An American authority on Mexico has stated that most historical accounts of modern Mexican history are "folklore with footnotes." Folklore and myths are, of course, an integral part of Mexican history. The national emblem, used on the Mexican flag, reflects an Aztec legend concerning the place where Tenochtitlán (now Mexico City) should be founded. As a result of the appearance of this "sign" (an eagle perched on a cactus with a serpent in his mouth), the city was founded at its present location in 1325. The legend of the miraculous appearance of the Virgin to an Indian peasant in 1531 was one of the most important factors in facilitating the conversion of the Indians to Catholicism. The Virgin of Guadalupe is today the supreme Catholic symbol of Mexico. There are, to be sure, many who question the miracle, and included among these doubting Thomases are three priests and a bishop as well as many noted historians. \(^1\)

The "Indian Jews" of Mexico, too, through a confused mixture of myths, legends, distorted history, and wishful thinking, claim brotherhood with the world community of Jews. The unraveling of some of their accounts—which are replete with inconsistencies and historical inaccuracies—constitutes the theme of this article.

Jews first came to Mexico with Hernán Cortés in 1521 and have lived there continuously ever since. This is so despite the fact that, from 1493 to 1802, their presence in Spanish America was illegal owing to a series of decrees issued by the various monarchs of Spain and the Supreme Council of the Spanish Inquisition. Isabella la Católica, Queen of Castile, who issued the first

---

\(^1\) See Alma Reed, "The Virgin of Guadalupe: Historical Background," *The Mexico Quarterly Review*, I (Summer, 1962), 175.
of these decrees, hoped to insure that the Indies discovered by Christopher Columbus would be as Judenrein, as devoid of Jews, as she and her spouse Fernando had tried to make her realm of Castile and his of Aragon. Nonetheless, despite them, their successors, and the Inquisition, the discovery and colonization of each place in the New World were immediately followed by the arrival and settlement of Jews, primarily from Spain and Portugal. These Jewish settlers — a number of whom, though ostensibly Catholics, practised their ancestral faith in secret — are the people termed anusim (a Hebrew word, meaning "forced ones") or Marranos. Recorded now, in many instances, for the first time, the tales of the martyrdom, heroism, and ingenuity of these Jews in their battle for survival enrich the pages of Jewish history.

Since the story of Mexican Jewry is so largely unknown, it is easy to understand why so many tourists and journalists have unwittingly accepted the claim of some Mexican Mestizos to descent from early Jewish settlers and have been moved to write about the "Indian Jews," who are, in fact, neither Indians nor Jews, but something else — Mestizos. In colonial times, a Mestizo was the offspring of an Indian mother and a Spanish father. In modern times, however, it is impossible to differentiate, biologically, between Mestizo and Indian. An Indian, as used herein, is one whose ancestry includes no one of European or Caucasian extraction. A Mestizo is neither an Indian nor a Caucasian, though, of course, his ancestors have resided in Mexico for many generations; his bloodlines are of mixed origin and he is a member of the group which constitutes the majority of the Mexican population.

There are in Mexico several different groups calling themselves Israelitas, and this has caused confusion. In English-speaking countries, Jews are termed also Hebrews or Israelites. In Mexico, a Jew is known as a Judío or an Israelita. Two private Jewish schools in Mexico City are called the Colegio Israelita and the Nuevo Colegio Israelita. One of the Jewish newspapers is La Prensa Israelita, and there is also a Centro Deportivo Israelita (Jewish Sport Club). Fur-

* The word colegio refers to elementary or secondary school rather than college. The schools mentioned above are secular. They teach Yiddish and Hebrew.
thermore, an Israelita, a Jew, must be distinguished from an Israeli, a citizen of the State of Israel who may be Jewish, Christian, or Moslem. The problem is complicated by the fact that two Protestant sects in the United States called the Church of God have branches in Mexico where they are known as the "Iglesia de Dios." The congregants of these churches — Mestizos, for the most part — call themselves Israelitas and claim that they are the true descendants of the biblical Jacob, who was given the name of Israel when he wrestled with an angel of the Lord, as is related in the Book of Genesis.

The Iglesia de Dios — with which the Mestizos were affiliated before they adopted Judaism — believes in Jesus, Mary, the Immaculate Conception, and the like. Still another group calls its congregation Bet-El and Casa de Dios (House of God). The disciples of this group have branches in Mexico City, Guadalajara, Puebla, and Veracruz. Numbering over three thousand, they are mainly of the lower middle class, are independent of other religious groups, seek no publicity or affiliation with the Jewish community, and are unknown to tourist guides. They admit that they were Christians who adopted Judaism, but still believe in the New Testament Apostles as good men in the chain of Hebrew prophets. Since they admit that they have never been converted to Judaism, they will not be discussed. This article will be devoted to those groups which profess to be authentically Jewish, have cloaked themselves in varying claims of descent from Jewish forebears, and of which much has been written. The names of the forebears of these groups have changed, but claims as to the time of the arrival in Mexico of these forebears is uniform — the sixteenth century.

Some of the Mestizo Jews assert that they are descendants of Luis de Carvajal, the governor and conqueror of that area which is now northeast Mexico. Others claim the governor’s nephew and namesake Luis de Carvajal, el mozo (the younger), as their forebear. Still others say that their ancestors were part of the group of Jews who journeyed to the New World with Governor Carvajal. A few are more vague and say that they know only that their ancestors arrived before 1596. Another part of the legend states that their Spanish Jewish ancestors fled the wrath of the Inquisition about
1596 and lived in the mountains and wilderness of Mexico in Indian villages. The alleged descendants of these refugees aver that they did not know until the 1920's and 1930's that any other Jews lived in Mexico.

The date 1596 is important in Mexican history, especially with reference to the Jews. An auto-da-fé held on December 8 of that year involved over one hundred Judaizers, of whom nine were burned at the stake. Among these were Luis de Carvajal, el mozo, his mother, and three sisters.

Who Is a Jew?

The Orthodox Jewish interpretation is simple: only a child born to a Jewish mother, unless she is married to a man other than the father of the child, is a Jew. A non-Jew may be converted under rabbinic supervision pursuant to Jewish law on the subject. This is and has been the rabbinic answer for centuries. It was restated by Moses Maimonides during the twelfth century in his Hilkot Issure Biah, and his writing is consistent with the talmudic order Kodashim. The culmination of a woman’s conversion is her immersion in a ritual bath in the presence of authorized witnesses. An Orthodox beth din, or religious court, usually consisting of three rabbis, then issues a certificate signifying that the woman has fulfilled all the requirements and is to be regarded as a Jewess. The court also renames her — usually Sarah, daughter of Abraham. It is almost impossible to be accepted as a Jew, even by Reform or Conservative rabbis, merely by adopting the Jewish religion and performing its precepts. The distinction between mere adoption of Judaism and formal conversion is an important point in this study of the brown-skinned Mexicans who seek a Jewish religious identification.

