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F. LaMond Tullis

In 1874 Brigham Young voiced his interest in taking the gospel message to Mexico. During the next two years he sent out several companies of missionaries, explorers, and colonizers. Then came missionary labors in Mexico City in 1879, the settlement of the Mormon colonies in Chihuahua in 1884 (after the arrival of the first Mormon expatriates from the United States who, because of polygamy, were fleeing federal marshals), and the subsequent reinforcement of the mission in central Mexico by both Anglo-American and Mexican missionaries. However, in 1889, because of the crisis over polygamy, the elders were called home and all missionary endeavor ceased. After the 1890 Manifesto, the Saints turned inward as they attempted to adjust to the dramatic change in marriage practice. They did not think seriously about proselyting in Mexico again until the turn of the century.

While reasons for closure of the Mexican Mission in 1889 may have seemed clear to everyone, President Anthony W. Ivins, who presided over the colonies in Chihuahua, found consequences of closure disagreeable. What success was there in a flock with no shepherd, living in an environment hostile to the gospel? Then, too, whenever President Ivins thought about the matter, he did not feel justified in the course the Church had taken with its members in central Mexico. It seemed to him “that if we convert people to the truth of the Gospel and admit them into the Church we ought to take care of them afterward, that is to say, give them all of the protection and care in our power to keep them in the path of rectitude and teach them the principles that we know will lead them back into the presence of our Father.”¹

In 1876 Elder Ivins had traveled 4,000 miles on horseback with other missionaries to take the Book of Mormon message to the Mexican people. From 1882–83 he had served as a missionary in central Mexico, and as president of that mission from 1883–84. He had firsthand experience not only of the difficulty of living the gospel in Mexico but also of the open heart and expansive spirit of the Mexican people. Besides, he never shrank from the conviction that the Church must complete its mission on the Lamanites.

While almost everyone else’s attention had been turned to matters of survival and development within his own ethnic community, Anthony W. Ivins continued to brood over the abandoned Mormons in central Mexico among whom he had many personal acquaintances. We do not know if he was preoccupied about the numerous Church members from the Indian

tribes in northern Mexico who had also been abandoned, but he did do much thinking and considerable talking about the Church's mission in central Mexico. Thus it was a fortuitous call indeed for Mexico that lifted Anthony Ivins in 1895 from his comfortable residence in St. George, Utah, and placed him in the Mormon colonies in Chihuahua as president of all the Mormons in Mexico.

For six years Anthony W. Ivins directed his prodigious energies and organizational and leadership skills to solidify the position of the Mormon in the colonies. Much was accomplished by the Saints in the colonies under Elder Ivins's able leadership.

Having worked first with the Anglo-American Mormons, in 1901 Anthony Ivins turned his attention to the other half of his calling—the native Saints in central Mexico. He laid the whole matter before the First Presidency during one of his visits to Utah for general conference, speaking not only of the lost Saints who had their right to a shepherd but also of the young men and women in the colonies who spoke Spanish and were acquainted with Mexican customs and culture. Despite the debacles of the past, conditions in the colonies now looked highly propitious. Pressures from the U.S. government had subsided. In the colonies there was a new generation of youth both willing and exceptionally qualified to take the gospel south once again. Besides, the economic well-being and good management of the colonies made possible a surplus in both money and manpower to support a new missionary endeavor. In addition, with the perspective of time, some of the heartaches experienced by the members from central Mexico who had attempted to colonize in the North had subsided. Elder Ivins felt it was a new day and the time for a new effort. The First Presidency agreed.

The man that Anthony Ivins recommended the Church select to direct the work in the south was exceptionally well trained and committed. Ammon M. Tenney had been with Elder Ivins on the first 1876 expedition into Mexico. He served two years as head of the Mexican Indian Mission (1887–89), later taking Wilford Woodruff's advice to leave for Mexico and settle in the colonies (he founded homes in Díaz and in Juárez). In the colonies, and in his numerous conversations with Elder Ivins, he also urged that the matter of reopening the mission in the South be laid before the First Presidency. When Tenney's call came, he was not particularly happy about leaving his family once again, but he willingly and enthusiastically accepted his new call to serve the Lord.

