



Rafael Monroy ca. 1913. President of the branch in San Marcos, Mexico, Monroy was executed by the army of Emiliano Zapata during the Mexican Revolution. As villages surrounding San Marcos came under attack, Monroy, a merchant and landowner, helped provide refuge in San Marcos for members of the Church fleeing the violence of the Revolution. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.

Execution in Mexico: The Deaths of Rafael Monroy and Vicente Morales

This retelling of the execution of Monroy and Morales places their deaths in the context of the religious, social class, and nationalist conflicts of the Mexican Revolution.

Mark L. Grover

Introduction

It had rained most of the night, and the air was damp. Jesucita Monroy had not slept and was out on the street early, pleading with the officers of the Zapatista army who were occupying the Mexican village of San Marcos. Her early morning appeal was successful, and the Zapatistas released her three daughters from army custody. After getting two of her daughters home, Jesucita and her oldest, Guadalupe, went to the place where two executions had taken place the evening before. Already burdened with emotion and grief, these two women began the task of moving the stiff bodies of their son and brother, Rafael, and their nephew-in-law and cousin-in-law, Vicente Morales, home to prepare for the funeral and burial. Victims of the brutality of a civil war in Mexico, these two men had lost their lives in the violence they had deplored. For many members of the family and for many friends, Rafael and Vicente became examples of faith and dedication to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For the grieving mother and sister, the possible motives for the execution were to be understood several years later, only after the pain and emotion of the event had subsided.

Few scenes in the history of man are as dramatic and disturbing as an execution. The shooting of Joseph and Hyrum Smith in 1844 is indelibly etched in the collective memory of Mormons. On July 17, 1915, seventy-one years later, Rafael Monroy, the president of the San Marcos Mexico Branch, and Vicente Morales, his

first counselor, were brought before a firing squad at 9:00 P.M. and shot by soldiers in the army of the Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata. Monroy and Morales became the first Mexican Mormons to be executed by a revolutionary army and, in the eyes of many, to suffer the fate of martyrdom.

The published descriptions of the execution by Rey L. Pratt, the president of the Mexican Mission at the time, and subsequent popular recounting of the story portray the event primarily in terms of religion and faith. I suggest that, although religion played a part in the chain of events that led to the shooting, these events must also be examined in the context of the political and social environment of the time. A rejection of Catholicism by the two men was a component of the story, but the middle-class status of Monroy; his relationship to citizens of the United States, both Mormon and non-Mormon; and his apparent support of the opposing revolutionary army were equally important ingredients. The fact that violence in the Mexican Revolution often focused on certain professions, such as merchants, also helps to explain the tragic occurrence.

Religious history must be examined within the environment of the society in order to be fully understood. Thus an understanding of the events in religious history often requires an appreciation of various interlocking factors, of which religious persecution is only one. Placement in this context does not lessen the spiritual elements of religious history, but does increase our understanding that the spiritual does not occur in a vacuum removed from the secular environment.

Mormonism in Mexico

Mormon missionaries first entered Mexico in 1875, and a small branch was established in Mexico City in 1878. The early missionary reports encouraged Brigham Young to establish a colony in northern Mexico of members from the United States. After negotiating with the government of Porfirio Díaz, the Church purchased land in the northern state of Chihuahua, and several Mormon families moved from the United States to Mexico in 1885. The mission in central Mexico was closed in 1889 but reopened in 1901, and the earlier branches in that area were reestablished. Rey L. Pratt,

later of the First Council of the Seventy, began serving as mission president in 1907. He was energetic and enthusiastic, and his presence stimulated and vitalized the mission. Missionary activity in and around Mexico City, combined with the presence of the United States colonists in the north, resulted in a small, but important, Mormon presence in Mexico by the beginning of the Mexican Revolution in 1910.¹

San Marcos

One area where the Church was particularly successful was in the small village of San Marcos, Hidalgo, close to the town of Tula, about forty-five miles north of Mexico City. One member, Jesús Sanchez, was baptized in 1881 and remained faithful to his new religion after the missionaries left. Missionaries returned to the village on August 15, 1912, to reestablish contact with Sanchez. They stopped at the local store to ask directions, and the proprietor invited them to eat with her family. After the meal, the family gave the missionaries directions to the Sanchez home. Jesús Sanchez was a quiet man, respected in the village for his honesty and integrity. He had maintained his belief in the Mormon Church and had suffered some persecution because of his religious beliefs. Sanchez was close to sixty years old and was not in good health.²

The owner of the store was Jesús Mera de Monroy (Jesucita Monroy), the mother of four living children.³ Before moving to San Marcos, the family lived on a farm near the town of El Arenal until the father, Jesús Monroy Vera, died. The family's landlord suggested they leave the farm and helped Jesucita get a government position. In December 1902, Jesucita moved her family to the village of San Marcos, where she worked in the new job and soon opened a small grocery business. One daughter, Natalia, married R. V. McVey, a U.S. citizen, and they owned a store in the nearby village of San Miguel. The oldest son, Rafael, married Guadalupe Hernández, and they purchased a small farm on the outskirts of town. Two daughters, Jovita and Guadalupe, lived with their mother, taught school in the village, and worked in the family store. Jesucita opened her home to extended family members, and several nieces and nephews lived with the family on different occasions.⁴



The Monroy family ca. 1913. Left to right: Rafael Monroy, María Concepción Monroy (Rafael's daughter), Guadalupe Hernández de Monroy (Rafael's wife), Natalia Monroy de McVey, Jesucita Monroy, Jovita Monroy, and Guadalupe Monroy. After joining the Church in 1913, the Monroys became one of Mexico's early stalwart Mormon families. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.

