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## A NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEW MEXICO SCHISM

FRAY ANGELICO CHAVEZ

MOST WRITINGS ABOUT Archbishop John B. Lamy of Santa Fe, who came to New Mexico in 1851, have made much of a "schism" the noted Padre Antonio José Martínez of Taos organized some years after the bishop's arrival. But Father Martínez had no such thing in mind even if Lamy mistook the padre's attitude as being schismatic.<sup>1</sup> A real schism did take place, however, in the southern parishes of Belen and Tomé sometime before Lamy came, when the church in New Mexico was still under the jurisdiction of the Mexican bishop of Durango, Don José Antonio Laureano Zubiría. While this brief schism may be of minor importance, it does shed light on the odd characters of the two priests who brought it about. Because both of these priests occasionally break into the civil accounts of those times, a discussion of their backgrounds and activities serves to fill a gap in a significant period of New Mexico history.

One of these padres was a young fellow named Nicolás Valencia whose incorrigible nature seems to have begun asserting itself from the time of his arrival in New Mexico as an ordained priest, if not before he left Durango. The other was Fray Benigno Cárdenas, a fugitive Franciscan from Mexico City, whose strange career is most incredible. What lends further interest to the affair is the part played by New Mexico's territorial government, directly and indirectly, following the American occupation of 1846.

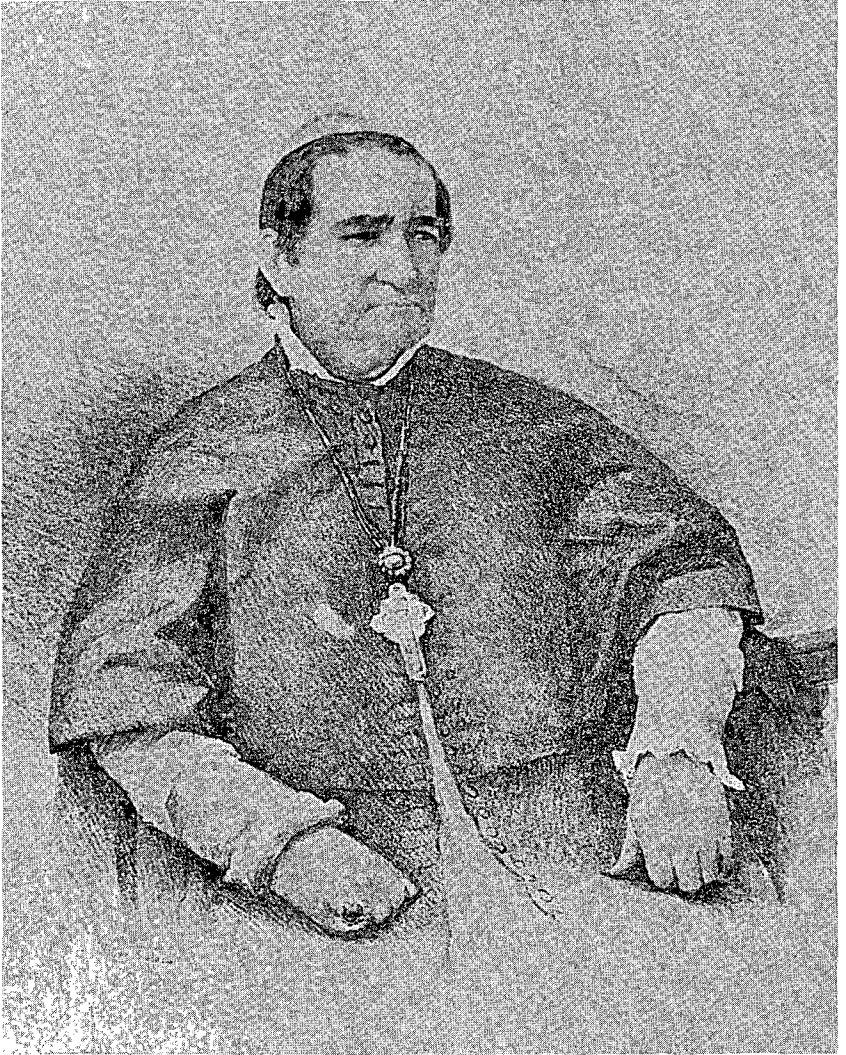
Padre Nicolás Valencia first appears in local church records in February 1845 as the assistant priest at the vacant parish of Sandia, then in the care of the pastor of Albuquerque. Evidently, he had just arrived from Durango, and, not satisfied with his minor post at the small Indian pueblo, he demanded a better one from Don Juan Felipe Ortiz in Santa Fe, who was Bishop Zubiría's vicar for New Mexico. Vicar Ortiz curtly ordered Valencia to stay put in

