dignidad,* as did the fact that Pierce himself performed most of the rebaptisms.[56]

Pierce tried in other ways to help Third Convention leaders preserve their *dignidad.* He explained that by rejoining the Church, the Third Conventionists were not "selling out" on the idea of Mexican leadership—they were taking steps toward it. After the reunification, Pierce argued, the Church in Mexico would develop rapidly, and thereafter a stake would be organized with local leaders presiding over it. Pierce's reasoning enabled the Conventionists to feel that the Third Convention had made its point and that its goals were being achieved.

President George Albert Smith's 1946 visit to Mexico was another important milestone toward unity in Mexico. Pierce had argued long and hard for this visit. When he first broached the subject with President Smith, the President turned to J. Reuben Clark, then his counselor in the First Presidency, and said, "You haven't been down there for a while; why don't you go."[57] President Clark responded by suggesting that they think about it and make the decision later. President Clark, remembering his own memorandum to the Mexican Saints nearly ten years earlier[58] and seeing the wisdom of President Smith's personal visit to Mexico, joined Pierce in persuading him to go.

Church members and Conventionists alike were immensely proud and honored to receive the man all Saints recognized as prophet, seer, and revelator. During President Smith's visit to the Tecalco conference, the home of the Third Convention, members

spread flowers along the lane leading into the chapel and stood on each side in long lines, singing "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet," as the president walked along the flower-strewn path.[59] Many voiced the opinion, "He looks like a prophet; he acts like a prophet; he talks like a prophet; he is a prophet."[60]

Despite his illness while in Mexico, George Albert Smith's visit was a striking success. People pressed in from all sides wanting to shake his hand or just to be near him, and they were thrilled that he would sit at their table and share their food.[61] Of course, many also wanted to receive him in their homes. He accepted the Mexicans' hospitality graciously, as had David O. McKay three years earlier.

The Reunification

The Mexico City conference over which President Smith presided saw approximately 1,200 Third Conventionists return to the fold. Tension was high as the conference began. No one was sure what President Smith might say. He might speak in a condemning tone, chastising Third Conventionists, as other Church leaders had done. He might point an accusing finger. He did none of these things. His love and kindness soon dispelled all anxiety. Harold Brown, who translated for President Smith on this occasion, said that as the President spoke, the tension eased and people relaxed and began to smile and respond to his words. Brown remembered the occasion as a most extraordinary one.[62]

The prophet spoke in both the morning and afternoon sessions, stressing the need for harmony and unity. The Third Convention choir, comprised of more than eighty voices, provided the music.[63] President Smith asked Abel Páez to speak to the congregation. The Third Convention leader expressed his joy at being able to return to the Church and his happiness about the work that would now be accomplished. Pictures were taken, and an article of considerable length, along with the pictures, was published in the *Deseret News.*[64] Obviously, the Third Convention's return to the Church was an important and happy event to nearly everyone.

However, a few malcontents were not satisfied. Some accused the Church of giving Páez $25,000 to betray the Third Convention.[65]



Third Convention leader, Abel Páez, speaking at the 1946 reunification conference. Given the opportunity to speak by President George Albert Smith (to the left of Páez), Páez expressed his joy at returning to the Church. President and Sister Arwell L. Pierce of the Mexican Mission are seated next to President Smith. President Pierce was instrumental in bringing together Conventionists and mainline members. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.

Others, echoing Margarito Bautista, accused Páez of delivering the sheep of Israel to the Gentiles.[66] Margarito Bautista and his own group remained in Ozumba, appearing only occasionally to hurl epithets—"Gentiles! Sons of Egyptians! Fathers of obscurantism!"[67] Some Anglo members in Mexico were also upset, feeling that Pierce had soft-pedaled the seriousness of the Third Convention's actions and had gotten its members back into the Church on false pretenses.[68]

Be that as it may, the Conventionists came back, and Pierce, making good his declared intention of developing local leadership, put people to work right away. By special permission of the First Presidency, on June 19, 1946, he selected and organized a *Comité de Consejo y Bienestar* (Committee of Counsel and Well-Being). Guadalupe Zárraga, Abel Páez, Bernabé Parra, Apolonio Arzate, and Isaías Juárez—strong leaders with highly diverse backgrounds—were called to serve on this committee.[69]