Members of the Monroy family were generally well regarded in the region, especially Rafael. Guadalupe stated that “Rafael was respected in the town for his character and standing, in so much that District of Tula authorities asked that he represent the village and town and other organizations. He was consulted on various issues or questions.”⁵

Rafael was acquainted with Jesús Sanchez, and he knew that Sanchez was a “Protestant,” though they seldom discussed religion. After the missionaries’ visit, Rafael asked Sanchez about the foreign missionaries and inquired concerning his religious beliefs. Sanchez responded with a discussion of Mormonism and concluded by bearing his testimony of the gospel. Rafael’s two sisters Jovita and Guadalupe were particularly moved by his testimony and decided they wanted to investigate the Mormon Church. Sanchez gave them a Protestant Bible, and the two began to read and compare it with the Catholic Bible. They told Sanchez they desired to talk with the missionaries when they returned to the village.

Sanchez became ill in March of the following year and was cared for by his daughter and Jesucita Monroy. When he went into a coma and death seemed imminent, Jesucita persuaded his daughter to contact the Mormon missionaries and ask them to come and give him a blessing. She sent a letter to mission headquarters in Mexico City explaining the extent of her father’s illness and urging the missionaries’ visit. On March 29, Elders W. Ernest Young and Willard Huish arrived to find that Sanchez had died that morning. The family made funeral arrangements, and the missionaries stayed the evening at the home of R. V. McVey, Natalia Monroy’s husband.⁶

The following day a number of people attended the funeral. After the service, Jesucita approached the elders and “took us by the hands, and said she wanted to know more, and invited us to her home, which we gladly accepted.” The missionaries ate lunch at the Monroy home and talked about the Church with Jesucita, Jovita, and Guadalupe. That evening Rafael came by, and they all stayed up late, talking. Two days later, the missionaries revisited the family before returning to Mexico City.⁷

The two Monroy sisters Jovita and Guadalupe had the most ardent interest in the Church. Their enthusiasm was so great that for a time their mother became concerned they were

becoming “addicted” to the Church. Rafael’s interest caused conflicts with his wife; she tried to hide the pamphlets given them by the missionaries.⁸

The Monroy family attended a mission conference that was held May 24–26, 1913, in the town of San Pedro Mártir. At this conference, they met President Rey L. Pratt, and a strong bond was immediately formed between President Pratt and the Monroys. They enjoyed the meetings and were particularly impressed with the unity felt among the members. After the conference, President Pratt invited the family to his home in Mexico City, where they met the rest of the Pratt family. Two weeks later, President Pratt and Elder Young returned to San Marcos, where, on June 11, Rafael, Jovita, and Guadalupe were baptized. Elder Young described the event:

June 11 is a happy day for me. It is now three months since visiting the Monroys the first time. . . . These converts are descendants of the Otomi [*sic*] Indians, a very nice family. At 12 noon we went to a grove on the river, a beautiful place by a large cypress tree with branches that spread over the water. . . . It was interesting how I baptized Rafael, as he was a 210-pound man, but I took him into water up to our shoulders and I immersed him so quickly that he had no time to be disturbed about breathing. President Pratt was smiling about the sudden immersion when I looked at him while he witnessed the baptism from the bank of the river.⁹

The Monroys’ association with the foreign missionaries immediately attracted the attention of the villagers. The family’s rejection of the Catholic Church was noted, and many of the faithful Catholics began to pray for the Monroys’ return to the church. The local priest even directed a Sunday sermon against the Monroy family. They became the object of some harassment that included written vulgarities on a wall of their home. Rumors were spread suggesting that food sold at their store had been officially condemned and that some who had eaten it had become ill. An unsuccessful boycott of their store was attempted. Many friends of the family withdrew, and the Monroys became isolated from the rest of the community. The family’s response was increased faith and enthusiasm in the Church.¹⁰

These activities would probably not have lead to serious difficulty had Mexico not been in the midst of a general civil war. Thirty years of oppressive dictatorial rule by Porfirio Díaz between

1876 and 1910, followed by a period when his successors were unable to gain legitimate political control, had propelled the entire country of Mexico into a violent revolution. Four separate armies eventually formed around powerful regional *caudillos* (strongmen), who battled each other for political control of the country.