Sandia until the bishop himself, who would be visiting New Mexico soon, made his own decision.<sup>2</sup> This order was not the vicar's usual way of acting whenever newly ordained natives came home from the Durango seminary; he was always most considerate in his dealings, like granting vacations with relatives before putting the new appointees to work on his vicarial authority. This incident alone makes one wonder whether Valencia was a New Mexico native, but it is also a harbinger of things to come. Valencia never seems to have gotten along with the local clergy in those early years, and he may have had his troubles with Bishop Zubiría before being sent north to New Mexico.

As to his origins, Valencia could well have been a native of New Mexico's Rio Abajo where his family surnames, Valencia and García, abounded. The old town of Valencia owed its origins to a seventeenth-century pioneer settler of this name. That no child named "Nicolás Valencia" appears in the baptismal records is inconclusive evidence, since some of the Rio Abajo registers are no longer extant. The only hint about his parentage appears many years later, when the Jesuit pastor of Albuquerque noted on 5 February 1871 in the house diary that he had buried at Los Ranchos de Atrisco the mother of Padre Valencia, the latter lending his assistance at the obsequies. Although the pastor did not mention the lady's name at this time, according to the burial register as of 20 January 1871, the only person buried in Atrisco was an Antonia María García, seventy-five years old, who must have been the padre's mother.<sup>3</sup> Yet her marriage to any male Valencia does not appear in any records; hence the padre may have been born at El Paso del Norte or points further south in the Mexican republic, for some of the Valencia and García families had remained there instead of returning home with the Vargas resettlement of New Mexico in 1693.<sup>4</sup> This heritage could explain Padre Valencia's nonconformist ways and his cold treatment by Vicar Ortiz, or his actions could have been entirely due to his nature and not to birth and different upbringing elsewhere. Santiago Valdez, in his unpublished biography of Padre Martínez of Taos, states that a Padre Valencia had studied under him with other youths prior to their going to the Durango seminary; but the fact he could not recall the fellow's first name suggests that his memory was uncertain.<sup>5</sup>

Bishop Zubiría arrived for his second Pastoral Visitation of New Mexico in the spring of 1845. With him came three priests: Fray José Mariano López, a mature Franciscan who hoped to revive the defunct Custody of his Order but was frustrated by his untimely death, and Padres José Antonio Otero and José de Jesús Cabeza de Baca. These last two were newly ordained natives, both from outstanding Rio Abajo families, and notable because both were innocent victims in the schism to come. What the bishop decided about Padre Valencia at this time is unknown, except that the latter's signed entries as an Albuquerque assistant continued until May. The next one hears is that the bishop made him the temporary pastor of Belen as of 15 August 1845.<sup>6</sup> Judging from what Zubiría wrote later, his appointment at Belen was a period of trial. His ministerial entries run until July 1850, but not as the lawful pastor during the latter part of this five-year period. From what one gathers later on, Valencia must have soon begun displaying a penchant for acting independently as if the church's canons and his bishop's regulations counted for nothing, causing grave divisions among his parishioners as a result. These actions culminated in his suspension by Zubiría in 1848 on the grounds of insubordination, through his vicar in Santa Fe.

An early indication of his independent character and activities occurred in 1846, shortly after Gen. Stephen Watts Kearny took over Santa Fe and all of New Mexico for the United States on 18 August. On the night of 29 August, wrote Lt. W. H. Emory, an unnamed priest came to warn the general that a Mexican, Colonel Ugarte, had left El Paso del Norte with 500 regulars to help Gov. Manuel Armijo repel the American troops.<sup>7</sup> Armijo, of course, had fled the country before Kearny's army arrived. Emory's brief entry suggests a great deal; the mysterious padre must have come from the Rio Abajo to have such information, his sentiments differed radically from those of the other clergy in the Rio Abajo, and, lastly, he must have been Padre Nicolás Valencia. While all of the New Mexico padres had passively accepted the sudden American occupation of their homeland, they had not had sufficient time to clarify their allegiance to Mexico with the new situation, as they did sometime later. On the other hand, this nocturnal informant had evidently made up his mind from the start, and for reasons of



Bishop José Antonio Laureano Zubiría of Durango, Mexico. Courtesy Museum of New Mexico.

his own, as revealed in another Emory passage in which he is also nameless.