Regardless of all the articles sentimentalizing and accepting the Judaism of the “Mestizo Jews,” there is but one valid criterion — Jewish law. Under Catholic law, no person is accepted as a Catholic simply by attending mass and fervently adhering to Catholic customs. Such a person cannot be married in a Catholic church, or be buried in a Catholic cemetery, or be the recipient of other Church sacraments. Similarly, no person can bestow upon himself the reli-
gious status of a Jew. However strict his observance may be, no Orthodox rabbi, and few Conservative rabbis, will agree to officiate at his marriage or burial. Interment in a Jewish cemetery is denied to non-Jews. Even the liberal trend among some Reform rabbis of adding adoption as an entrance to the brotherhood of Jews is subject to community acceptance—and the Mexican Jewish communities do not accept the "Mestizo Jews" as genuine Jews.

An important factor in the survival of Judaism has been adherence to the law of lineage despite persecution, absence of a religious hierarchy, or—prior to the establishment of the State of Israel—lack of a "land," a place where the cultural aspects of Judaism could be sustained and nourished without the assimilative pressures of a non-Jewish majority group. Individuals cannot enter Judaism at will or whim. The integrity of Jewish lineage has been basic to the concept of Jewish peoplehood, so that there has never been an amorphous group of Jews. The condemnation of intermarriage has been consistent for nearly 2,200 years. In *The Structure of Spanish History*, the Spanish historian Américo Castro wrote: "The people who really felt the scruple of purity of blood were the Spanish Jews... there is a punctilious concern for family purity... as a consequence of the persecution in the fifteenth century, he became still more acutely aware of his exclusive particularism." Stress is laid here upon Spanish Jews, because the "Mestizo Jews" claim them as their ancestors.

**Historical Background of Mexican Jewry**

Since many "Mestizo Jews" claim descent from the Spanish Jews who came to Nueva España—colonial Mexico—during the sixteenth century, some background history for colonial Mexican Jewry is in order. The majority were Sephardim who came from the Iberian peninsula. When Cortés captured Tenochtitlán, there were Jews in his company of conquistadores, and the identity of at least four has been clearly established. Among them were Hernando Alonso, Gonzalo de Morales, and Diego de Ocaña. The first two

---

were burned at the stake in 1528 because they were found guilty of Judaizing. Prohibitions against the settlement of Jews, Moors, and other “heretics” in the New World had been issued for many years prior to 1521. The first edict that applied directly to Mexico was issued in January, 1523, and the last is dated September 16, 1802. The Mexican historian Alfonso Toro has written:

In spite of the legal prohibitions, there were many Jews who came to the New World and who had taken part in its discovery and conquest and also in the formation of the colonial society. They were to be found in all the social classes and in all the professions and official positions.  

Notwithstanding all the edicts and the trials of Jews by bishops and Inquisitors, “the Jewish community continued to grow in Mexico City, Pachuca,” and other places, according to Dr. Richard E. Greenleaf.  

_Conversos_ and their descendants discreetly practised the old Jewish rites. The word _marrano_ was never used in the Inquisitional trials in Spain or Mexico. In addition to _nuevos cristianos_ (New Christians) and _conversos_, Jewish apostates were called _hebreo-cristianos_. Conversion to Christianity, however, failed to give them equal rights with _cristianos viejos_ (Old Christians.)  

Francisco Fernández Castillo states that there was a Grand [Chief] Rabbi in Mexico about 1550 and “that among the Spaniards of the colony there were more Jews than Catholics, although none wanted to denounce their presence.” (Italics in the original.) Robert Ricard, in his article, “Pour une étude du Judaïsme Portugais au Mexique Pendant la Période Coloniale” (A Study of Portuguese Jews in Mexico during the Colonial Period), wrote:

Taken altogether, the reading of these Inquisitional documents gives the impression of a real swarm of Portuguese Jews. Therefore, it is not sur-

---

4 Alfonso Toro, _Los Judíos en la Nueva España_ (Mexico, 1932), p. xxiii. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.


6 Francisco Fernández Castillo, _Libros y Libreros del Siglo XVI_ (Mexico City, 1914), p. 584.
prising that a Mexican Dominican priest, Fr. Hernando de Ojea, took an interest in the situation. And it seemed serious enough to him to cause him to publish in 1602... an apologetical work intended to bring about a conversion of the Mexican Jews, which he entitled The Coming of Christ, His Life and Miracles, etc.7

To paraphrase a cliché, "The Spanish Jews were like all other Spaniards — only more so." If a Spaniard was proud, the Spanish Jew was prouder, because he felt that his religion gave him, even if only in his own estimation, a little higher status. This is relevant to the improbability of sexual relationships between Jewish women and Indian males.

The entry of Jews into Mexico continued unabated. Henry C. Lea writes:

...during the quiescent period of the Tribunal [this ended in 1642] the class of New Christians, who secretly adhered to the ancient Jewish faith, increased and prospered, accumulating wealth through the opportunities of the colonial trade which they virtually monopolized.8

The great Chilean historian of the Mexican Inquisition, José Toribio Medina, reported that Fernando Rodríguez, a victim of the auto-da-fé of 1647, lived in Veracruz and that his home had served for more than forty years as a hospitality center for Jews arriving in Mexico. They rested there for a few days before beginning the arduous trip from Veracruz to Mexico City. Duarte Rodríguez used his house in Veracruz as a meeting place for the Jews of that city in the seventeenth century.9

In 1862 — forty years after the end of Spanish rule — there was a meeting in Mexico City of more than 100 Jews to discuss the building of a synagogue. In 1889, Francisco Rivas Puigcerver, Director of the Department of Ancient Languages of the Preparatory School of the Mexican National University, began the publication of a newspaper in Mexico City called El Sábado Secreto, Periódico

7 Revue d'Histoire Moderne (Paris), August, 1939, pp. 519 et seq.
Judaizante ("The Secret Sabbath, A Jewish Newspaper"), which was the "organ of the Sephardis of America" and in which he declared that he was a Jew. The name of the paper was subsequently changed to La Luz del Sábado ("The Light of the Sabbath") and then to El Sábado ("The Sabbath"). In the issue of February 23, 1889, under the headline "A Los Miembros Sanos de la Colonia Israelita" ("To the Sincere Members of the Jewish Community"), appeared the plea: "We exhort you to remain in the Mosaic faith and not to imitate certain circumcised perverse ones [of our faith] who deny their race, their people and their God."

The Carvajals

One colonial Mexican family must be treated in detail because two groups of "Mestizo Jews" claim descent from these people. The family is that of Carvajal, who arrived in Mexico around 1580 together with others of Jewish descent under the aegis of Governor Luis de Carvajal.