In the midst of this civil violence, the lives of missionaries and Church members were often in danger, as were the lives of many others. One of the goals of the revolutionaries was to diminish foreign influence and control in the country. Consequently, people from the United States and those associated with them came under increased threat of violence. The foreign Mormon missionaries had to be extremely careful about where they went and how they acted. They even held a special meeting to discuss "attitude and conduct." The mission developed a set of rules and regulations for appropriate behavior.¹¹

Members also suffered abuse. Most of the violence had little to do with their status in the Church but was the result of the instability of civil war. Elder Young reported the kidnapping of a Sister Elena Rojas of the town of Tecalco. She and her mother were held for two hours and beaten. The women were bruised but not seriously injured.¹² A few days later, men broke into the home and store of the Luz Bautista family in Tlalpan. The soldiers ransacked the store and took everything, as they had done in many other homes and businesses in the town. The missionaries were in the house at the time but were able to hide from the soldiers.¹³ Ernest Young stated, "Great suffering was experienced by the members, and sad events were reported. Towns were burned, and savage revenge was carried on between conflicting political parties."¹⁴

The violence increased to a point that the safety of United States citizens was in jeopardy, necessitating the evacuation of all foreign missionaries in late August 1913. President Pratt, prior to leaving, attempted to assign local male members to lead the congregations, hoping to ensure the continuation of Church units until the return of the missionaries. Upon hearing the news of the evacuation, Rafael immediately went to Mexico City to say good-bye. At this time, Rafael, a member of only three months, was ordained an elder and put in charge of the meetings in San Marcos.¹⁵ Later that day, Pratt left for the United States.

The next two years were difficult for the members in San Marcos but were also a period of spiritual development. The members held Sunday meetings whenever possible, and the numbers attending increased. The members had frequent visits from local missionaries and surrounding branch presidents (generally once every two weeks) to insure that everything was going well. Local leaders received letters from President Pratt in the United States instructing the members about Church doctrine and encouraging faithfulness. Several new converts were baptized, and attendance at the meetings increased from just the Monroy family to almost forty people on numerous occasions.

Rafael became well known for his energy in the cause of the Church in Mexico. As surrounding towns came under attack by revolutionary forces, members would move to San Marcos for safety. The congregation welcomed these members and did all that was possible to find them housing and jobs. Many ended up working for the Monroy family either at the store or on Rafael's farm. It became fairly well known throughout the Church in Mexico that members in need could go to San Marcos and receive help. However, many of the local villagers became concerned that the growth of the Mormon population was too great and that it threatened their own security. Some even threatened to kill Rafael for teaching doctrine contrary to the Catholic Church.¹⁶

Rafael was concerned with the plight of the expelled American colonists in Northern Mexico¹⁷ and saw the area of San Marcos as a potential new gathering place. He purchased land with his own money with the intent of saving it for the colonists. He also collected money from members for the same purpose.¹⁸

The Killing

The Mexican Revolution was essentially a regional conflict between local leaders. Originally, several armies from different areas of the country were involved. In the final stages of the Revolution, the two strongest armies—the Zapatistas, followers of Emiliano Zapata from the southern state of Morelos, and the Carranzistas (also called Constitutionalists), followers of Venustiano Carranza from the north—battled each other in the vicinity of Mexico City.

Emiliano Zapata was a small land owner whose involvement in local politics made him acutely aware of the land problems of the Mexican poor. His personal charisma, combined with an attractive political platform, resulted in his being able to recruit a large army dedicated to changing the political and social structure of Mexico.

The Constitutionals were led by Venustiano Carranza, the governor of the northeastern state of Coahuila. They were a loose coalition of northern political and military leaders, including Alvaro Obregón from the state of Sonora but excluding Pancho Villa. Their political leanings were less radical than Zapata's, but they were still concerned with eliminating the inequities that were common in Mexico. These two armies battled for control of Mexico.¹⁹

The individual armies were not strong enough to maintain continuous control of the area, and consequently small villages and towns in the vicinity of Mexico City became the battleground between the two rivals and frequently changed hands. The residents suffered greatly. Jesucita Monroy described the difficulty of surviving this type of a conflict: "It was for us a very sad life, because we were frequently obliged to witness battles, and pose (without being such) as Zapatistas on the one hand and as Constitutionals on the other, and thus we passed the space of three months."²⁰

On July 7, 1915, a group of Zapatista soldiers moved into the village of San Marcos, which had been under the control of the Carranzistas for several months.²¹ They demanded food and other supplies from many in the village, including the Monroys. Rafael obliged the troops and provided them with a steer that he helped butcher. While waiting for the hide, he observed a neighbor by the name of Andres Reyes talking with the troops. Reyes apparently harbored jealousies toward the Monroys and told the soldiers that not only was Rafael an officer in the Carranzista army, but that he also had a cache of weapons and ammunition hidden in his mother's store.