The Church attached a high degree of importance to this effort, just as it had to an earlier one 1879 headed by Apostle Moses Thatcher. Thus, arrangements were made for Apostle John Henry Smith as well as Anthony W. Ivins to accompany Ammon Tenney to Mexico City to diagnose problems within the Church and see how many of the old members could be brought back into the fold. Elder Ivins had personal acquaintance with many of the

members from his missionary days in the early 1880s. He was anxious to see them again.

The first stop was Cuernavaca, where a Mormon named H. L. Hall lived and operated a hotel. Whether for reasons of patronage or conversion, several of the Mexicans in his employ had joined the Church, and at least one immigrant family from Switzerland was very interested. The hotel afforded a base of operations as a serene location on the evening of 8 June 1901 for Apostle Smith to ordain Ammon M. Tenney a high priest and set him apart as president of the Mexican Mission. President Tenney was to be under the direct supervision of President Ivins of the Juárez Stake. But there was no doubt that his new title meant he should strengthen the Saints in central Mexico as quickly as possible.

After they took care of preliminary organization matters and were apprised by Hall regarding political affairs in central Mexico, Elder Smith and Ivins called once again on Mexican President Porfirio Díaz. While Díaz was becoming an even more controversial man in Mexico than when the first Mormons previously sought his help, there was no doubting his continued friendship with the Saints. Accordingly, having been in Mexico only two weeks, the missionary party on 17 June asked for and received an audience with President Díaz.

Apostle Smith expressed his gratitude to President Díaz and the Mexican people for their kindness and consideration in receiving the Mormons into their land. He also explained the Mormons' purpose for their new mission. President Díaz expressed great satisfaction—already the economic exploits in the north had gained the Mormons a national reputation—and wished the missionaries every success. He asked Apostle Smith to convey his warmest greeting to President Lorenzo Snow, which Elder Smith did.

Within a decade dark clouds would cover Díaz's relationship with the Church. But, in the meantime, Mormons viewed the Mexican president as their great benefactor, and on every possible occasion visiting Mormon authorities told him so: "No more heroic man stands on God's green earth . . . than the man who stand at the head of the government of Mexico, President Díaz."² Typical was the 24 November 1904 visit of Apostles John Henry Smith, Matthias F. Cowley, and Charles W. Penrose, and of Richard W. Young, Dr. Faust, John Beck, D. W. Johnson, and Hyrum S. Harris. On behalf of the Mormon colonies in Chihuahua and the entire LDS church, they congratulated Díaz on his election to a new term as president of the Republic of Mexico. In fact, in 1901 Díaz was a hero to all foreigners in Mexico. "He was half-smothered with foreign decorations, each with its appropriate scroll," says Lesley Byrd Simpson about Díaz, a man who thrived on flattery.³

While Díaz was seen as an answer to prayer by some,⁴ he was considered a tyrant by others. "It is one of the many charming inconsistencies of Mexico that Porfirio Díaz, the military caudillo and bitter enemy of Juárez, should

have succeeded the Lawgiver of Oaxaca and ruled Mexico for a third of a century as an irresponsible despot, under the cloak of the liberal Constitution that Juarez and his devoted company had fought so long to establish.”⁵

When Porfirio Díaz had marched into Mexico City to declare the end of *La Reforma* in 1876, the nation was suffering from economic breakdown and social disorder. He befriended those of wealth and influence. Porfirio’s slogan was “Bread and the Club”: bread for the army, bread for the bureaucrats, bread for the foreigners, and even bread for the churches—and the club for the common people of Mexico and those who differed with him. He had, to put it succinctly, “the virtues of a great barbarian, and he needed them.”⁶ Troublesome Indians, striking workmen, indiscreet speakers and writers, and honest bandits disappeared into the noisome dungeons of the fearful old Belén Penitentiary or were shot while “attempting to escape.” And Mexico prospered—that is, the Mexico that was advantageous to Díaz. Men of title, money, and land holdings were highly pleased; other Mexicans were not. But their voice would not be heard for another decade.