On 6 September while enroute to California with some of his men, General Kearny happened to be the overnight guest of a Don José Chaves at his hacienda of Los Padillas north of Belen. Before breakfast, the honored guests were invited to attend a Mass in the chapel where, wrote Lieutenant Emory,

the eccentric person we met at yesterday's dinner officiated. Priest, fop, courtier, and poet were curiously combined in one person. Proud of his pure white hand, he flourished it incessantly, sometimes running his fingers through his hair, in imitation of some pretty coquette, and ever and anon glancing in one of the many looking-glasses with which the church was decorated. After Mass, to our surprise, he delivered an eloquent discourse, eulogizing the grandeur, magnanimity, and justice of the United States.<sup>8</sup>

The fellow must have arrived at the hacienda the evening before in time for the evening meal and for the express purpose of meeting the American general again. Once more, over and above his quite masterful description of a limp-wristed fop, Emory reveals a number of things. Evidently, this padre was the same man who had come to warn Kearny the week before, but whose features and mannerisms the lieutenant had not been able to pick out during that first visit in the dark of night. Clearly, the man's lavish praises for the American republic echo the very sentiments that must have prompted the earlier visit. The man's extremely effeminate mannerisms, and his possible homosexuality, indicate that this priest could not have been any of the other Rio Abajo pastors. Research and study of the manly characters of these other clergymen and their sentiments reveal that this padre could not have been portly old Padre Rafael Ortiz at Santo Domingo, the lively but quite masculine Padre José Manuel Gallegos of Albuquerque, Padres José Antonio Otero at Sandia, José de Jesús C. de Baca at Tomé, Fray José Mariano López at Isleta, or José Vicente Chávez at Socorro. The two very young priests, Otero and Cabeza de Baca, still harbored a staunch Mexican patriotism from their recent scholastic sojourn in Durango, while the decidedly older Padre Chávez was

a native of Puebla in Mexico who would soon be returning to his native land. And old Franciscan Friar López was a retiring person who would soon pass away.

One wonders then if Valencia's effeminate attributes contributed to his incorrigible nature as well as caused his previous troubles with Bishop Zubiría and Vicar Ortiz, even though only charges of insubordination were brought up. What helps tie the knot of certainty for these suppositions is Bishop Zubiría's final statement of 1850, when he wrote that the "civil change" in government had sparked Valencia's open rebellion. By February 1848, his seditious conduct at Belen had come to a climax. The parish registers and a later statement by the bishop indicate that Vicar Ortiz had, in his name, suspended Valencia of all his priestly faculties on 25 February. This suspension, however, had not fazed Valencia, who contumaciously remained in possession of the Belen parish by getting the local magistrate to support him against Padre Otero, whom the bishop had appointed as legal pastor of the parish.<sup>9</sup>

These actions bore all the elements of a schism. Zubiría tried to clarify the problems in a letter that he wrote to Valencia and that Vicar Ortiz duly remitted to all the pastors on 12 September 1848:

To the ingrate and wayward Presbítero Don Nicolás Valencia, his sorrowing Father, the Bishop of Durango, *salud* in the Lord. I say in the Lord, but what *salud* coming from heaven's height can reach or fit into the wretched heart of a Catholic priest who has willingly separated himself from the obedience of his diocesan shepherd, and, in opposition to it, persists in making sacrilegious use of faculties he no longer possesses for celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and much less for administering the Sacraments to a people which through his fault has rebelled against the principles of the Catholic Religion, has consequently separated itself from the bosom of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church? Poor son, wretched son: in that way there can be no *salud* for you from heaven, nor for any person whatsoever who from your hand has been receiving in vain the absolutions of sins by way of the confessional, and seeing the vain authorization of their weddings which, witnessed by an illegitimate minister, are nothing else than public concubinages that multiply scandals, and whereby the bad state of consciences is worsened through those unfortunates occurring to you—and which you

yourself incur, finally losing your soul and heaven even if in this life you should come to own the whole world. Return to your senses, son, for there must still be the opportunity for mercy when merited through sufficient proofs of emendation.<sup>10</sup>

Evidently, this touching admixture of paternal pleas and threats, and other such letters that the bishop mentions having written to him, made little or no impression on Valencia; he persisted in his contumacy. Matters were to become much worse with the arrival of a kindred spirit about a year later.