The accusation that Monroy had hidden weapons was false, but his relationship with the Carranzistas is not clear. It is doubtful that he held any position in the army, but he had shown considerable sympathy for them. Daniel Montoya Gutiérrez, who worked for Rafael, indicated that leaders of the army had eaten at the Monroy home several times, and it was this familiarity with the Carranzistas that attracted the attention of the town and resulted in the accusation.²²

Vicente Morales, a brick mason, was a member of the Church and part of the Monroy family. He had begun visiting the Monroys on January 25, 1914, as a local missionary on assignment from the branch president of the San Pedro Branch shortly after the missionaries from the United States returned home. Guadalupe Monroy described him as “a poor young man whose Spanish was limited because his native language was Otomí. . . . What he did have was a strong faith and powerful testimony about how the gospel had changed him.” He visited the family at least once every two weeks and became interested in Eulalia, the niece of Jesucita living in the Monroy home. They were married a year later on January 3, 1915. He worked for Rafael doing odd jobs on the farm and at the store.²³

Just prior to the time of Andres Reyes’s accusations, Morales had been working in the Monroy store, building a closet. Reyes suggested to the Zapatistas that this was a hidden closet where a cache of weapons could be found. Meanwhile, Rafael had returned to his mother’s house, and while he was eating, the soldiers confronted him—demanding that he open the store so they could search for the weapons. Rafael denied having stored any arms. The soldiers did not believe Monroy’s denials and continued to question him about the hidden weapons. They searched the store several times, knocking down the walls of the new closet, and found nothing. Guadalupe said to General Balderas, who was in charge of the troops, “Tear down the house if you want, but you won’t find weapons because my brother is peaceful and not a revolutionary.”²⁴

After the soldiers ransacked the store, they took Monroy, his three sisters, and Morales to a house that the Zapatistas were using as an improvised prison. When the Monroys and Morales arrived, they realized they were not the only ones being held prisoner. Several others in the town had been rounded up and arrested—most coming from wealthy families.²⁵

Jesucita spent much of the afternoon trying to influence the soldiers. She pleaded with the men:

Señores, My son is a peaceful man, he is not connected with any party, if he were do you think you would find him at home? If you want our possessions, then take everything we have, take all the money you have found, but don’t take my son.²⁶

To their demands that she give them arms, she “gave them the only weapons we had which were the Bible and the Book of Mormon, but they responded, ‘No, No, those aren’t guns! We want weapons and ammunition.’”²⁷

The soldiers tried to gain a confession from Rafael by hanging him from a tree and beating him. He told them nothing and “never showed any anger. He was always firm.”²⁸ Questioned several times during the afternoon, Monroy suffered much at the hands of the soldiers. When he was brought back to the prison, he did not look well. Guadalupe stated, “My brother’s hair was uncombed and his hands were dirty and bloody. I told him to comb his hair so he looked in his pocket for his comb but couldn’t find it. He went to a water faucet and washed his face.”²⁹ Later he saw his mother pass by and was touched: “Mother, you are like a feather in the wind, alone and dragged down by your pain because all your children are imprisoned.”³⁰

Jesucita took dinner to the five prisoners in the late evening. Before they could finish eating, soldiers came to the door and demanded that Rafael and Vicente come with them. Not knowing exactly what was happening, Rafael asked that his sister Natalia come with him, but the Zapatistas denied his request and took Rafael and Vicente from the room. Guadalupe described the scene: “Our hearts were pounding. The other prisoners looked at each other, and a profound silence filled the prison. We remained in this condition until we heard the firing of rifles and afterwards another shot.”³¹ It was a few minutes before nine. None of the family was at the execution.

After hearing the shots, Rafael’s mother rushed to the prison to find her son and Vicente dead. As she sobbed over her son’s body, the soldiers pushed her away from the scene. She was forced to return home in anguish, not knowing what would happen. She became concerned about the fate of her three imprisoned daughters.

That night seemed strange. It was a rainy evening, and the air was humid and the sky dark. The sisters remained as prisoners. Jovita was so upset that she vomited throughout the night and had to have frequent assistance. Guadalupe reported that they overheard the soldiers talking among themselves about the bravery of Rafael—that he had died “with his boots on.” Others questioned



Jesús Mera de Monroy. Jesucita was matriarch of the Monroy family, a widow, and proprietor of a small grocery store. She befriended the Mormon missionaries, and her family joined the Church during the Mexican Revolution. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.

why Vicente had also been killed. This talk was little comfort to the sisters. “Their observations were a little late. My brother had already

been killed.” That evening the soldiers butchered some sheep and allowed the blood to flow on the floor, creating a strange, terrible aura in the prison.³²

The soldiers did not allow the bodies to be removed from the place of the execution until the next morning. Jesucita Monroy’s anguish intensified:

Imagine what my suffering was to remain with my corpse lying there, and my three daughters prisoners, without permission to remove them that night, without human help, because all forsook me, even the brethren in the faith hid themselves for fear, and I could only hope for the protection of my Heavenly Father.³³

The next morning, Sunday, the Zapatistas released the sisters at seven. Guadalupe and her mother collected the bodies of Rafael and Vicente. With only limited assistance from members of the Church in the village, they took the bodies home. At three that afternoon, they held a funeral conducted by Casimiro Gutiérrez, a member of the Church. Some of the “humble” women of the town were present at the funeral “and wept with us.” The two men were buried the following day.³⁴