Luis de Carvajal y de la Cueva was born in 1539 at Mogodorio, Portugal. He was the son of New Christians, and nothing has ever been disclosed to reveal that they were not sincere converts to Catholicism. His paternal grandfather was Gutiérrez Vásquez de la Cueva, and Luis always believed his parents to be noble Old Christians. He left his parents' home at the age of eight, when his father took him to the Abbot of Sahagún, who was a relative and who educated him. He had been baptized, received communion, and religiously observed all Catholic rites. Luis’ maternal uncle Francisco Jorge de Andrada was a captain-general for the king of Portugal and later became an Augustinian monk. Luis’ brother Domingo was a Jesuit monk. His sister Francisca Núñez de Carvajal, however, married a man of converso background, Francisco Rodríguez de Mattos. In 1558, Luis married Doña Guiomar de Ribera, who, though she was of Jewish ancestry, never revealed that fact to her husband. They had no children, and Carvajal denied having any

---

See Procesos de Luis de Carvajal el Mozo (Mexico, 1935), and also my essay on Hernando Alonso in Journal of Inter-American Studies, V (No. 2, April, 1963), 291. My forthcoming work, "The Enlightened," also contains relevant data.
illegitimate children. His marriage was unhappy because of incompatibility, and his wife had refused to accompany him in 1566 on his first visit to the New World, where he gained fame as a naval captain, admiral, and fighter and tamer of Indians. The absence of children — heirs — undoubtedly was another cause of his marital unhappiness. His sister's marriage had produced nine living offspring.

Carvajal wanted his sister and her family to accompany him to Mexico after he obtained a contract from the king of Spain. The contract, dated May 31, 1579, permitted Carvajal to bring with him, as colonizers, 100 families, but there was no provision that such colonizers had to have certificates of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood). Previously required for all who went to the New World, such a certificate attested that its holder was an "Old Christian," and that his forebears, or at least the three preceding generations, on maternal and paternal lines, had been Catholics. The omission of the certificates in Carvajal's case is usually interpreted to mean that Carvajal was a Judaizer and had obtained special permission for his coreligionists to join his expedition to the New World. There are, however, certain facts overlooked by most writers who place too much stress on the exemption. To begin with, practically all expeditions of exploration and conquest, including Carvajal's, were privately financed. The king of Spain granted only the right to explore and promised certain rights to the leader of the expedition. By 1579, moreover, many Spaniards had heard discouraging reports from Mexico. Indian troubles had developed in the northern part of the country, and no gold was to be found lying about in the countryside. Paragraph 8 of the Royal Contract with Carvajal reads:

... on the confines of your territory of Pánuco ... are [certain] pueblos ... these people were formerly Christianized, but for five years they have been in rebellion, destroying churches and doing other damage. The Viceroy has sent captains and soldiers to reduce them [the Indians]. These captains have tried hard, but have been unable to pacify the region. You are, therefore, obligated to bring these Indians to peace and Christianity within eight years from this date.

---

As appears from the above provision, no attempt was made to deceive Carvajal about the conditions with which he was to be confronted. He had, in any case, been in the Pánuco area previously and had personal knowledge of the deplorable conditions prevailing there. Another provision in his contract required Carvajal to found a certain number of towns in the area within a specified time.

Carvajal’s grant was named the New Kingdom of León and ran from Tampico to what is now San Antonio and 200 leagues — 600 miles — westward from the Gulf of Mexico. It was one of the largest ever given. Possibly, the size was intended to offset the dangers. Carvajal was to receive the hereditary title of governor general. He promised his brother-in-law Rodríguez de Mattos to name his son Luis, el mozo, his heir. Rodríguez thought that the province would assure the future of Luis, el mozo, and he very likely thought also that the New Kingdom would be far from the long arm of the Inquisition. The Holy Office of the Inquisition had been formally established at Mexico City in November, 1571, with Dr. Pedro Moya de Contreras as the Chief Inquisitor, and autos-da-fé had already been conducted, but few crypto-Jews had been involved. The possibility of his son’s becoming governor may have been the inducement offered by Rodríguez de Mattos to many other crypto-Jews to form a part of the approximately seventy-five men of converso background that were to join the expedition. Those seventy-five who joined the entourage aided in supplying funds to outfit the enterprise.

Before they sailed, Carvajal’s wife Doña Guiomar asked her niece Isabel, daughter of Rodríguez de Mattos, to attempt to bring Carvajal to Judaism after their arrival in the New World when the time and place for such an attempt would be propitious. The opportunity did not come for Doña Isabel until 1586, when the governor visited her parents’ home. Upon hearing her words, the uncle, a devout Catholic, struck his niece so hard that she was thrown to


13 Santiago Roel, Nuevo León, Apuntes Históricos (Monterrey, 1938), p. 24, clearly indicates that the governor was a devout Catholic.
the opposite wall. From a conversation with his nephew about the same time, he deduced that Luis, el mozo, had leanings toward Jewish beliefs and that his brother-in-law, who had died two years previously, had been buried in accordance with Jewish rites. The governor confessed his suspicions to his personal priest, changed his will, and disinherited his nephew. He had failed, he subsequently explained, to report his suspicions concerning his niece and nephew to the Inquisition in Mexico City because, during the period 1586–1587, he was busy fighting the Chichimecs in a region far from the Mexican capital.

Although Governor Carvajal was originally accused in 1589 by the Inquisitional fiscal of "observing the law of Moses," the fiscal, after several hearings, modified the charge to being "an aider and abettor and harborage of Jewish apostates." The ultimate verdict was that he was guilty as an "aider, abettor, and harborage and concealer of Jewish apostates from the Holy Catholic faith." He was abjured de vehementi and sentenced to serve one year in jail and then to be exiled for six years. He died during the year of his incarceration, 1591.4

In 1590, Luis, el mozo, was convicted of heresy and sentenced to four years in a monastery where he was to be reindoctrinated into Catholicism. He had circumcised himself in 1587, about a year after being told by his parents that he was of Jewish extraction. His family had left the New Kingdom of León. Many others, if not all, of the Marranos who had come with the governor had moved to Mexico City, Taxco, or other towns outside of León. Life had proved too hard and too dangerous in Pánuco and the area to the north and west. On December 8, 1596, Luis, el mozo, was burned at the stake with his mother and three sisters because they had "relapsed" to Judaism from Catholicism. Mariana, another sister, was saved for the auto-da-fé of 1601. Luis, el mozo, always denied having children. His surviving sister, Anica, was burned in the auto-da-fé of 1649. Isabel and Leonor, two other sisters, never had any children. Catalina’s daughter, Leonor, was thirteen years

4 Tomo II, Expediente 3, Ramo de la Inquisición del Archivo General de la Nación de México [AGN].
old in 1601, when she was reconciled by the Inquisition. Later marrying a Catholic, she lived and died as a devout member of that Church. Several of her descendants — including a son, a granddaughter, and two great-grandsons — took holy orders. Two brothers of Luis, el mozo, succeeded in escaping: Baltazar to Italy, and Miguel to Salonica. Changing their family name to Lumbreroso, as had Luis, el mozo, one became chief rabbi and the other a famous doctor.\textsuperscript{15}

During the second trial of Luis, el mozo, he implicated 121 other Marranos, including those who had come to New Spain with his uncle. Practically all were still in Mexico, and they were arrested. They received their punishment (usually jail, a fine, and the wearing of a sambenito, though a few were sent to the galleys). Less than ten were exiled from New Spain. The vast majority continued to live openly in Mexico City after 1596.