Zárraga, Harold Pratt's confidant whom he had sent literally to spy on a Third Convention meeting, had remained faithful to the mainline Church through the troublesome years. Parra also had continued loyal to Church authorities, even though he had been excommunicated for moral infractions unrelated to the Third Convention.[70] He had recently been restored to full membership. Páez and Arzate were, of course, former Convention leaders. Isaías Juárez, the former district president of central Mexico, had become inactive during Harold Pratt's presidency.[71] First, Juárez had been exiled to Guatemala for political activities,[72] but then, in keeping with his leadership talents, he had returned to Mexico to help found his country's national farmworker's union (*Confederación Nacional Campesina*).[73] That effort and his work with the Mexican federal government's agrarian department had kept him traveling virtually every Sunday.[74] Frustrated with Anglo leadership in the Church in Mexico, he had sought other outlets for his talents but had kept in close touch with many Church members.

As different as these men were, they now came together in a new spirit of brotherhood and worked harmoniously in the Church. They counseled and advised the mission president, assisted in branch and district conferences, and worked in every way possible to prepare Mexico for the organization of a stake. They were also aided by Narciso Sandoval of the Puebla region, one of Mexico's

great missionaries, who had done everything for the Church except support the Anglo-American leaders sent to Mexico. Later, when he was in his fifties, Sandoval served still another mission for the Church.[75]

Many problems remained following the reunification, of course, but all of them were overshadowed by two facts: the members were together again, and they shared a buoyant optimism about the future.

One Fold

In 1946, the Saints in Mexico, brought together by the reuniting of the Third Convention with the Church, began to learn to work together, regardless of ethnic origin—retaining their individuality, yet conflicting less in their perceptions of the world than they had ten years earlier. Arwell Pierce, a U.S. citizen, was the successful president of the sorely tried but newly united Mexican Mission, accompanied by over forty-five missionaries from the U.S. Moreover, gifted Mexican leaders like Isaías Juárez, Abel Páez, Julio García, Bernabé Parra, Apolonio Arzate, Guadalupe Zárraga, Narciso Sandoval, and Othón Espinoza were faithfully serving the Church, as were several Mexican missionaries. Almost everyone was pleased.

Fifteen years would pass before the new vineyard matured; the first stake in Mexico was not organized until 1961, sixty-six years after the organization of the first stake in the Mormon colonies at Colonia Juárez in 1895. The new stake president was Harold Brown, a Mexican national of Anglo descent. Brown, raised in the Mormon colonies like so many previous Church authorities in Mexico, was cast in the mold of Rey Pratt and Arwell Pierce. He quickly opened up leadership opportunities for his Mexican brothers. Brown chose Julio García, a former Conventionist leader, as his first counselor. Gonzalo Zaragoza served as second counselor and Luis Rubalcava as clerk. The stake presidency reflected the feeling of brotherhood that had developed among the Saints in Mexico.

In 1997 this feeling continues. Today, more than half of the Church's members reside outside the United States. Approximately 18 percent of these live in Mexico. In 1997, Mexico has nearly

800,000 members, 152 stakes, 47 districts, 18 missions, a temple in Mexico City, and a second temple planned for northern Mexico. About 1 in every 125 Mexican citizens is a member of record. Moreover, Mexicans by birth and race preside over almost all the stakes, wards, missions, districts, and branches and serve as missionaries, not only in Mexico, but throughout the world. Leadership in Mexico, which started to come of age in the 1930s, has now matured; the Church there, despite intense growth pains, is now stable and thriving. This blessing is a direct result of the efforts of Arwell L. Pierce, who, exercising his stewardship with diplomacy and love, became a shepherd to the Mexican Saints.

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NOTES

An abbreviated and popularized version of the Arwell Pierce story has been published as "A Diplomat's Diplomat: Arwell Pierce and the Church in Mexico," in Bruce Van Orden, D. Brent Smith, and Everett Smith Jr., eds., *Pioneers in Every Land: Inspirational Stories of International Pioneers Past and Present* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 113–24.

[1]For an extensive discussion of these points, see F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987). I am grateful to Elizabeth Hernández for her early research on these matters as reported in LaMond Tullis and Elizabeth Hernández, "Mormonism in Mexico: Leadership, Nationalism, and the Case of the Third Convention" (August 1976), unpublished.