On 6 September 1849, Vicar Ortiz sent out a warning to all the Rio Abajo pastors. In the past months of July or August, he wrote, a certain Fray Benigno Cárdenas, a friar of the Holy Gospel Province in Mexico City, had arrived. This priest was under suspension and shorn of all his sacerdotal faculties by his Minister Provincial for being an "apostate" (a Franciscan term for a fugitive from the Order). His major superiors had now written to Ortiz, requesting him to prevent the culprit from administering the sacraments and, if it were possible, to have him arrested and returned to his religious community in Mexico City. Nevertheless, Ortiz continued, this padre had already taken possession of the parish of Tomé with the help of the town magistrate of Valencia, who then informed the *cura propio* (permanent pastor) about his decision. The latter, Padre José de Jesús Baca, had then left Tomé in order to report the matter to the authorities in Santa Fe.<sup>11</sup> Eventually apprized of the affair, Bishop Zubiría in Durango dispatched a similar warning to the New Mexico clergy, saying that he had sent a notice to Cárdenas, ordering him to leave New Mexico as of 30 November 1849 and to return to his regular prelates. "This Apostate Franciscan Religious," Zubiría wrote, had furtively introduced himself into his diocese with forged papers from some bishop; adding crime upon crime, he also had the affront to despise another edict of Zubiría's on 12 December. Therefore, he was an *excommunicatus vitandus* (an excommunicate to be avoided), and all those who adhered to him came under the same penalty.<sup>12</sup> Of course, these orders fell on deaf ears. New Mexico was now American territory, and neither the provincial's request for Cárdenas's arrest nor Zubiría's orders for him to leave had any force.



Another account of the activities of Cárdenas prior to his coming to New Mexico appeared thirty years later in *La Revista Católica*, a Jesuit weekly printed in Las Vegas, but this account has to be apocryphal considering what his superiors had written to Vicar Ortiz. This Cárdenas, the journal stated, had once been the secretary of the bishop of Guadalajara before leaving his Order. After having committed adultery, and then murder, the story continued, he had been suspended and excommunicated by the bishop of Guadalajara in 1852.<sup>13</sup> This date is obviously wrong, and Cárdenas's connections with the prelate of Guadalajara (who was an archbishop) are not consonant with what his superiors wrote to Ortiz about his having left the Holy Gospel Province as an "apostate." Moreover, the Franciscan Province where Guadalajara was situated was the distinct one of Sts. Peter and Paul in Jalisco. Nor was Cárdenas a man of violence or a womanizer. This evidence shows the falseness of the account in *La Revista Católica* and how much oral tradition within three decades can evolve beyond actual fact.

In a letter Cárdenas wrote three years later in 1853, he stated that, after leaving his religious community, he had vainly inquired from learned persons in Culiacán, and afterward from theologians in different Mexican dioceses, about points of doctrine that bothered him.<sup>14</sup> But, according to Zubiría, he also used forged papers in passing from one diocese to another. While Cárdenas's declaration about his doctrinal doubts seems apparent in his later orthodox preaching and actions, his actions also suggest that he, a much better educated man than Nicolás Valencia was, shared Valencia's nonconformist spirit concerning church canons and the regulations of their religious superiors.

Soon after Cárdenas had reached Tomé in the late summer of 1849 and impressed the Valencia magistrate with his glib talk and captivating personality, he found a congenitally wayward twin in the less sophisticated Padre Valencia at Belén, a parish situated diagonally across the Rio Grande from Tomé. Just as Valencia had illegally stayed on in Belén as pastor by getting the local civil authorities to eject Padre Otero, whom Bishop Zubiría had appointed as its *cura propio*, Cárdenas now ousted Tomé's rightful pastor, Padre Cabeza de Baca, and took complete charge.<sup>15</sup> The combined Belén-Tomé schism then began in earnest.