The number of Spanish and Portuguese males, Jews and non-Jews, in Mexico during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries far exceeded the number of Caucasian females. The Indian was a slave and was not considered an equal in the eyes of many encomenderos, hacendados, and even some members of the Church. Caucasian women had their choice of mates among white men. Indians were not Jews, and any woman of Jewish ancestry who chose to marry a Christian could have her choice among the Spanish men.

In 1605, Pope Clement VIII granted grace to all those reconciliados penanced by the Holy Office. Fifteen "reconciled," former practicing Jews, filed a petition to go free. Numerous other instances can be given of the existence of Jews and of autos-da-fé involving Jews from 1601 to 1795. In only two Inquisitional trials, however, is there any mention of sexual relationship between a Jew and an Indian. Both of these trials took place during the seventeenth century; one of them involved Tomás Trevisano de Sobre-monte. Though the "Mestizo Jews" claim descent from the early arrivals, it is to be doubted that they know of the uninterrupted existence of Jews in Mexico between 1596 and the modern era.

\textsuperscript{15} See Note 10, supra.
There is no national Mexican Jewish community organization. The three principal Jewish communities are in the capital, in Monterrey, and in Guadalajara. None of them recognize the “Mestizo Jews” as coreligionists, but this fact does not prevent the members of the Mestizo Jewish communities from registering as “Israelitas” in the decennial government census whose categories are “Católico,” “Protestante,” and “Israelita.” (Note the use of this word, instead of Judío or Hebreo.) The “Mestizo Jews,” according to the most optimistic estimate, number no more than “a few thousand,” but such a figure is completely unrealistic, for these figures have included the group “Bet-El” or “Casa de Dios,” which itself numbers over 3,000. According to Jack Starr-Hunt in the New York Post of November 1, 1945, and the “American Friends of the Mexican Indian Jews” as of January, 1944, there were “500 souls (Mexican Indian Jews) in Mexico City and as many in the country towns of the Republic.”

The Mestizo Jewish communities visited by tourists are generally those of Mexico City: Calle Caruso of Colonia Vallejo, which has recently split into two, the dissident group lacking any permanent headquarters; and Venta Prieta, in the State of Hidalgo. Toluca, too, is mentioned as a location for a group, but there is only one “Mestizo Jew” there. Another example is Apam, but the one who used to reside there moved away about 1952. He affirmed that he and his deceased wife were the only ones in Apam who had claimed descent from Jews. Monterrey and two or three other places have been named in various articles, but the naming of these places resulted from hearsay or from secondary and tertiary sources. Many of those who write about these people cannot speak Spanish, have had no knowledge of Mexican history—and particularly the Jewish phase of that history—and have lacked a critical and scientific approach which includes the ability to sift evidence and to

16 See my essay, “A Dying Branch,” in Jewish Spectator, XXVII (No. 2, Feb., 1962), 92. Toluca was mentioned to me by Shimon Amir, First Secretary of the Israeli Embassy in Mexico from 1956 to 1960.
Lic. Baltazar Laureano Ramírez
Spiritual leader of Mexican Mestizo Jewry
(see pp. 161 ff.)
separate the chaff from the wheat. None, except Dr. Raphael Patai, have evidenced any knowledge of the history of the Iglesia de Dios and the connection of the leader of the Mexico City Mestizo group with it.

While the Venta Prieta and Mexico City groups include some individuals who claim descent from Jews preceding the nineteenth century, many others admit that their parents or grandparents were "converted" to Judaism. It is obvious that they equate conversion with adoption. All admit that there has been continuous inter-marriage with non-Jews. Dr. Patai reported: "Some of these [New Christians] . . . scattered and hid in outlying towns and villages, marrying — for lack of women of their own kind — native Indian girls, and passing on the heritage of their faith to the children." Dr. Patai, however, in reporting the above account told to him in 1949, forgot that a child of a pagan or Christian native Indian woman cannot be a Jew, even if the father were a Jew. In 1964, Dr. Patai interviewed these people again, and the people were then willing to consider conversion. According to the *Jerusalem Post* of May 16, 1965, Dr. Patai finds that "they have accepted the story of their Jewish ancestry and Marrano descent as a pious fairy tale." None of these individuals or groups possess any material evidence of the practise of Judaism except that which they received from tourists or the recognized Jewish community during approximately the last twenty-five years.

**Venta Prieta**

More has been written about the Venta Prieta people, and more pictures have been taken of them, than of any other Mestizo Jewish group. So widespread is the community's fame that in April, 1963, representatives of ABC Radio and Television and a reporter for *Life* went to interview and photograph its people in order to exhibit to American audiences their observance of the Jewish Passover.

Venta Prieta is a Mexican village, about a mile and a half from Pachuca, the state capital. Its principal Jew, or elder, lives about fifty feet off the highway, and the synagogue is about 100 feet beyond. In 1940, Marie Syrkin, a school principal in New York and later a professor at Brandeis University, visited Venta Prieta because she had heard of the "Indian Jews." She went with an interpreter, and she comments: "Conversation came hard even for those of our party who knew Spanish." She tells of an old woman, unnamed, but obviously Sra. Trinidad Jirón de Téllez, who sat with her at dinner and told her that "her father had been scalded to death in boiling oil for Judaizing. This had happened before 1910, when Judaism was still proscribed." (The last phrase is an obvious historical error, since freedom of religious conscience was enacted in 1857.) She gave the Jewish population of Venta Prieta as "twelve Jewish families." 18

Dr. Patai interviewed Sra. Trinidad nine years later. She was then eighty-five years of age, but he found her decisive in her statements. She told him that her father had lived in Morelia, that he and his family had been the only Jews there, and that, when his Christian neighbors discovered his faith, they "sewed him into the skin of a newly slaughtered bull and threw him into a cauldron of boiling water, where he died a miserable and painful death." Her father Ramón Jirón, the second, married a local girl from Pachuca. Trinidad herself claims to have married, in 1879, Manuel Téllez, "who came from another Indian Jewish family," and that they settled in Venta Prieta. Patai also interviewed Gertrudis, the sister of Trinidad. She stated "unfalteringly" that her grandfather lived in Zamora, State of Michoacán — almost 150 kilometers from Morelia — and that

He and his wife, Petra Diaz, as well as my own parents were Catholics. I, too, am a Catholic. My grandfather was of Spanish descent. His parents wished him to become a priest, but he did not want to and ran away from home. His father pursued him, caught him, and as a punishment forced him to dress in a bull’s skin.