[2]The Anglo-American Mormon colonies in Chihuahua and Sonora provided an excellent reservoir for trained Church leadership to serve in central Mexico. Despite the years of Church service of these Anglos, many central Mexico Saints did not believe that these qualifications were sufficient. They wanted leaders of their own "flesh and blood" (*de pura raza y sangre*).

[3]President Ivins had first turned his attention to the Spanish-speaking members in the southwestern United States, who were also under his jurisdiction.

[4]Sources of information on the first convention include:

a. Harold Brown, oral history interview by Gordon Irving, copy of transcription from tape, Mexico City, 1973, Oral History Program, Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 31–42 (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

b. Julio García Velázquez, oral history interview by Gordon Irving, copy of transcription from tape, Mexico City, 1974, Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives, 4–34.

c. Cruz González de la Cruz, oral history interview by Gordon Irving, "Interview, Puebla and Atlixco," typescript, Puebla, Mexico, 1974–76, Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives.

d. *Informe General de la Tercera Convención,* Mexico, 1936, Historical Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

e. Santiago Mora González, oral history interview by Gordon Irving, magnetic tape, Puebla, Mexico, 1974, Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives, Spanish, translation by the author.

f. Santiago Mora González, interview by author, Puebla, Mexico, 1975.

g. William Walser, oral history interview by Gordon Irving, typescript, Salt Lake City, 1973, Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives, 26–27.

[5]"That the white race is our tutor we do not deny, but it is also true that at some point in time our tutor, by a humanitarian act, must set us free to develop our own selves. . . . The success or fruits of sixty years of our Church's labor among us cannot be recognized until the moment that it [the Church] has sufficient faith to confer upon us the responsibility of guiding our own destinies for the development of our spiritual life and the redemption of our people." *Informe General,* 20, translation by the author.

It is now commonplace throughout the world that ethnic groups undergoing rapid value changes (such as rural Mexicans adopting a new religion of hope and expectation) tend to seek equality in both form and substance with their associates. They tend to develop an extreme sensitivity to their dignity and personal worth, and they struggle for the day in which others will respect them as much for what they hope to become as for what they are. These are some of the new conditions that contribute to a rejection of paternalism, actual or implied. Almost all forms of cultural, social, or economic dependency and, in general, any position that may imply "the rear seat on the bus" are repudiated.

[6]Melvin J. Ballard, report on his trip to Mexico, *Deseret News,* "Church Section," March 19, 1932, 2.

[7]In 1912, during the Mexican Revolution, the Anglo-American Mormon colonists left Mexico. Five of the original seven colonies were abandoned. However, by 1917, colonists were reentering Mexico, some permanently. Many of those called to serve in Mexico in the 1930s were originally from the Mormon colonies or were descendants of colonists. They had strong ties to Mexico and spoke Spanish.

[8]The figure is an extrapolation. Official membership records for the mission before it was divided show the following: 1933, 4,045; 1934, 4,219; 1935, 4,245; and 1936, 4,317. For 1937, the year after the division, the figures show 2,854 for Mexico. Assuming constant ratios between the Mexican and United States sections of the mission before division, Mexican membership in 1935 would have been approximately 2,800.

[9]Information on the relationship between Rey L. Pratt and Margarito Bautista derives from García Velázquez, interview, 15.

[10]Walter Ernest Young, oral history interview by Gordon Irving, typescript, Provo, Utah, 1973, Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives, 33.

[11]Both Julio García Velázquez and William Walser state that the First Presidency sent Bautista to Mexico to train Mexican Latter-day Saints in genealogical matters. While some General Authorities may have encouraged Bautista, I do not know that he was directly commissioned to do this work. It is more likely that he was doing it on his own, due to his intense interest in genealogy, although Walser does state that Harold Pratt objected to Bautista's "being sent." García Velázquez, interview, 60; and Walser, interview, 24.

[12]Mary Pratt Parrish, oral history interview by Gordon Irving, typescript, 1974, Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives, 19.

[13]The book is lengthy, including pictures and maps. Margarito Bautista, *La Evolución de México: Sus Verdaderos Progenitores y Su Origen y el Destino de América y Europa* (Mexico City: Talleres Gráficos Laguna, 1935).