Commenting on this situation, Apostle John Henry Smith reported finding during his two-week stay in central Mexico a “gentle and considerate people . . . who had been crushed in the past and the years of serfdom under which they have labored for so many years has killed to a great extent their spirits.”⁷ Elder Smith, however, did not recognize Porfirio Díaz as part of the problem. The Apostle was resolute in his conviction that the time was not far distant when the natives of Mexico would “enter in at the door designed by their Maker, and would be engaged in building temples to the Lord.”⁸

Apostle Smith and the other missionaries were perhaps surprised and no doubt pleased at finding so many members of the Church in central Mexico who had maintained their testimonies during the long interregnum. He had conversed with some of the old members who had been baptized as far back as 1879 during the Thatcher mission. Elder Ivins himself was “surprised at the thorough understanding both men and women seemed to have of the doctrines and principles of the plan of redemption.”⁹

In spite of these positive indications, when Elders Ivins and Smith returned to their homes, leaving President Tenney to revitalize the missionary work and institutionalize the Church in Mexico City and environs, there was no doubting the magnitude of the task at hand. As most of the members from the early days originally had been Protestants, it was understandable that in the absence of contact with the Church they would introduce many Protestant ways into their worship. Because Mormonism is low on ritual, anything “different” that smacks of sectarianism is unnerving. Certainly, for the most part, the people had maintained religious activity, but it was being expressed in forms alien to the Mormon way. In addition, marital infidelity and common-law marriages were prevalent among the people. In this, the members had simply made peace, for the most part, with established cultural norms.

If all this were not challenging to President Tenney, members had set up their own congregations and were reluctant to lose control of them. Some members relented only after President Tenney promised that never again would the priesthood or the missionaries be withdrawn from them. Although he must have fervently hoped his statement was prophetic, only a decade would pass before his prophecy would be proven inaccurate as a consequence of the Mexican civil war which brought about the second withdrawal of missionaries from that land.

The chronology of President Tenney's visits to various localities where Mormons were known to reside offers a brief glimpse into conditions of the Church when the mission was reopened. After leaving the other missionaries at the depot of the Mexican Central Railroad for their trip to El Paso via the city of Chihuahua, President Tenney returned to Cuernavaca to hold additional meetings and learn as much as he could. Then he left for Amecameca to visit Sylvester López, an old friend of the Mormons who would do everything for the Church except join it.

From Amecameca he went to Cuautla in Morelos, meeting with Simón Zúñiga, one of the old converts who had been with the company of colonists to Chihuahua in 1887 only to return later, his family disappointed, on foot, and in hardship. President Tenney was welcomed among the Saints there, however, and spent his time reorganizing the branches in the region and reteaching Church organizational procedures and fundamental doctrines. He emphasized the laws of the fast, tithing, and prayer. While the Saints had, to some extent, strayed from Church standards, all whom he met seemed willing to learn and believe. Six new converts came into the Church in Cuautla.

From Cuautla President Tenney traveled to the foot of the imposing volcano Popocatepetl to visit Ozumba, a town that had greatly occupied the time and attention of the 1879 missionaries. Ozumba, he found, had changed little from the days in 1884 when missionary Milson H. Pratt had picturesquely described it:

Ozumba is nearly south of the city of Mexico, about forty miles distant, and is the center of several villages overshadowed by the lofty and noted Popocatepetl. It is situated at the southern extremity of the valley of Mexico, which sweeps around and among the hills and mountains like the bed of some large lake, which undoubtedly the greater part of it was, in times gone by. This region has been terribly disturbed by volcanic eruptions, as extinct craters seem in every direction, abundantly to testify. . . . The "gran volcan" Popocatepetl, rising in a cone 17,852 feet above the level of the sea, still emits a small column of smoke, which can be plainly seen on a clear morning from the village of Aclantla, but later in the day it is quite difficult to distinguish on account of the heavy atmosphere.¹⁰