The next few days were difficult. The family and other members of the Church were in constant fear as soldiers threatened to kill all the Mormons. After a few days, the Carranzista soldiers returned to San Marcos, and the Zapatistas were no longer a threat.³⁵

Rafael's mother sent Rey Pratt, who was in the United States at the time, a brief description of the events. After the cessation of the fighting, Pratt returned to Mexico and visited the San Marcos Branch on December 9, 1917, for what must have been a very emotional and sad reunion.³⁶

Religious and Secular Factors

The question remains as to why the two men became victims of the Revolution. The explanations given in eyewitness accounts are not entirely clear but begin to shed light on the various factors that combined against Monroy and Morales. Rey Pratt, in his description of the event, concentrated on the religious aspects. As recorded in a 1920 conference report, Pratt stated that, although he was not an eyewitness, he received his information from the family: "I can see it just as plainly as if it were here: for I have seen it and I have heard the mother and the daughters recite the sad experience." He further stated in an article about the execution, "The circumstances attending the execution were told to the family afterwards by a soldier who witnessed them." Pratt suggested that the arrest and execution occurred because the Monroy family were members of the Church—that the Zapatistas arrested the two men because a neighbor denounced them as Mormons and specifically Rafael as "a leader of those who professed that strange religion . . . and was perverting the people and leading them off after other gods." Pratt stated that the soldiers requested that Monroy and Morales "give up their arms." (He does not mention the Zapatista pursuit of a cache of arms.) In response to this request, Rafael and Vicente gave the soldiers their scriptures (as Jesucita had done earlier, according to Guadalupe Monroy's account). The soldiers became angry and began to torture the two men. They were told all that was required was a denial of Mormonism and they would then be given their freedom. Brought before the firing squad, they again refused to deny the Church. They were allowed

to pray, and in his prayer, Rafael stated, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” After the prayer, Rafael stood up, folded his arms, and said, “Gentlemen, I am at your service.” After the execution, a “tropical storm broke over the little village, and the rain came down in torrents.”³⁷

In Jesucita’s description of the events, she also suggested that religion played some part in the tragedy. In the letter written to Pratt immediately after the execution, she described the event and then stated:

As the days pass we are finding out little by little that also in this town there were false witnesses that helped to condemn to death my son, saying that he perverted the people and taught a kind of religion, and that he was a ‘Mormon,’ and that word that they had not before heard they interpreted as some very bad thing, and hatred and ill will follow us with the stories.³⁸

Jesucita then indicated, however, that she felt the primary reason for the killings was due to Rafael’s non-Mormon U.S. connection. She stated that the soldiers came to the village “hunting the gringo”—her son-in-law, R. V. McVey. He was suspected of actually participating in the fighting on the side of the Carranzistas. McVey had left for the United States when the fighting became heavy, leaving his wife and child behind. Jesucita believed that, unable to find McVey, the soldiers had arrested his Mexican brother-in-law with whom he had business dealings and who was therefore also considered to be part of the opposition army. After explaining this to Pratt, Jesucita expressed her feelings and anger toward her son-in-law: “Please write to Mr. McVey and explain to him all that has happened, as myself and his wife cannot do it, as our hearts are very sore, that because of his bad character, my innocent sons have had to pay.”³⁹

Guadalupe Monroy makes no mention of what happened at the actual execution even though she wrote her account several years after the incident. She indicates that none of the family was present at the execution, but she does mention overhearing the soldiers talk about the bravery of the two men. Guadalupe’s account is so detailed in all other aspects of the event that it is surprising that she does not include a description of the execution. The oral history of Rafael Monroy’s daughter also does not include

a description of the execution. Daniel Montoya Gutiérrez was a young man at the time of the execution and had rushed to the scene immediately after the shots were fired. His description of the events—recorded nearly sixty years after the execution—is similar to Rey L. Pratt's.⁴⁰

The Revolution was not a coordinated effort by the Mexican people to bring about change in the political and social structure of the country. Adherents of political movements from each region of the country became involved in some way in the seven years of fighting, each group attempting to affect the outcome of the struggle in favor of their particular region or ideology. Nevertheless, in spite of the varied regional factions in the Revolution, common beliefs and goals eventually united the groups, culminating in the cessation of the fighting and the acceptance of the Mexican Constitution of 1917.