Since the suspension of Valencia the year before, Vicar Ortiz in Santa Fe had found himself with an unsolvable problem on his hands. The advent of Cárdenas doubled his woes. The chief problem maker, because of its unwarranted interference, was the new American civil government in the capital. Anglo civil governors like Col. John M. Washington (1848–49) and Col. John Monroe (1849–51) were not so much to blame, however; they seemed to have looked on passively. Instead, a pair of native Hispanic major officials seemed to be the culprits. One was Donaciano Vigil, who had succeeded Charles Bent, murdered at Taos in January of 1847, as acting and then actual governor (1847–48).<sup>16</sup> The other was Antonio José Otero (a first cousin and almost namesake of young Padre Otero) whom General Kearny had appointed in 1846 as one of New Mexico's three supreme justices.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately, Governor Vigil and Justice Otero still labored under the mistaken impression, as did the magistrates of Belén and Tomé, that civil officials could interfere in internal church affairs. This alleged practice had continued during Spain's church-state role in New Mexico for 236 years, and even in the last thirty-five years of a supposedly secular and republican government under Mexico. First, following Vicar Ortiz's suspension of Padre Valencia in 1848, Governor Vigil had countered by suspending him from his vicarial office. The governor made this decision after consulting Padre Martínez of Taos, who was looked upon as an expert on canon and civil law, but who also suffered from the same wrong ideas regarding the separation of church and state. Besides, Martínez found a chance to get at Vicar Ortiz, whose vicarial position he had always envied or resented; he advised Vigil that such ecclesiastical censures no longer held under the new American government.<sup>18</sup> Then, after the Belén-Tomé schism had started, Justice Otero, a native of that area, ruled in favor of Valencia and Cárdenas, also concurring with the local magistrates in ousting and even persecuting the lawful pastors, Padres Otero and Cabeza de Baca. On 17 September 1849, the latter had written to Vicar Ortiz, asking to say Mass in private homes of Tomé because the schismatic Cárdenas was in full possession of the church.<sup>19</sup>

All this while, Vicar Ortiz had kept pleading in vain at governmental headquarters in Santa Fe, complaints that eventually reached

Congress in Washington. An undated draft of a letter, apparently from the vicar to New Mexico's governor, states that Cárdenas had unlawfully appropriated the chapel of Valencia in the Tomé parish, an act accomplished through the machinations of the town's magistrate to the exclusion of Padre Baca, the rightful pastor.<sup>20</sup> Vigil was no longer governor, but Justice Otero was still in power and working with the schismatics against Vigil. Since governors Washington and Monroe were strictly career soldiers, they could have been ignorant of American civil law regarding the separation of church and state and held themselves aloof from the controversy; or, as Anglo Saxon Protestants, they perhaps derived pleasure from the turmoil going on among the Mexican Catholics. In the end, only through the vociferous efforts of an American named Richard J. Weightman, a fearless if controversial lawyer of those times, was Vicar Ortiz able to end the schism.<sup>21</sup> Now he replaced Valencia at Belén with another young native, Padre Rafael Chaves, and at Tomé he restored Padre Cabeza de Baca.

Nonetheless, Valencia, though a maverick and not an official churchman, continued ministering to his followers in the Belén area and even as far south as Socorro. Cárdenas, very likely because he was not an American citizen or for other unknown reasons, was either expelled from New Mexico, or he found it best to leave the region. But the damage that their schism had done still weighed heavily on the mind of Bishop Zubiría on this third and last Pastoral Visitation of New Mexico in 1850.

Toward the end of his visitation on 8 November, he wrote about the nullity of the Belén marriages that Valencia had performed. One day later he declared that Valencia, besides lacking the faculties to do so, had married couples despite serious impediments.<sup>22</sup> On the same day, he entered a long declaration in the Belén marriage book stating that the parish had suffered the gravest misfortune at the hands of a "schismatic," Nicolás Valencia, who, having been placed there temporarily in 1845, had afterward in 1848 refused to surrender the parish to Padre Otero when the latter had been appointed as its *cura propio* by virtue of a *concurso* (written test). Valencia had persisted in administering the parish by availing himself of "the civil change in the land" and by means of the "irreligious backing" provided by misguided persons within

and outside the district (the local magistrates and Justice Otero). Moreover, Valencia had "with open contumacy" refused to obey the paternal letters the bishop had sent him from Durango. Valencia had gone to such extremes as to snub "the suspension *in totum*," which on 25 February 1848 his vicar had imposed on him, and thus he continued marrying people whose serious impediments were of the first order. The bishop commanded Valencia's successors to revalidate such marriages and cross out their previous records in the marriage book. (Padre Rafael Chaves also crossed out the baptisms, which, while illegal, were nonetheless valid.)<sup>23</sup>