Later, Elder Pratt brought the whole geography of the surrounding area into perspective. Since many of the branches President Tenney returned to visit are named herein, it is interesting to note what Pratt had to say:

The descent from Ozumba to the hot country, or a lower valley just south, called the "tierra caliente," is very rapid, being nearly 3,000 feet in ten miles, and the valley is still over 4,000 feet above sea level. Aclantla lies east of Ozumba, San Juan de Guadalupe on the northeast with its large plantation, Tecalo on the north by west. . . . Chimal, a village of pears and flowers, lies on the south. These settlements are in the immediate vicinity of Ozumba, and what makes them more interesting to us than anything else is that they are all Indian towns, the inhabitants of which are actual Lamanites, Israelites, as there is very little white blood diffused among them, except here in Ozumba. In the other settlements they usually speak the Mexican instead of the Spanish language, although they understand and can speak both. . . . We have also two congregations in the "tierra caliente," one in Coahuistla, and the other in San Andres de la Cal.¹¹

In Ozumba, Tenney visited Lino Zarate, who had served the Church as a missionary in 1879 and 1883. On one occasion in 1883 Zarate had let his zeal get the better of his judgment. He and Milson Pratt, knowing all open-air meetings in Mexico were prohibited by law, nevertheless got themselves arrested for preaching in the plaza of Ozumba.¹² Now, eighteen years later, Lino Zarate was still very much a Mormon and was anxious for President Tenney to help him give a blessing to his (Zarate's) wife, who lay at the point of death. Her rapid recovery thereafter seemed miraculous to all except Tenney and Zarate himself, who knew the hand of the Lord when they saw it.

After spending less than two weeks in Ozumba, President Tenney rushed to Atlautla with Zarate and a Brother Camacho where they found Simón Páez and his family. This family also formerly had lived in Juárez, remaining about five years after most of the original colonists from central Mexico had left. Páez received them kindly and wished them every success.

With spirits buoyed, they then traveled to Chimal and visited the family Nicolás Rodríguez. The family agreed to return to the Church only on condition that the missionaries and priesthood would not again desert them. Then in Tecalco they found Julián Rojas. The spirit of initiative, independence, dedication, and desire to know and carry out the will of the Lord that had made Rojas a successful missionary during the days of Elders Thatcher and Ivins now created troublesome conditions for the missionaries. Rojas had a congregation he wanted to control exclusively, reminding the elders that for many years his people had been as "a sheep without a shepherd." They talked a long time and Lino Zarate finally exacted an agreement from Rojas to reaffiliate with the Church.

A month later, on 18 August 1901, President Tenney returned to Tecalco and rebaptized Rojas and seventy-five of his followers. A week later Rojas's complete submission was noted when simultaneously he was advanced to an elder and was able to support Fedronio Pérez rather than himself as president of the newly organized Tecalo branch. Inasmuch as this was the first branch reorganized by President Tenney, it is significant that Rojas

made it possible, first by acting as shepherd and second by stepping down to allow another to take his place. This transition was no doubt laden with a bitter taste for Rojas, and one can only admire his long-range vision and support of the Church. Interestingly, a year later when Pérez was released and sent on a mission, Julián Rojas was installed as president of the Tecalco branch.

After the initial organization of the Tecalco branch, President Tenney returned to Amecameca but found a ‘spirit of revolution . . . among those who met at this place.’ So he traveled to Ixtacalco, just outside Mexico City, and found the Páez family who gladly received new directions after they were shown wherein they had allowed some alien ideas to creep into their religious sentiments.

And so it went day after relentless day for nearly a year—Ammon Tenney alone, except when accompanied by some of the local brethren such as Lino Zarate and Angel Rosales.

Aside from visiting and teaching the members, one of the things President Tenney wanted to do as quickly as possible was create branch organizations and confer the priesthood on worthy members. As soon as some of the Saints were in a position to bear leadership responsibilities under his direction, he organized them in local branches with local branch leadership. Besides the first branch at Tecalo that Julián Rojas had held together for so many years, Ammon Tenney organized a branch at San Andrés de la Cal led by Francisco Miranda, a priest. Needing help, he called Lino Zarate, Julián Rojas, Juan Méndez, Simón Zúñiga, and Brother Camacho on short-term missions to travel to the branches and give instructions.