She said that he later ran away for good and settled in Real del Oro, also near Pachuca.

Patai wrote: “I succeeded in finding irrefutable documentary proof that the Indian Jewish congregation in Mexico was organized as a result of, or at least as a step subsequent to, the secession of one of their present leaders from the Iglesia de Dios.” Patai, with whom I conferred, was referring to Baltazar Laureano Ramírez, who had resided in Pachuca in the early 1920’s and was a constant visitor to Venta Prieta. Patai wrote that the relationship between “them [the Mexico City group led by B. Laureano Ramírez] and Venta Prieta is strained and even hostile.” The Venta Prieta group disowned Laureano Ramírez sometime in the mid-1940’s and later discharged its second leader about 1961, because it learned, after eighteen years, that he was an associate of Laureano Ramírez. Ramírez had formed a branch of the Iglesia de Dios in Venta Prieta, while he lived in Pachuca. As late as 1938, he was preaching to the group in Venta Prieta under the banner of the Iglesia de Dios, whose members are called “Israelitas.” According to Patai, “Some members of the Venta Prieta community did not conceal that they were proselytes converted to Judaism or half-converted [sic] to it. . . .”

In 1948, the total Jewish population, Patai found, comprised “eight Jewish families” and “number only a few dozens.” Still, a pamphlet entitled Indian Jews in Mexico, published about 1944 by the short-lived “American Friends of the Mexican Indian Jews,” has this to say:

It would be difficult to assert how many descendants of the Carvajal family are alive today, although there are a great many Indians in Mexico who take pride in their lineal descent from the Carvajal family. Their typical Indian features and their decidedly Jewish facial expression they attribute to the fact that in the days of the Carvajals intermarriage between the Jews and the Indians was rife. Carvajal himself subscribed heartily to the theory, which still prevails strongly in Mexican high quarters, that the Indians were the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. (Italics added.)

The historical ignorance perpetuated by the author of the foregoing, the late Rabbi Morris Clark, has been approached by few writers on the “Mestizo Jews.” A later article by Rabbi Joseph H. Gumbiner,
however, indicates that Rabbi Clark came to revise his views. In 1956, Gumbiner gave an account of his interview with Laureano Ramírez, whom he found using for Sabbath services a “large Spanish Bible which contained both Testaments, no Jewish version being available in Spanish.” Ramírez also said that there were no prayer books, because “the present Spanish translation of the Hebrew is rotten.” (Latin American Jews have been using the Old Testament with a Spanish translation since at least 1912.) Gumbiner asked Rabbi Clark why the organization “American Friends of the Mexican Indian Jews” had passed out of existence. Rabbi Clark’s reply was summarized as follows:

After several years of effort in their behalf, Rabbi Clark lost confidence in the value of the project, primarily because he came to believe that the Jewishness of the Indian Mexican Jews was of recent genesis, and that they had no connection with the colonial history of the marranos as they claimed, and that the internal administration of their affairs was not what it should have been. The present attitude of Rabbi Clark is shared by my friend in Mexico City, who said he believed that there was no need for Jews in Mexico or the United States to be concerned about this group. (Italics added.)

An article in the Mexico City magazine Hoy, of October, 1939, on the Venta Prieta people failed to state that any of the interviewees had made claims of descent from any Carvajal. It does state that the Jews were obliged to marry “con mujeres indias, mestizas o criollas” — with Indian and Mestizo women or with the daughters of Spanish Catholics. There was only one person called Carvajal among the Venta Prieta people. In an interview with me, he denied any knowledge either of his descent or that of any family in Venta Prieta or Mexico City from any colonial Carvajal. The name Carvajal, of course, is and has been common in Spain and in Latin America. It is a good Old Christian name. A Carvajal was president of Mexico for six weeks in 1915, and there was a General José María Carvajal. The Mexican National Archives have records of several monks named Carvajal, as well as of a bigamist.

An old cemetery — estimated in 1949 to have been between fifty and seventy-five years old — was used by the ancestors of the “Mestizo Jews” of Venta Prieta. It was examined by an American who is an authority on folklore and by a Mexican Jew. Both informed me of what they had seen. The tombstones had borne crosses, and none predated 1875. At this period of history, however — after 1875 — it would have been possible to leave off the crosses or substitute the insignia of any other religious group. The cemetery has now been abandoned, and when Rabbi Shlomo Goren, Chief Chaplain of the Israeli Army, visited Venta Prieta, Enrique Téllez, the community’s present spokesman, begged off with many excuses from taking us there.

Protestant Evangelical Churches were founded at Pachuca in 1873, and at Real del Monte, another neighboring pueblito, in the years 1874 and 1876. Missionaries and evangelists were working diligently in the region, and among them were many Mexican residents of the area as well as American missionaries. Conversions were numerous in the Pachuca area for various reasons. The local silver mines were owned by English-speaking people. The Americans and English there sponsored the building of Protestant churches and the erection of a school. They aided in the propagation of their sect. Pastor Olivera, who served in Pachuca for three years, from 1928 to 1930, never heard of any judíos in Venta Prieta or in any other part of the area during his pastorate there. The annual reports, conferences, minutes, etc., of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the period from 1887 to 1930 make no mention of the existence of Israelitas who professed Judaism, or of judíos, or of anything to attest to their presence. Members of the church who were interviewed stated that the existence of such a group, if known, would have been noted in the reports. Leonard S. Ingram, a missionary of the “brethren,” has evangelized in Mexico since 1896 and has been in the Pachuca area many times, but he, too, never heard of judíos or Israelitas there prior to 1940.²¹

Significant is the statement of Shimon Amir, an Israeli diplomat

²¹ Olivera supplied this information in a personal interview in Feb., 1963; Ingram supplied me with his information in Jan., 1963.
who served in Mexico for four years, from 1956 to 1960. Writing to me in 1961, he said:

I have met the leaders of the Jewish community of Venta Prieta. . . . On various occasions . . . I have tried to obtain from them a precise account of their descent. None of them could show any document which could serve as a basis for any exact conclusion. As an alternative, I tried to examine their Jewish ancestry, in the form of individual "case studies." Some of them admitted . . . that in their childhood they had been converted to Protestantism and in a later stage to Judaism. A few stated that they had been born Jews, but only one — the leader of the community in Venta Prieta — could remember that his grandmother had arrived in Venta Prieta "because of being persecuted in the North of Mexico" where she had resided beforehand. [Morelia is not in the North of Mexico, but so rapidly do legends change!]