At least three of these ideologies affected the revolutionary mind-set that swayed the Zapatista soldiers and influenced their decision to execute Monroy and Morales. The most prevalent of these beliefs was that foreign influences and interests were responsible, in large part, for the social and economic deprivations of the early twentieth century. President Díaz had encouraged and favored foreign economic and financial involvement in the country, believing foreign participation to be essential and crucial in the industrialization and modernization of Mexico. U.S. investments in Mexico were three times that of any other country and well over double the investments made by the Mexicans themselves. U.S. citizens had controlling interest in 75 percent of the mines, 72 percent of the metallurgy industry, 68 percent of the rubber companies, and 58 percent of the petroleum industry. Combined foreign interests controlled 80 percent of all major Mexican industries.⁴¹

During the conflict, there were widespread anti-U.S. manifestations throughout the entire country. These nationalistic acts became important influences in the ideology of the Revolution. A pro-Mexican stance automatically meant an anti-U.S. stance. Consequently, revolutionary rhetoric and violence were directed against U.S. citizens as well as Mexicans who had dealings with Americans. These factors especially applied in the south among the followers of Emiliano Zapata, who had suffered significantly at

the hands of foreign elements. Even the Mormon colonists in northern Mexico, who tried not to take sides in the fighting and were protected from the harsher aspects of the violence during much of the Revolution, still experienced persecution and eventually became war refugees. Rafael Monroy's business dealings with his American brother-in-law, combined with his conversion to a church whose headquarters were in the United States, made him suspect in the eyes of the anti-U.S. nationalists.⁴²

Second, for many in Mexico, the Revolution had a powerful religious component. For several years, Protestant churches had been active in the country, often with the blessings of the Díaz government, and had converted many Catholics. Many Mexicans viewed the Protestant evangelical activity as anti-Mexican. These same anti-Protestant groups also believed the secularization of the Mexican government since independence in 1821 was wrong—especially in a country which had a historical tradition of the combination of church and state. Many Catholics erroneously saw the symbol of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the flag of Emiliano Zapata as an indication of his intent to reestablish the Catholic Church as the state religion. The antireligious activities of the Carranzistas in destroying Catholic churches further strengthened the perception of many that the Mexican Revolution was as much a religious as a political conflict. In fact, a Carranzista attack on a Catholic church in a nearby town probably intensified the religious conflict in San Marcos.⁴³

These feelings naturally translated into anti-Mormon activity. The soldiers in San Marcos were strongly influenced by local citizens who had been against the Monroys since they joined the Mormon Church. But the primary consideration of the soldiers was military, and the religious affiliation of the victims was of secondary importance. The Zapatista military was primarily interested in Rafael and his family because of their suspected relationship with the opposing forces. Other members of the Church may have been harassed, but none was imprisoned.

The third important element was the level and direction of social violence in the civil war. The Mexican Revolution was perceived by many—particularly the lower classes—as a class struggle. The fighting forces of the *caudillos'* armies were generally

poor peasants who took up arms and fought in the Revolution both because of a sense of duty to local leaders as well as frustration caused by years of neglect and abuse. These peasants were those who inflicted the violence.

Within this anarchistic atmosphere, the identification of the enemy tended to be as much a personal decision based on emotions and past experiences as a choice based on ideology. The middle classes of society, especially those involved in the distribution of goods and services, are often the most vulnerable victims of war, regardless of political or ideological leanings. Mexican grocers and retailers of foods, both large and small, suffered greatly because of demands placed upon them by the soldiers. More importantly, the poor people often felt that the grocers and shop owners had been exploitative and dishonest with them in the past; consequently, the poor took advantage of the lack of law and order to get revenge. When both the distribution of food and the presence of a foreigner or foreign investment were combined, the degree of violence inflicted was significantly higher.

The best-known example of this type of social violence was directed against the Chinese of northern Mexico. Brought into Mexico primarily to work on the construction of railroads, the Chinese moved away from manual labor jobs connected with the railroad and soon owned grocery stores scattered throughout northern Mexico. They were so successful that by the time of the Revolution the Chinese controlled much of the food merchandising in Sonora and other northern states. The first victims of the violence, they were attacked and their stores looted. Most fled the country. The Chinese became victims of the war because of the Mexican revolutionaries' suspicion of foreigners and their hostility towards the retailers of food products.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Rafael and Vicente and their families became victims of a conflict over control of Mexico. Unfortunately, too many factors combined against the Monroy family for them to remain unaffected by the war. First, Rafael had openly given at least moral support to the opposing army. Second, his connections with foreigners—the Mormon missionaries, the Mormon colonists, and especially his U.S.

brother-in-law—made him suspect. The town knew that he was purchasing land for the purpose of bringing the displaced U.S. colonists to the area. Third, he and Vicente were perceived as Protestants during a conflict having an anti-Protestant component. And fourth, Rafael was a merchant and fairly well-to-do. This combination of factors encouraged his neighbors to turn him in to the Zapatista army officers, who in turn made the decision to execute Rafael and his cousin because they perceived the two as threats to their revolution.

But for many, the execution is more than a story of innocent victims caught in a conflict for power in Mexico. Their story as told by Rey Pratt and retold by missionaries and members has become primarily a tale of religious martyrdom. Regardless of the interpretation placed on the motives and events leading to the executions, Rafael Monroy's and Vicente Morales's dedication and faithfulness to the gospel are unquestioned, and their story is an important part of the history of the Church in Mexico. The legacy of the faith,



Mother and daughter decorating the grave of Rafael Monroy, 1922. María Concepción Monroy and Jesús Monroy were accompanied to the graveside on this occasion by a missionary, Elmer P. Bright. For many years, members and missionaries have visited the grave and retold the story of the execution as it was first told by Rey L. Pratt. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.

strength, and resilience left by Jesucita, Rafael, Vicente, Guadalupe, and other members of the Monroy family and the San Marcos Branch are important examples to present-day members.