Most of these missionaries were married and had many children. It was a service of love that they entered with no small sacrifice. Soon the missionaries were joined by Angel Rosales, Margarito Bautista, Jacobo Gonzáles, and Juan Mairé, the son of the Swiss family that H. L. Hall had introduced to the Church. In ensuing months, Juan Páez was ordained a priest and set apart to preside over the branch at Ixtacalco, José González (later excommunicated) was placed over the Trigales branch. Rosales on 12 July 1902 became the first returned native missionary to head a branch of the Church among his own people.

From 1902 through 1910 a consistent pattern emerged in the expansion of the gospel in central Mexico. One was the infusion of missionaries from the colonies in the north, who arrived with regularity and with already-developed skills in the Spanish language. Not all of these young Anglo-American Mormons were devoid of personal and family responsibilities. Many were married and left spouses and children at home to be cared for by the Saints while they took their turn preaching the restored gospel.

A second consistent feature during this period, especially during Tenney’s presidency and the later presidency of Rey L. Pratt beginning in 1907, was the building up of indigenous leadership in the branches. More native branch presidents and counselors were called and trained. Relief Societies

were organized, headed by local sisters, who learned the arts of compassionate service appropriate for their time as well as skills in health and maternity care. For example, when Lino Zarate died in 1903, he left a wife and seven children. All but his wife and one small daughter were bedridden with the same affliction that cost him his own life—typhoid fever. The Relief Societies of his own and nearby branches rallied to help the family materially and spiritually and to nurse the afflicted back to health. When Apostle A. O. Woodruff and his wife, on tour in Mexico City, contracted smallpox (which shortly took their lives), Juana Páez gave Sister Woodruff the competent and caring attention the English nurse her husband had acquired could not or would not give. Juana willingly risked her own life in the service of a dying sister who so desperately wanted to see her five-month-old daughter one last time.

A third consistent feature of the years up to 1910 was the continued attention authorities in the colonies and in Salt Lake gave the new mission. Anthony W. Ivins came frequently to journey among the Saints, hold conference, and encourage and instruct the members and missionaries. When he was called to be an Apostle in 1907, his successor, Junius Romney, likewise frequently visited the Saints in central Mexico. And numerous Apostles (A. O. Woodruff, John Henry Smith, Matthias F. Cowley, Charles W. Penrose, Heber J. Grant, Anthony W. Ivins) made one or more visits between 1902 and 1910 to check on matters for themselves. Apostle Cowley even spent an entire month going to each branch, organizing Sunday schools and teaching local members how to lead the music.

A fourth pattern was the constant attempt to reclaim the lost sheep that had been abandoned. Of the nearly 300 persons converted to the Church by 1889, there were fifty-five numbered among the Saints as of 13 August 1902. But many missionaries delighted in reviewing the record and going out to contact the lost ones. Sometimes they were successful, sometimes not. In July 1903, for example, two elders left to visit the towns of Tula and Nopala. In looking over the records, they had found the names of several people who had been baptized in those places. In San Sebastián, a village near Nopala, they found José María Yáñez, who, with other members of his family, had been baptized years before. He was cool toward the missionaries but showed them photographs of Elders J. Z. Stewart, Meliton G. Trejo, and others whom he had known.

Yáñez related to the missionaries the conversion of his mother. She had dreamed that some men were publishing a tract that would aid her spiritually. She sent him to find these men. It was then that he had met Plotino Rhodakanaty, who directed him to where Moses Thatcher was having the tracts published. After reading the tracts, the mother asked the elders to baptize her. Her son, José María, and his wife were also baptized. Later he was ordained an elder. But in the long winter of abandonment he had become disaffected and had renounced his priesthood. Yet many other

members were overjoyed to see the missionaries again. The missionaries therefore kept making an effort to find them.