[14]García Velázquez, interview, 60. In addition, we learn from reading Rey L. Pratt's writings in "The Restored Gospel" that Pratt was fascinated by the possible connections between Native Latin-Americans and the peoples of the Book of Mormon. In his writing, Pratt speculated on these connections, closely paralleling some things that Margarito later wrote in his book. In 1927, Pratt began sending a monthly newsletter to Mexico that he entitled *El Evangelio Restaurado (The Restored Gospel),* drafting most of the newsletter himself. Several issues are preserved in the LDS Church Archives.

[15]García Velázquez, interview. In addition, the title page of Bautista's book bears the name of Apolonio Arzate as the printer.

[16]Andrés González Jr., interview by author, Provo, Utah, January 12, 1976.

[17]Enrique González, quoted in *Informe General,* 18, translation by the author.

[18]*Informe General,* 18.

[19]Arwell L. Pierce, interview by Karl Young, magnetic tape, El Paso, Texas, February 22, 1962, Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. I know of no discussion about people's perception regarding Bautista's authority to set apart anyone for any calling.

[20]Mexican Mission Historical Record, April 22, 1936, LDS Church Archives. Entries for May were placed on this date.

[21]Antoine R. Ivins to Harold W. Pratt, February 25, 1937, Antoine R. Ivins Papers, LDS Church Archives. In November of 1936, Elder J. Reuben Clark Jr. prepared a carefully written letter that was read in all the Mexican branches still affiliated with the Church. Elder Clark was a logical choice for this assignment, since he had lived in Mexico as U.S. ambassador from 1930 to 1933. The Mexican Saints knew and respected him. In the letter, Elder Clark explained that the people who had signed the convention's petition were entirely out of order and that the mission president was not the representative of the members to the President of the Church, but rather of the President to the members. He further stated that a mission president should be acquainted with all the Church's procedures in order to prevent disruption and disorder and that (at that time) none of the Church's missions were presided over by any other than men who had grown up in the Church. He went on to say that the Mexican Saints already had an unusual

number of their own people in responsible positions; that if the President of the Church ever felt inspired to do so, he would appoint one of their number to preside over them; that the Mexicans were not exclusively (among Latter-day Saints) of the blood of Israel; and that Mexican and other American Saints were from the same family (that of Joseph) and all of the Book of Mormon's promises applied as well to one people as to the other. For a summary of the Clark letter, see Antoine R. Ivins to Harold W. Pratt, October 27, 1936, Ivins Papers, LDS Archives. For extended background discussion, see Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico.*

[22]The minutes of the proceedings are found in the Mexican Mission Historical Record for May 6, 7, and 8, 1937.

[23]Brown, interview, 33–34. Brown states that Margarito Bautista felt himself to be the logical choice for mission president before the Convention split with the Church. Bautista did not like being passed over by Church authorities. (Bautista thought, since he was a high priest and Harold Pratt "only" a seventy, that Pratt was of "lower rank.") His continued jockeying for leadership after the schism may have proved to be an insupportable challenge to Third Convention leaders who were, after all, just then in a difficult process of organization. This view, however, must be balanced by the minutes of the initial Third Convention meeting, which state that Margarito Bautista turned down a proffered nomination for mission president (*Informe General,* 18–19). See also Mora González, interview by Gordon Irving; Walser, interview, 27; Brown, interview, 27; 86; and García Velázquez, interview, 14.

[24]Eran A. Call, oral history interview by Gordon Irving, 1973, copy of transcription from tape, Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives.

[25]"Doctrinal purity" was a goal of the Third Convention from the very beginning. See Mora González, interview by Gordon Irving; and García Velázquez, interview.

[26]Harold W. Pratt, Journal, August 6, 1938, LDS Church Archives. Pratt had suffered from chronic appendicitis since April 1937, and in December 1937, he submitted to an appendectomy. Shortly after recovering from this operation, however, he began suffering from what he called "kidney colic" and eventually had to have a kidney removed. He was released when he returned to the United States for that operation.

[27]See also Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico,* 150.

[28]Pierce was born June 8, 1882, in Glenwood, Sevier, Utah. He married Mary Brentnall Done on October 2, 1907, in the Salt Lake Temple, and he died October 23, 1967, in Americus, Sumter, Georgia. AncestralFile, 4.17, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. At the time of his mission call he was residing in El Paso, Texas.

[29]Pierce, interview.

[30]Pierce, interview.