On 13 November, while stopping at San Antonio in the Socorro parish on his return to Durango, the bishop again wrote about the invalid marriages the "wretched priests" Cárdenas and Valencia had performed and repeated what he had said about the latter in his previous statement at Belen. In addition, he ordered the pastors of Socorro, Belen, Tomé, Isleta, and Albuquerque to rectify said marriages. While at El Paso del Norte on 6 December, he wrote the particulars concerning the strange misadventures of Fray Benigno Cárdenas.<sup>24</sup>

Although Padre Valencia continued ministering as a suspended priest to a number of misguided folk in the Belen and Socorro areas, nothing further is known about him until two years later at the start of 1852. In the meantime, New Mexico had been made a Vicariate Apostolic with Santa Fe's first resident prelate, Bishop Lamy, who arrived on 9 August 1851 with his vicar and very close friend, Joseph P. Machebeuf. Sometime in September, Lamy left for Durango to consult with his Mexican predecessor, Zubiría, on the limits of his jurisdiction, and he was back in Santa Fe by 10 January 1852. At this time he accepted the services of Padre Valencia, who had evidently insinuated himself into the good graces of Vicar Machebeuf. Lamy assigned Valencia to the pueblo parish of San Felipe, a strange action since Lamy was employing a former schismatic still under his predecessor's suspension.

This decision is all the more baffling when one considers what had happened to Lamy just a few weeks before. Sometime in November 1851, while on his return trip from Durango, he had stopped at Fort Franklin in the Texas El Paso district to visit with American troops. Here he had run into Cárdenas, whose glib talk

and engaging ways must have been such that the bishop readily accepted his services. When they reached Socorro, however, Padre Otero told Lamy about his new friend's heretical character and the schism the fellow had created at Tomé two years before. Lamy dropped Cárdenas forthwith.<sup>25</sup>

This means that Cárdenas had lingered on in the Texas El Paso region after leaving New Mexico. If Cárdenas's testimony is exact or true, it must have been after this encounter with Lamy that Bishop Zubiría had him ejected from Socorro del Paso through an American justice named White. Cárdenas then went all the way to Rome to request a decree of secularization (to function as a secular priest) from the pope. These details are recorded in a letter he wrote from London on 15 January 1853 to Padre José Manuel Gallegos of Albuquerque.<sup>26</sup> (Cárdenas did not know that Bishop Lamy had suspended Gallegos in absentia on 5 December, after Gallegos made a trip to Durango in September, and had given the Albuquerque parish to Machebeuf. Gallegos was still in Durango when Cárdenas wrote and would not be back until 1 March.)<sup>27</sup> Cárdenas also wrote that his plea for secularization had been a formality to clear his good name since he intended to continue functioning outside the Catholic Church. After the pope had acceded to Cárdenas's request and he had been absolved by the minister general of the Franciscan Order, he had been recommended in the same papal decree to serve under Bishop Lamy of New Mexico. But, Cárdenas added, Bishop Lamy had made the people of New Mexico believe that Cárdenas was an excommunicate and had abjured the Catholic faith. Cárdenas told Gallegos that he expected to be back in New Mexico by May or June, and the tenor of the letter indicates that he expected to convert Gallegos to his views and recruit his help.<sup>28</sup> This letter shows that Cárdenas was a congenital liar and muddled facts and dates, not to mention his motives. Any such papal decree in his favor made the Franciscan general's absolution superfluous, and his meeting with Lamy had taken place before he went to Europe.

But the article in the *Revista* contains a different version. Cárdenas had indeed gone to Rome in order to seek secularization from Pope Pius IX, who first referred him to the Franciscan minister general, who had already learned about Cárdenas's escapades

in the New World from his superiors in Mexico City. The minister general placed Cárdenas in a house of correction for six months, but he kept writing to the pope without signs of repentance. Hence, the pope ordered the minister general to dismiss Cárdenas from the order and to give him up as a lost cause.<sup>29</sup> This account seems to be the more correct version of Cárdenas's sojourn in Rome.