A fifth consistent pattern was that the Church grew by new converts to the fold. In the fourteen months President Tenney spent heading the mission, 175 baptisms were performed. Thereafter, by 1911 new converts raised the membership to over 1,000. New fields were opened and new branches organized, and the work expanded to include new peoples and new climates.

During this period there was a minor scurry or two that harked back to the old days when colonization and gathering were much in vogue. In 1903 H. L. Hall and others vigorously proposed setting up a colony of Mormons in Trigales, where a new branch had been organized and the valley and climate seemed most advantageous to receive the Saints in a gathering place. However, the Church adopted Helaman Pratt's alternative plan proposed so many years before—namely, taking a colony of the Saints to the north. Thus, five months later on 15 December 1903 José Zúñiga and his wife left for Dublán to look over the prospects of colonizing among the Anglo-American Mormons. There was some attention paid to this: "As they are the first to immigrate since the reopening of the mission, many of the Mexican Saints are awaiting with interest their reports of the treatment they receive, etc., for several others are thinking of leaving for the Colonies soon."¹³ Then, in 1907, at the organization of the San Pedro Martir branch, which Anthony W. Ivins had traveled to Mexico City to organize, he told the congregation "that he hoped before long to secure suitable lands near the Colonies" in the north on which to colonize the Mexican Saints.¹⁴ Two years later Ivins in his new appointment as an Apostle sat in a meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve in which five thousand Mexican dollars were appropriated to procure land on which to colonize the Mexicans. Elders Ivins, John Henry Smith, and Francis M. Lyman made the proposal, recommending that land be purchased near one of the Mormon colonies already founded by "our people" and "that we do not attempt to colonize them all in one place, but that two small colonies be started."¹⁵ This effort never gained much magnitude.

As the years passed, with the Anglo-American missionaries celebrating each 4th of July in Tivoli Park and the Mexican members each 16th of September in their own communities, clouds of war were billowing on the horizon. Few seemed to see them, especially the foreign residents. Thus, in September 1910 when Mexico celebrated the hundredth anniversary of Father Miguel Hidalgo's "Cry of Dolores" that had launched the war of independence against Spain, all seemed to be well. By all counts the celebration was a magnificent occasion, President Díaz sparing no expense for the guests—many from foreign countries—who were present. In all the wining and dining and in all the reports sent home, several things were clear: Mexico was the epitome of stability and success in the Western Hemisphere. The country was prosperous, the budget was balanced, and

Mexican currency was as strong as the gold that backed it. Foreign capital was safe and returned handsome dividends for those who had invested wisely in agricultural lands, oil properties, and mining or railroad stocks.¹⁶ It was a golden age.

However, within a year, the cruel illusion of Mexico's prosperity and stability would become known to the whole world, not just to the common Mexicans whose standard of living had plummeted while the national economy rose. Mormons in central Mexico and in the northern colonies would soon feel the searing point of the revolutionary's sword.

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1. Anthony W. Ivins to Apostle Francis M. Lyman, recorded in the Manuscript History of the Mexican Mission, 30 April 1902, Library—Archives, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter cited as Church Archives.

2. Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 30 June 1901, p. 2, Church Archives.

3. Lesley Byrd Simpson, *Many Mexicos*, 4th ed. rev. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), p. 292.

4. Hubert Herring, *A History of Latin America*, 3d ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 325.

5. Simpson, *Many Mexicos*, p. 287.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

7. Journal History, 30 June 1901, p. 2.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Anthony W. Ivins to Apostle Francis, 30 April 1902.

10. Journal History, 16 February 1884, p. 3.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Rey L. Pratt, "History of the Mexican Mission," *Improvement Era* 15 (April 1912): 489.

13. Manuscript History of the Mexican Mission, 15 December 1903.

14. *Ibid.*, 19 May 1907.

15. Journal History, 20 January 1909, p. 4.

16. For an overview, see David M. Pletcher, *Rails, Mines and Progress: Seven American Promoters in Mexico, 1867–1911* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958).