Although the branch of San Marcos has grown into a ward of faithful members, the small village has changed little in eighty years. The Monroy store is still open, run by descendants of Jesucita, and the graves are still decorated by family members on special days and visited by members of the Church who have heard the story of Rafael Monroy and Vicente Morales.

Mark L. Grover is Senior Librarian and Latin American Bibliographer, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. He expresses appreciation to Katy Warner Christiansen for assistance with the original documents.

NOTES

¹The best history of the Mormon Church in Mexico is F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987). For a less scholarly approach, see Agrícola Lozano Herrera, *Historia del Mormonismo en México* (Mexico: Editorial Zarahemla, 1983). See also Dale F. Beecher, "Rey L. Pratt and the Mexican Mission," *BYU Studies* 15 (spring 1975): 293-307.

²Most of the personal information concerning San Marcos and the Monroy family comes from a document written in 1934 by Raphael Monroy's sister, Guadalupe Monroy. It is a detailed, vivid, and touching account of the history of the family and the San Marcos Branch. I contacted Rafael Monroy's daughter, María Concepción Monroy de Villalobos, who gave me permission to use the document. The translation of all quotes into English is mine. Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia de la Iglesia de Jesucristo de los Santos de los Ultimos Dias de la rama de San Marcos, Tula, Hidalgo, 1934." Copies of this manuscript are available in the Archives, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; and Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

³Jesucita signed her name Jesús Mera Vda. de Monroy. Vda. is the abbreviation for *viuda* or widow and thus not actually part of her name. Mera is her maiden name, and Monroy is the surname of her husband. Throughout the remainder of this paper, she is referred to as Jesucita Monroy. Her letter to Rey Pratt, quoted in the text, is signed formally and is referred to in the notes as she signed it—Jesús Mera Vda. de Monroy. In the text and in the notes, the other Spanish names are used as they are signed or as they are referred to in the documents.

⁴Another son, Pablo, had died of typhoid at the age of nineteen soon after the family moved to San Marcos. María Concepción Monroy de Villalobos, oral

history interview by Gordon Irving, 1974, typescript, James Moyle Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives, 1-2.

⁵Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 9A. As is common in Mexico, Monroy's history is numbered with a page number on the right page only. I will indicate whether it is on the left page with an A or right page with a B.

⁶W. Ernest Young, *Diary of W. Ernest Young* (n.p., 1973), 90-91. This volume was printed primarily for family members. Copies are available at the LDS Church Archives and the Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

⁷Young, *Diary*, 91.

⁸Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 9B.

⁹Young, *Diary*, 98-99, 106-7. Jesucita Monroy was baptized on July 21, 1913, along with two other members of the family living with them. Two servants of the Monroy family were also baptized in July. Despite her initial concerns, Rafael Monroy's wife, Guadalupe, was baptized on July 28. Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 11B-12A.

¹⁰Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 11B-12A.

¹¹Young, *Diary*, 92.

¹²Young, *Diary*, 102.

¹³Young, *Diary*, 103. The members and missionaries in San Vicente were threatened with death when someone suggested that Catholicism was the only true religion and that the proof of this claim would be the death of the Mormons. Fortunately, the civil authorities in the area provided protection to the members. Young, *Diary*, 110.

¹⁴Young, *Diary*, 120-21.

¹⁵Young, *Diary*, 115; Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 19A.

¹⁶Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 22B-23A.

¹⁷Eight Mormon colonies were established in two states of northern Mexico—Chihuahua and Sonora—between 1885 and 1912. With the outbreak of fighting in 1912, the settlements occasionally were threatened by military forces passing through the area. The colonists' U.S. connections made them vulnerable, considering the antiforeign rhetoric of the Revolution, though they suffered less than other U.S. citizens in northern Mexico. Beginning in 1912, a series of evacuations of Mormon settlers from Mexico to the United States took place whenever the colonists perceived their lives to be in danger. Many would return when the immediate threat passed. In the end, however, the six smaller, less-successful settlements were abandoned. For a general history of the colonies, see Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 5-108; Blaine Carmon Hardy, "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico: A History" (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 1963); and Karl Young, *Ordeal in Mexico: Tales of Danger and Hardship Collected from Mormon Colonists* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1968).

¹⁸Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 17B, 20A.

¹⁹For information on Zapata, see John Womack Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968). For information on Carranza, see Douglas W. Richmond, *Venustiano Carranza's Nationalist Struggle, 1893-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

²⁰Jesús Mera Vda. de Monroy to Rey Pratt, August 27, 1915, LDS Church Archives. An English translation was made of the original letter and kept in the file. I used that translation.

