

Universalizing Mormonism: The Mexican Laboratory

Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture by F. LaMond Tullis (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1987), 250 pp., \$22.50.

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THE APPEARANCE OF *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* is cause for celebration. For one thing, another volume in the beleaguered sesquicentennial series sees the light of day, accompanied by a refreshingly frank explanation by its author, F. LaMond Tullis, of some of the frustrations of being a scholar working in Mormon history. As he explains in the preface, one publisher rejected the work because it mentioned sensitive problems of the Church in Mexico. Finally, after his work was accepted by his current publisher, Tullis had to revise his manuscript in order to communicate with a general, not only a Latter-day Saint, audience.

More important, *Mormons in Mexico* provides a model of how studies of the Church in other countries can be carried out most fruitfully, providing not superficial cheerleading but genuine understanding. Since we will doubtless be seeing a long string of publications—Mormons in Korea, in the Philippines, in France, in Finland, and so on—it is important to have something like Tullis's work, which is neither a pageant nor "yearbook," to show the way.

The first six chapters tell the story of early exploring and colonizing, the ups and downs of missionary proselytizing, the exodus of many Anglo-American Mormons

during the Revolution of 1912, the subsequent development of relative isolation, and the shattering challenge of the Third Convention in the 1930s.

Essentially a nationalist movement, the Third Convention was a pathetic experience stretching from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s. Some Mexican members, feeling neglected and patronized, petitioned among other things for a mission president of Mexican nationality. A schism resulted but was eventually healed largely through the efforts of mission president Arwell L. Pierce, an unsung hero. A better goal, argued Pierce, was a stake with a Mexican president. At the time of President George Albert Smith's visit to Mexico in 1946 some 1200 Conventionists returned to the Church. Unity was restored. Eventually, in one way or another, all of the basic goals of the Third Convention—Mexicans in leadership positions, young Mexicans on missions, increased educational opportunities, and more chapels—would be achieved.

Especially valuable in Tullis's book are two chapters on current conditions. The generation since World War II has seen incredible growth as Church membership in Mexico climbed from several thousand to over 300,000 in more than eighty stakes. Young Mexicans by the hundreds, even thousands, have served as missionaries. Though the Church by law may not sponsor schools directly, they have enhanced educational opportunities by indirectly sponsoring schools through an educational society that meets legal requirements. Rapid growth occurring simultaneously elsewhere in Latin America has raised the percentage of Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Church members from 1.5 to 20. By the end of the century, Tullis estimates,