[31]Arwell Lee Pierce, "The Story of the Third Convention," typescript, LDS Church Archives, 1.

[32]I do not know the exact arrangements that made it possible for Pierce to serve in Mexico as mission president—only that Pierce took great care to work them out "properly." The Third Conventionists had previously hired a Salt Lake City lawyer to look into Harold W. Pratt's military training service at Utah State Agricultural College in Logan, Utah. They then attempted to use this information

as a basis for getting Pratt expelled from Mexico. Mexican authorities would not accept their argument, however, because Pratt was a bona fide Mexican citizen—a condition they considered not to have been destroyed by obligatory military training at an American university. But Church authorities in Salt Lake City felt certain that if Conventionists found out that Pierce was born in the United States they would try to use this information to have him expelled from Mexico. A. Lorenzo Anderson to Arwell Pierce, April 16, 1942, Ivins Papers. There was some irreverent speculation about Pierce paying *mordidas* (bribes) and J. Reuben Clark's subsequent disgust about any talk of bribes. Ami Lorenzo Anderson, oral history interview by Gordon Irving, typescript, Salt Lake City, 1973, Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives, 103.

[33]Mexican Mission Manuscript History, quarter ending March 31, 1943.

[34]The Third Convention had about 1,200 members, fifteen functioning branches, six constructed chapels, and a small corps of missionaries. García Velázquez, interview.

[35]Brown, interview, 34–35.

[36]Pierce's immediate predecessor, A. Lorenzo Anderson, had refused to give the Third Convention any literature. In a letter to Anderson, Antoine R. Ivins had confirmed the perceived correctness of this hardline approach to dealing with dissidents. Antoine R. Ivins to A. Lorenzo Anderson, July 3, 1939, Ivins Papers.

[37]Brown, interview, 34.

[38]Pierce, interview.

[39]Some American members vigorously objected to Pierce's efforts, even accusing him of deceiving David O. McKay into believing that the Conventionists had not apostatized from the Church. Walser, interview, 28.

[40]See, for example, the Mexican Mission Manuscript History, November 30, 1942.

[41]In a district conference in Cuautla in 1946, Brown gave a speech that analyzed the ideological errors of the Third Convention, documented and based on scriptures the Conventionists themselves had been using. This major address was later published in the *Liahona* under the title "Ephraím esparcida entre los Gentiles." *Liahona* 10 (November 1947): 446–51. It formed the basis for many of Brown's speeches as he accompanied Pierce.

[42]Mexican Mission Manuscript History, quarter ending December 31, 1943.

[43]In the early days of the difficulty, David O. McKay, then a counselor to President Heber J. Grant, had taken a hardline, punitive approach to the Convention leaders. Following his return from Mexico, however, he apparently viewed things differently. He asked Antoine R. Ivins to research the Third Convention correspondence to see if there would be anything precluding the First Presidency's reconsidering, or reviewing, the cases of those who had been excommunicated. See Antoine R. Ivins to David O. McKay, March 9, 1944, Ivins Papers.

[44]García Velázquez, interview.

[45]Brown, interview, 34–36; Call, interview; Mexican Mission Manuscript History, throughout this period, with specific illustrations in the entries for the quarter ending March 31, 1943.

[46]González de la Cruz, interview.

[47]Brown, interview, 34–36.

[48]Cirilo Flores Flores, oral history interview by Gordon Irving, 1974, Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives. See also Mora González, interview by author, and González de la Cruz, interview.

[49]Harold W. Pratt had earlier spoken to the Third Conventionists about a stake, but when he reported as much to the First Presidency, they cautioned him

> about . . . promising them a stake organization or even the possibility of one of their number presiding over the mission. The privilege of their receiving the Gospel should merit their appreciation and support of those who have been sent down, appointed, and set apart to preside over that Mission. The Lord will dictate when reappointment or reorganization should be made. In the meantime it is the duty as well as the privilege of members to conform to the teachings and requirements and the ideals of the Church.

The letter was signed by Heber J. Grant and David O. McKay and entered in the Mexican Mission Manuscript History for the quarter ending June 30, 1936.

[50]This statement is reconstructed from the Mexican Mission Manuscript History, quarter ending March 31, 1943.

[51]Narciso Sandoval Jiménez, oral history interview by Gordon Irving, magnetic tape, Puebla, Mexico, 1974, Spanish, Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives.