On the whole, the members of this group, when not confronted individually, pretend being descendants of the Spanish marranos who arrived after the Conquest. Another assertion often repeated was that there were in Mexico numerous nuclei of these Jews. After my insistence, I once received a list of these nuclei. . . . Some of them I did not find at all. [In Toluca, he found one who was living as a Crypto-Christian]. . . . According to what he told me, he was born a Roman Catholic, later converted to Protestantism, and still later to Judaism, as a result of "missionary" work done by the V. P. [Venta Prieta] group. . . .

During my four years stay in Mexico, I was approached a number of times by other self-professed Jewish groups, but on examining their beliefs and customs, I found that they were members of some splinter Protestant sect.

Worth noting, too, is Laureano Ramírez' statement in an interview with a reporter for a leading American weekly magazine about November 8, 1956: "In all synagogues (Pachuca, Guerrero, San Luis Potosí, Cuernavaca and Nuevo León), we practice religion as it is practised in Israel." Nonetheless, as a five-time visitor to Israel and as one conversant with religious practices there, and as one who has attended the services at Calle Caruso conducted by Laureano Ramírez and has interviewed at least ten others who have attended these services, I can state that there is only a vague

22 Though the interview never appeared in print, the reporter showed me a copy of the story which he submitted to his editor.
similarity between religion "as it is practised in Israel" and as it is practised by the disciples of Laureano Ramírez.

In 1957, Baltazar Laureano Ramírez wrote to Rabbi David Polish: "Since we are under the sun we practice Brith Milah [circumcision] in our own children..."23 In 1958, however, representatives of the Mestizo groups approached an official of the Ashkenazi Kehilla, the Mexican Jewish community organization for those of Eastern European descent, with a request to have them pay for circumcision for their congregants. The matter was submitted to the stadt-rabbonim, the official rabbis for the Kehilla, and the stadt-rabbonim determined that the people were not Jewish and, therefore, not entitled to religious circumcision. (Rabbi Goren held likewise after his superficial investigation.) They volunteered to help them through a conversion proceeding, if they desired it, on an individual basis, since sincerity in desiring conversion and knowledge of fundamental Judaism are basic requirements.24 Of course, neither "Rabbi" Ramírez nor "Rabbi" Salazar, of Venta Prieta, could accept this proposition on behalf of their flocks because it would have been tantamount to an admission that they were not already Jews.

The Mexican journalist León Wainer-Kahn, who was a schoolmate of a son of Ramírez', wrote:

Most of the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews do not accept the Judaism of the old members of the Iglesia de Dios, who now pass themselves off as Jews. Sometime back, in 1939, I learned of a Protestant group who had been converted to Judaism under the direction of Licenciado Baltazar Laureano Ramírez. His son, Laureano Ramírez and later Laureano Luna (he later changed his name), informed me of the transformation... Next they enwrapped themselves in the myth; the new Jews wrote their own history, they formed great ideas about themselves and the early days of the conquest of Mexico. Of course, they did not delay in attempting to pass themselves off as descendants of Luis de Carvajal, el Mozo. As a result of this tale, they touched the hearts of many good people and received economic aid without any delay.25

23 Copy in the American Jewish Archives.
24 Rabbi Jacob Avigdor so advised me by letter.
25 "Son Judios porque Quieren Serlo" [They are Jews Because They Want to Be], La Vida en México (April 14, 1962), p. 8.
Patai, too, commented: "In the Jewish group the lack of religious zeal contrasts remarkably with their ardent wish to be accepted as descendants of the ancient Jews."

These people who had left Catholicism for a Protestant sect, the Iglesia de Dios, and who then switched from being "Israelitas" to "judios," obviously want roots. Mexicans love tradition. Their switching of religions and sects had left them with a desire to have firm identification. They cannot revert. They must save face. Anyone who has studied such noted Mexicans as Octavio Paz, Samuel Ramos, and Santiago Ramírez can readily understand this. A passage from *The Labyrinth of Solitude* by Octavio Paz, one of Mexico's most notable sons, illustrates the problem:

> We [Mexicans] tell lies for the mere pleasure of it, like all imaginative people, but we also tell lies to hide ourselves and to protect ourselves from intruders. Lying plays a decisive role in our daily lives, our politics, our love affairs as well as our friendships and since we attempt to deceive ourselves as well as others, our lies are brilliant and fertile. . . . Our lies reflect both what they lack and what we desire, both what we are not and what we would like to be.\(^6\)

Dr. Robert Ravicz, an eminent anthropologist fluent in Spanish, has studied the Venta Prieta group for the purpose of doing a sociological study on them and their relationship with their non-Jewish neighbors. He has confirmed that, rather than telling the truth, these "Mestizo Jews" tell tourists what they think the tourists want to hear. Dr. Ravicz informed me in May, 1963, of some new proselytes who had left the Iglesia de Dios to adopt Judaism. Of course, they did not go through the formal Jewish ceremony of conversion.\(^7\)

**A Church, An American Group, and Three Men**

We must now turn our attention to a Church, a philanthropic group, and three men. The Church is the Iglesia de Dios; the group is the "American Friends of the Mexican Indian Jews,"

---

\(^6\) Translated by Lysander Kemp (New York, 1961).

\(^7\) Dr. Ravicz supplied this information in a personal interview.
which had a brief existence; and the men are Baltazar Laureano Ramírez, the late Rabbi Morris Clark, and the late Chaim (Henry) Shoskes.

The Church of God, whose Mexican branch is the Iglesia de Dios, has a history which traces itself back to Moses. The Church identifies itself as a Sabbatarian Protestant movement and contends, in *A History of the True Church*:

> From the time of the exodus of the twelve tribes of Israel from Egyptian bondage to the advent of our Saviour, the church was called “Israel,” this term having originated through the experience of Jacob wrestling with the angel. . . . That Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled in the change of name from Israel to the Church of God is further seen by reading Acts 20:28. . . .

The Mosaic laws were and are part of the basic dogma of this Church. “The flesh of swine was placed under ban,” and the “Passover, or the Lord’s Supper,” was to be “on the fourteenth day of the first Jewish month (Nissan, also known as Abib), i.e. on the evening of the Passover.” In 1932, “with the assistance of Elder Henry Cohen, a Hebrew-Christian, they published 150,000 gospel tracts in the Hebrew language,” and headquarters were established in Palestine. The date of the Church’s establishment in Mexico does not appear, but a convention held at Saltillo in 1925 was comprised of various existing churches in Mexico and was attended by Baltazar Laureano Ramírez. Members of the Iglesia de Dios wear in their lapels a six-pointed star, which the Jews call “The Star of David.” The *History* reveals that Mexico was represented at Salem, West Virginia, on November 4, 1933, in response to the call to choose, by lot, the Twelve and the Seventy. Headquarters in the various countries were also chosen, among them Mexico City. Raymond Saenz of Mexico was one of the Twelve, and eight Mexicans were among the Seventy.