Next, the account in the *Revista* continues, Cárdenas went to France, and in Paris he presented himself before the Empress Eugénie, the pious Spanish consort of Napoleon III. Posing as a poor missionary from New Mexico, he wangled the sum of two thousand francs from their imperial majesties.<sup>30</sup> Cárdenas's actions in Paris are partially corroborated in his letter to Gallegos, in which Cárdenas stated that, after having written to Gallegos from Rome on 15 October 1852 telling him about seeing the pope and the minister general, he had written to Gallegos again from Paris in December.<sup>31</sup> But a more detailed corroboration is furnished by Bishop Lamy's vicar, Machebeuf, who visited the Empress Eugénie on a similar begging mission, she told him of the previous one by "*un malheureux Père Franciscain du Mexique*."<sup>32</sup> The *Revista* article also mentions this account by Machebeuf.

From Paris, Cárdenas went to London, where he wrote Gallegos on 15 January 1853. According to the *Revista*, while in London Cárdenas asked the Anglicans to accept him as their minister, but he was turned down. Then he tried the Methodists, who gladly received him and ordained him as their apostle to New Mexico, also providing him with the tidy sum of \$3000.<sup>33</sup> It is not clear if Padre Gallegos, while in faraway Durango, received the three letters Cárdenas sent from Rome, Paris, and London. Perhaps they were waiting for him upon his return to Albuquerque in March.

What is clear is that Gallegos found himself suspended and deprived of his parish by Bishop Lamy, and he returned to Durango to enlist the aid of Bishop Zubiría. Finding no resolution to his problems there, he returned home that summer and plunged into politics with his eye on the position of New Mexico's deputy to Congress. Immediately his opposing faction, with the *Santa Fe Gazette* editor as its spokesman, introduced the religious issue in order to get the Catholic vote. They championed Bishop Lamy as a symbol of law and order and argued that the bishop had been

maligned and persecuted by evil native priests among whom Gallegos was the worst.<sup>34</sup> At the start of this bitter fall campaign the *Gazette* editor got hold of Cárdenas's letter of 15 January. The 3 September issue of the *Gazette* published the Spanish text of the letter in smallest type while giving the impression in larger type that the infamous Cárdenas was thereby backing Gallegos in his bid for Congress. While this ruse did not work at that time, later historians have been misled, neglecting to read the letter that included only the writer's religious adventures.<sup>35</sup>

Cárdenas, in his new role as an ordained Protestant minister, was back in New Mexico by August of 1853. He had boldly preached a religious discourse in front of the Santa Fe cathedral, meant also as an affront to Bishop Lamy for having dropped him like a poisonous toadstool at Socorro more than two years before. But the *Gazette* editor now made Cárdenas look as though he were campaigning for Gallegos by publishing that 1 January letter from London.<sup>36</sup> No evidence exists, however, that Gallegos and Cárdenas had joined forces in any way, much less in religious matters, since Gallegos, although out of the ministry because of Lamy's suspension, had not abandoned his Catholic faith.

A similar tricky attack on Gallegos took place later when Cárdenas advertised his second public discourse in the pages of the *Gazette*. Captioned "Notice to People of Santa Fe and the Territory," the advertisement announced that the "Missionary Benigno Cárdenas" was to preach on the true meaning of the Eucharist at the Portal of the Palace on Sunday, 4 December. In accepting the advertisement, the editor used the occasion for another unjust attack. Declaring that Cárdenas's change of religion was neither a gain for Protestantism nor a loss to Catholicism, he implied that this criticism was also applicable to Gallegos if he made a similar change.<sup>37</sup>

Later, the *Revista* writer notes, Cárdenas returned to New Mexico and established himself at Peralta (in the Tomé parish), but his influence was confined to a few families who in 1882 still adhered to his tenets. Cárdenas also had extended his efforts to Los Jarales (Belen parish) and south to Socorro, but he left few tracks. In 1854 he began ministering under a different identity in the Valencia chapel. Since 1850, he had abandoned Catholic ritual and preached heresy, forming a little "reformed" church with his followers.<sup>38</sup> The

*Revista* writer is obviously wrong about the date and in claiming that the Valencia chapel was built in 1849. He also is incorrect in saying that Cárdenas in 1850 had preached an anti-Catholic sermon in the Tomé courthouse. Obviously, a thirty-year tradition had transferred to Tomé an incident that had happened in Socorro after Cárdenas returned in 1853. Actually, as W. W. H. Davis writes in *El Gringo*, following Cárdenas's return some Anglo-American lawyers holding court in Socorro invited him to preside during that week. In the courthouse one evening he held a religious service in Spanish. The lawyers provided the choir by singing English hymns, while the congregation, consisting mostly of Mexicans, looked confusedly on.<sup>39</sup>