[52]Brown, interview, 34.

[53]In February 1937, the First Presidency (Heber J. Grant, David O. McKay, J. Reuben Clark Jr.) instructed Harold W. Pratt to convene an ecclesiastical trial for Third Convention leaders. Pratt, Journal, February 27, 1937. However, the First Presidency's notification letter to Convention leaders was signed by Antoine R. Ivins and George F. Richards so that the position of the First Presidency would not be compromised in the event of an appeal. A. R. Ivins to the First Presidency, February 27, 1937, Ivins Papers; and Antoine R. Ivins to Harold W. Pratt, March 2, 1937, Ivins Papers. Pratt convened his appointed court on May 6, 7, and 8, 1937, and the court voted to excommunicate Margarito Bautista, Abel Páez, Narcisco Sandoval, Pilar Páez, Othón Espinosa, Apolonio Arzate, Felipe Barragán, and Daniel Mejía. The minutes are recorded in the Mexican Mission Historical Record for May 6, 7, and 8, 1937. A majority of those excommunicated were branch presidents; Abel Páez was a member of the district presidency.

Shortly thereafter, David O. McKay made an inquiry to Harold Pratt asking whether it would be a good idea to invite the disaffected leaders to El Paso to meet with some of the brethren there. Perhaps a rehearing of their trials could be held. Pratt, Journal, May 18, 1937. President McKay's overture seemed to suggest that if the Conventionists were willing to show a contrite spirit, the "lower" court's decision might be reversed. If the invitation was ever extended, the men did not accept it (none of them even went to the original trials) because they considered Pratt's court to have operated unrighteously. They therefore concluded that the verdict was null and void in the eyes of God. Mexican Mission Manuscript History, quarter ending June 30, 1943, also quarter ending December 31, 1943.

Pierce explains how the earlier court's decision was eventually changed by the First Presidency:

> President George Albert Smith, in a special meeting I had with him and his counselors in the First Presidency's office in April of 1946, had me read the appeal to the First Presidency of the Church translated from the Spanish into the English and, also, the Mission President's recommendation to the First Presidency about the appeal. My recommendation as Mission President was that we accept the appeal as presented and I recommended that the action taken against these men in the beginning, excommunication from the Church for rebellion, be changed from excommunication to disfellowshipment because I thought excommunication was too severe in view of all the circumstances. . . . President Smith then asked for one of his counselors to make a motion and President McKay moved that the appeal, as presented, be passed upon favorably. . . . This was passed on favorably by the First Presidency with President Pierce, by request of President Smith, voting with them. (Pierce, "Story," 4)

[54]Pierce, "Story," 5.

[55]However, all ordinances performed by Third Convention brothers while outside the fellowship of the Church were repeated.

[56]Mexican Mission Manuscript History, quarter ending September 30, 1946.

[57]Pierce, interview.

[58]See note 21.

[59]E. LeRoy Hatch, interview by the author, Colonia Juárez, Mexico, May 5, 1975; García Velázquez, interview.

[60]Pierce, interview.

[61]García Velázquez, interview.

[62]Brown, interview.

[63]*Deseret News,* "Church Section," June 15, 1946, 3.

[64]*Deseret News,* "Church Section," June 15, 1946, 2.

[65]García Velázquez, interview.

[66]Daniel Mejía, as cited in González de la Cruz, interview.

[67]Brown, interview.

[68]John Floyd Walser, interview by the author, Provo, Utah, July 23, 1975.

[69]Mexican Mission Manuscript History, quarter ending December 31, 1946. Pierce made public announcement of the action in "Anuncio de Interés a la Misión Mexicana," *Liahona* 11 (October 1946): 405, 433, and strongly urged the members to support these men in their callings.

[70]Anderson, interview, 61.

[71]Pratt, Journal, September 15, 1937; Mexican Mission Manuscript History, March 31, 1943.

[72]Agrícol Lozano Herrera, interview by author, Mexico City, May 31, 1975.

[73]Lozano Herrera, interview; García Velázquez, interview.

[74]Mexican Mission Manuscript History, March 31, 1943.

[75]Lozano Herrera, interview. See also F. LaMond Tullis, "Reflections on a Mexican Legacy," Martin B. Hickman Outstanding Scholar Lecture, Brigham Young University, March 6, 1997, 7–9.