As the *Publicaciones de la Iglesia de Dios — Constitución, Gobierno y Doctrina de la Iglesia de Dios* — testify, the Church holds that Jesus is the Saviour, Redeemer, and Messiah and that he, as a Son of God, was born of the Virgin. Included in its dogma is the total acceptance of all Christian Scriptures and other Christian concepts. On the last page of the official publication of the Iglesia de Dios in
the 1930's appears the following: "NOTA: Para más informes diríjase al Señor Laureano B. Ramírez, Apartado Postal 1527, México, D. F." (For more information you are directed to Sr. B. Laureano Ramírez. . . .) In November, 1961, Dr. Patai stated, in referring to a pamphlet written by "Sr. Ramírez" in September, 1948, that it "is of a polemical character, criticizing the Iglesia de Dios, for its non-monotheistic character. . . . What is interesting is that as recently as 20-30 years ago, he was a leader of the Iglesia de Dios." Dr. Patai, at that time, did not know that Laureano Ramírez had been separated from the Iglesia de Dios in Mexico City during the 1930's by the Reverend Zeferino Laureano Ramírez, minister of the Iglesia de Dios, for reasons explained in March, 1963, to Dr. Paul Nathan. Baltazar would, then, naturally write polemical literature against the Iglesia. Having once converted the Mestizos from Catholicism or agnosticism to Protestantism, as exemplified by the Iglesia de Dios, he was later involved in switching them to Judaism.

A letter, dated January 26, 1962, from Chaplain (Rabbi) Joshua L. Goldberg, U. S. Navy (Ret.), stated in part:

I was introduced to Mr. B. L. Ramírez in Mexico City. . . . I visited the synagogue of the Mexican Indian Jews and preached there. . . . I did not go too deeply into the scientific details of their history. I understand that one of the Conquistadores, who was a Marrano, upon reaching Mexico, reverted with his family to Judaism and treated his Indian slaves so well that they accepted the family's religion. . . . I know, however, that Dr. Henry Shoskes, of HIAS, claims to be the discoverer of the group and had written on the subject. . . . Frankly, I had it in mind to go again to Mexico, and then I would have given myself the opportunity to look into the matter more deeply, for the self-annointed Rabbi, B. L. Ramírez, who is a lawyer and the factotum of the synagogue, did not leave me with the impression that he's a missionary in the name of the God of Israel. . . . (Italics added.)

Mr. Shoskes wrote of Baltazar Laureano Ramírez:

The ministro could not read the ancient text of the parchment and asked me with some embarrassment to read in his place a few verses from the portion of the week. . . . The most plausible theory is that the present-day Jewish Indians are the descendants of the Spanish Marranos who came to

---

28 In a letter from Dr. Patai to me.
Mexico in the sixteenth century to escape from the Inquisition in Spain. These refugees were for the most part men, who married native women. In the course of generations, the descendants of these Marranos lost their Semitic features and became outwardly indistinguishable from their neighbors. . . . They had ceased to practice circumcision after the Inquisition was established in Mexico, as the circumcised Marrano was burned at the stake; but they have revived this rite in recent decades.29

Now, there are innumerable Inquisitional procesos involving Jews which reveal that circumcision had been effected during the entire Mexican colonial period (1521–1821). The verdict after 1642 was usually exile, return to Spain, jail, and confiscation of all property. The stake was reserved for relapsos or some obstinate prisoners who refused to admit heresy. Circumcision was not the crime. Circumcision was sought as corroboration of guilt. Its presence was proof of heresy. It is impossible to discern differences between the punishment imposed on Jews bearing the Mark of the Covenant and on those who had no such mark, but were still found guilty of observing the Law of Moses. Attention should be directed to the last sentence in the quoted passage from Shoskes' book and to Laureano Ramírez' statement in his letter to Rabbi Polish: "Since we are under the sun we practice 'Brith Milah' [circumcision]."

It would seem that many writers repeat garbled versions from Toro's La Familia Carvajal, and B. Laureano Ramírez may owe his account to what he may recall from having read it and from what he learned about Judaism from Rabbi Morris Clark and from Shoskes. Rabbi Clark acted as a teacher of Judaism for the Mexican lawyer. They had met sometime in the 1930's, coincidentally about the time the Mexican was going from Protestantism to Judaism, but still using the name of Iglesia de Dios in Venta Prieta. I think that Rabbi Clark, who helped sponsor Baltazar Laureano Ramírez, had partially atoned for the extreme naiveté or deception that he had perpetrated, or for the fulfillment of a desire to participate in something unique or sensational. Unfortunately, his atonement as represented by his letter to Rabbi Joseph H. Gumbiner never received the publicity it deserved.

AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE MEXICAN INDIAN JEWS

On March 20, 1944, a letter was mailed, and the stationery on which it was written contained the names of many officers and of the National Advisory Board of the "American Friends of the Mexican Jews." Those listed were prominent in the American Jewish community, and equal distinction applied also to most of the Mexican sponsors. When, in 1961, verification was sought of their affiliation with the group, prominent people like Rabbis David de Sola Pool, Solomon B. Freehof, and Maurice N. Eisendrath all denied any knowledge of affiliation with the "American Friends of the Mexican Indian Jews." Dr. Nahum Goldmann vaguely remembered being asked to help, but he had never heard further from them. Several of the Mexican sponsors "disaffiliated" themselves for reasons similar to those set forth by Rabbi Morris Clark.

Mrs. Murray Campbell, author of an article on the Venta Prieta group, stated that she clearly remembered asking them what other like groups there were in Mexico and where there were other synagogues. The answer was Venta Prieta and Pachuca (actually the same) as well as Apipilulco and Cocula. Most pertinent was their significant omission of any reference to Licenciado Ramírez and his Mexico City "synagogue."³⁰

Baltazar Laureano Ramírez is the leader of the Calle Caruso synagogue. They are inextricably entwined. The synagogue has had three names: Congregación de Elohim (Hebrew for Congregation or Church of God, a literal translation of Iglesia de Dios); Bnei Elohim; and, finally, Kahal Kodesh Bnei Elohim, its present name.

The editor of the United Israel Bulletin, a free-lance news sheet not affiliated with the State of Israel, published a lengthy article on Lawyer Ramírez.³¹ The self-ordained "Rabbi, Mohel and teacher"

gave me, as well as four tourists present at the time, copies of an issue of this periodical. "This is the truth," he said, and he must be adjudged to have approved the contents. The article states that "Rabbi" Ramírez "attends to the religious needs of his people, such as circumcision, marriages, etc. . . ." The editor then attributes to "the amiable Ramírez" the revelation that in the Monterrey region of northern Mexico live hundreds of thousands of Mexican Catholics who consider themselves descendants of Hebrews. Some of the leaders, he said, had often come to him and requested that he establish a synagogue in their midst.

There is a three-story Jewish community center building in Monterrey, plus a private school that goes through high school and a large, beautiful synagogue. The leaders of the Monterrey Jewish organizations stated that no Indian or Mestizo group or any Catholics claiming descent from Jews had ever approached them for membership, help, teaching, conversion, or association of any kind.