²¹In describing the events surrounding the execution, I have used Guadalupe Monroy's and Jesuscita Monroy's accounts because they were eyewitnesses. For printed descriptions of the event, see Rey L. Pratt, "A Latter-day Martyr," *Improvement Era* 21 (1918): 720-26; Rey L. Pratt, in *90th Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* 19 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, April 1920): 90-93 (hereafter cited as *Conference Reports*); Rey L. Pratt, "I Will Make One Last Request," *Deseret News, Church Section*, December 1, 1934, 3, 8 (this is an abbreviated publication of Pratt's conference address in April 1920); Steven P. Osborne, "Affire [*sic*] in Mexico: Benjamin Parra," *This People* 4 (February/March 1983): 36-38; Annie R. Johnson, *Heartbeats of Colonia Diaz* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1972), 462-66; W. Ernest Young, "The Baptism and Martyrdom of Rafael Monroy," *Diary of W. Ernest Young* (n.p., 1973), 669-70. See also the film *And Should They Die* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1964).

²²Daniel Montoya Gutiérrez, oral history interview by Gordon Irving, 1974, typescript, James Moyle Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives, 2.

²³Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 14A, 18B.

²⁴Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 32B.

²⁵Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 32B. The wives of Rafael and Vicente were not imprisoned. Vicente's wife, Eulalia, was pregnant.

²⁶Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 32B.

²⁷Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 32B-33A. Apparently this was a common tactic and had been used by the missionaries who, when asked for guns, offered the scriptures as their only weapons. Young, *Diary*, 79.

²⁸Montoya Gutiérrez, interview, 2.

²⁹Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 33B.

³⁰Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 33B.

³¹Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 33B.

³²They were to find out later that the sheep were Rafael's and that during the evening the soldiers had ransacked the Monroy farm, taking everything, even "the bed linen." Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 34A.

³³Monroy to Pratt.

³⁴Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 34B.

³⁵Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 36B-37A; Monroy de Villalobos, interview, 1.

³⁶Pratt continued as president of the Mexican Mission until his death in 1931. For a description of his return to San Marcos, see Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 51A-52A.

³⁷Pratt, "A Latter-day Martyr," 724-26; Rey L. Pratt, *Conference Reports*, 92-93. Pratt's description of the story is supported by missionaries who worked in the area after the fighting had stopped. Elmer P. Bright, a missionary who went with the Monroy family to decorate Rafael's grave, stated in his diary on March 31, 1922, "He [Rafael] was taken from his home by a little squad of soldiers and they told him if he would deny his testimony of the truthfulness of Mormonism they wouldn't kill him." Elmer P. Bright, *Diary*, vol. 1, LDS Church Archives, 113-14.

³⁸Monroy to Pratt.

³⁹Monroy to Pratt. McVey eventually returned to Mexico after the deaths of Rafael and Vicente and reconciled with the family. For several years after the incident, missionaries traveling through the area would stay at his and Natalia's home. See Elmer Bright, *Diary*, vol. 2, 4.

⁴⁰Montoya Gutiérrez, interview, 2. It is puzzling that Guadalupe Monroy left out of her account of the execution the strong religious motives described by Pratt, Gutiérrez, and others. The recounting of the event by Pratt in his 1920 conference address was already part of the story that was being told to missionaries. Notice the following description written several years later by Elmer Bright when he described the event in a history of his missionary experience: "I will here give an account of the case I am referring to. I will write the words of President Rey I. Pratt as he spoke of the account at the general conference in Salt Lake City, in the spring of 1920. . . . I have heard the story from the lips of those who suffered the loss of their son and brother and I know this account of it to be true." Elmer P. Bright, *Life History*, part 4, LDS Archives. Most secondhand descriptions of the event are similar. It is curious that Guadalupe, though a faithful member of the Church for the rest of her life, did not chose to focus on the religious aspects of the story.

⁴¹Ramon Eduardo Ruiz, *The Great Rebellion: Mexico, 1905-1924* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), 103.

⁴²For studies on the anti-American aspects of the Mexican Revolution, see Gene Z. Hanrahan, ed., *!Abajo el Gringo!: Anti-American Sentiment during the Mexican Revolution* (Salisbury, N.C.: Documentary Publications, 1982); D. A. Brading, ed., *Caudillo and Peasant in the Mexican Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); and Fredrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

⁴³Guadalupe Monroy, "Historia," 25A. For a discussion of the religious aspects of the Revolution, see Deborah J. Baldwin, *Protestants and the Mexican Revolution: Missionaries, Ministers, and Social Change* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

⁴⁴See José Jorge Gomez Izquierdo, *El movimiento antichino en México (1871-1934): Problemas del racismo y del nacionalismo durante la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1992); Charles C. Cumberland, "The Sonora Chinese and the Mexican Revolution," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 40 (May 1960): 191-211; and Leo M. Jacques, "Chinese Merchants in Sonora, 1900-1931," in *Asiatic Migrations in Latin America*, ed. Luiz M. Martinez Montiel (Mexico: El Colegio de Mexico, 1981): 13-20.