A man named "Camajal" — the only one in the entire group alleging this as his name — has a son who gave an interview to a reporter for the National Jewish Post.32 The young boy, "Javier (Shimon) de la Vega Carvajal," asserted that his "father is a Mexican Indian who has converted to Judaism. . . . His grandfather's mother came to Mexico when she was young. She married twice, the second time to a Catholic. Shimon's grandfather is the son of the first husband, presumably a Jew." (Italics added.) This grandfather was interviewed by me. Born a Catholic, he had himself circumcised and formally converted in 1942. He publicly stated in 1963 that he knows "of no drop of Jewish blood" in his ancestry.

Though all accounts of the Mestizo Jews contend that the Carvajal family had been destroyed by the end of the sixteenth century, Anica, the youngest daughter of Rodríguez de Mattos, was burned in person in El Gran Auto-da-Fé of April 11, 1649, when she was sixty-six years of age and a widow.

While some have written about the similarities between Christianity and Indian beliefs, it is also easy to show analogies between

---

Jewish practices and those of the Indians. Washing, confession, fasting, offering of the first fruits, and the system of jurisprudence were Jewish as well as Indian and Christian customs. In fact, Bishop Diego de Landa and Fray Antonio Vásquez Espinosa, among many others, wrote in the seventeenth century of the similarities between the Indians and Jews. Blood was of great importance to the Aztec Indians prior to the Conquest. Their gods required blood so that they could give life to the people. For many years during the colonial era, Mexico City had the greatest concentration of Judaizers in the country. The Jewish ritual slaughtering of chickens, including letting the blood run into the earth, and the circumcision ritual which caused some drops of blood to flow, must have recalled to the Indian pre-Christian rites. As early as 1540, Juan de Baeza was tried by the Inquisition for Judaizing, and during the proceedings it was adduced that he had circumcised some children, one of whom was an Indian child.

Many of the accused Judaizers, including the women, showed exceptional heroism. Julio Jiménez Rueda, while erroneously referring to Jews as a race, wrote that they "bore the torture [of the Inquisition] with great valor, not only the men, but also women like Ana Vaez who suffered all the turns of the cord and the jars of water which they [the Inquisitors] were accustomed to force into the accused, without informing on any of their friends." The autos-da-fé were public holidays. People were ordered to come, and they had to bring their servants, too. Indians were compelled to watch. They noted that Jewish men and women, among others, were going to the stake and being burned for their faith. To the Indian of Central Mexico, this was an enactment of the legends and stories which he had heard from his elders about the merit of dying bravely for one's gods. The martyrdom evidenced in the autos-da-fé and the scourging or lashing which Jewish women endured in the streets for their religion must have made a deep impression on the Indian or the disenfranchised or bastard Mestizo.

33 Antonio Vásquez de Espinosa, Descripción de la Nueva España en el Siglo XVII (Mexico, 1944), pp. 49 et seq.

The Indian and the Jew were both objects of religious persecution by the Spanish overlords. What greater bonds of brotherhood could there be than those of the shared religious significance of blood and of persecution? It does not strain one's credulity to imagine a Jew circumcising an Indian and saying, "Now we are blood brothers. All you see and hear in this household is secret." In 1605, Gonzálo de Tal and Alonzo González, servants of Alonso de Rivera, were accused before the Inquisition of "practicing certain Jewish acts."35

The Israeli diplomat, heretofore quoted, advanced this hypothesis:

It seems that the main group is the Venta Prieta group, which some time in the past has conducted some missionary work. [This was part of the Iglesia de Dios activity.] . . . They are not the descendants of the Marranos. . . . It is possible that some of the 'conquistadores' secretly kept, for some time, some Jewish customs, which were seen and later copied by the servants of their entourage. These Indian Jews might be the descendants of these servants. Most probably, while practising these customs, they were never aware of their meanings, and their relation to Judaism. After the laws of the Reforma in the second half of the XIX century, Protestants started to conduct missionary work, and probably reached some of these Indians practicing Jewish customs. After being acquainted with the Old Testament, perhaps they [the Indians] discovered the similitude of their own customs with those of the Bible and started to consider themselves Jews. This hypothesis is based on affirming some relation between these Indian Jews and the Protestants.

It is necessary to recall the growth of Protestantism in the Pachuca area as early as 1874, the favorable climate that existed for its diffusion in that part of the State of Hidalgo, the distribution of copies of the Old Testament and the dissemination of the information contained therein. Several have stated that the tunes they heard sung by the "Mestizo Jews" as late as ten years ago were Protestant tunes. Subsequently they adopted for their devotions the Ashkenazic liturgical music taught them by a Mr. Chernifsly. In the 1940’s, the Colonia Vallejo group used as their cantor Moisés Rubinstein, a European-born Jew.

Dr. Adolfo Fastlicht, a member of the Mexican sponsors of the "American Friends of the Mexican Indian Jews," stated that, when

35 Tomo 281, Expediente 61, AGN.
he first had contact with these people, he heard them singing hymns in praise of Jesus as well as Moses. His affiliation as a Mexican sponsor was at the urging of Rabbi Morris Clark. He disavowed the group shortly after a shipment of prayer and other books arrived for the "Mestizo Jews" from the United States and he ascertained the manner of the disposition of some of the books. The *Enciclopedia Judaica Castellana* also corroborates the Protestant origins of the "Mestizo Jews":

Beside the religious congregations of the Sephardim and Ashkenazim, there is a group of proselytes who are called Indian Jews. The members of this group are no more Indians than the remainder of Mexican citizenry. There has also arisen a pretension, with all the exaggeration of sensationalism, that this group consists of descendants of the secret Jews of the sixteenth century. This is an exaggeration.

The Jewish group to which we refer came in great part from the Protestant sect, Iglesia de Dios, who began their activities in Mexico during the past century. Part of the members of this sect consider themselves *spiritual Jews, circumcised in their hearts*, and venerate Jesus of Nazareth, neither as a God or son of God, but as a prophet. As a consequence of disputes and for other reasons, some affiliates of the sect decided to consider themselves Jews and have lived as such for some two decades. Their children learn to read Hebrew, and the cult uses the Jewish devotionals. The balance of their Protestant dependence is found in their hymns.

The art of cross-examination, deftly and subtly employed, often reveals what Carl L. Becker has so aptly stated: "Passionate faith and expert rationalism are apt to be united." Furthermore, "It is not always possible to press what William James called 'the irreducible brute facts' into the neat categories prescribed by faith." The Mestizo Jews have faith; like most Mexicans, they passionately believe what they say — but "the irreducible brute facts" refute the antiquity of their membership in the category of faith which they have adopted for themselves.

36 From a personal interview with Dr. Fastlicht in Oct., 1962.
37 *Enciclopedia Judaica Castellana* (Mexico, 1948), VII, 446.