*El Gringo* includes two other pertinent passages concerning Cárdenas's preaching. Davis mentions that Gov. David Merriwether (elected in 1853) had made the acquaintance of one Cárdenas, a former Catholic priest who was now a Protestant preacher. Cárdenas had impressed the governor as a man of learning and considerable ability who at one time had held a high position in the church. Now he was laboring as a Methodist missionary in the south where he had gathered a small flock; some years before he had a falling out with Mexican Bishop Zubiría who, for a real or pretended cause, had placed him beyond the pale of the church. To obtain justice, Cárdenas had sought redress in Rome, and, after having been examined by the pope and his advisors, he had not only been reinstated, but had also been furnished with documentary proofs that he exhibited upon his return to America. He had decided not to remain in the church, however, because his religious views had changed in the meantime. His one object in going to Rome, in fact, had been to clear his name and standing before being accepted into another religion.<sup>40</sup>

This account must have been what Cárdenas told Governor Merriwether, and it echoes the Gallegos letter with its typically involved statements. But it also conjures up the glib tongue and engaging personality that had previously impressed the Tomé magistrates, Justice Otero, and later Bishop Lamy. All in all, Cárdenas was a strange fellow who may have been psychopathic. But the most interesting, perhaps the most incredible, phase of Cárdenas's erratic life took place the following year.



In 1855, says the *Revista* writer, Cárdenas fell gravely ill at Peralta when believers tried in vain to bring him back into the Catholic Church. One day an unclean animal (a hog?) entered his bedroom, grabbed him by a foot; and dragged him outside the house, all in view of the persons attending him. In his fright he started invoking the holy names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph while also crying out: "It's the Devil!" Sometime later, recovered from his illness as well as humbly repentant, he went to Albuquerque and threw himself at the feet of Vicar Machebeuf, begging to be reconciled with the church. Machebeuf and his assistant, Father Guerin, joyfully received the prodigal son and notified Bishop Lamy in Santa Fe, who then sent his vicar the necessary faculties for absolving Cárdenas. Machebeuf did so on a Sunday before all the faithful gathered for Mass. While Cárdenas knelt before the altar steps, his clothing pulled down to bare his shoulders; Machebeuf laid lashes on them "according to the ritual." Then Cárdenas was vested with his cassock, after which he gave a moving discourse in which he confessed that, while preaching Protestant doctrine, he knew all the while that he had been teaching error. After some days he returned to Peralta to do the same thing in the theater of his crimes, but it had no effect on those few whom he had perverted in that place.<sup>41</sup>

While this biased account seems outlandish and almost beyond belief, Davis refers to the same incident in a footnote to his passage on Merriwether's encounter with Cárdenas. Davis relates that Cárdenas had returned to the church and had recanted his Protestant heresies at Albuquerque on 24 February 1856. There he had been compelled to suffer the humiliation of receiving several lashes on his back, covered only by his shirt, and which were laid on him by the hands of the *vicario* [Machebeuf].<sup>42</sup>

Cárdenas's conversion was most sincere, the *Revista* continues. After spending three months in Bishop Lamy's house in Santa Fe, displaying every mark of true repentance, he went to Havana, Cuba, where he was taken back by his Franciscan brethren and spent the last four years of his life doing penance.<sup>43</sup> Evidence is missing for these last years in Cuba, but the sudden conversion followed by the odd penitential rite in Albuquerque is corroborated in Davis. As for the incident with the unclean animal at Peralta,

the *Revista* writer opined that the story could be true or false, but that it was being told by good witnesses and had never been questioned.<sup>44</sup> All in all, one can say that Cárdenas had not been an evil man *per se*, nor a violent man by nature, or a womanizer. He was more likely what one might call a show-off confidence man whose impulses were beyond his control.

Meanwhile Padre Nicolás Valencia, who had been shoved into the background, continued in the good graces of Bishop Lamy and Vicar Machebeuf. But his final years, even if not as strange as those of Cárdenas, touched upon local history in a small but significant way. Ironically enough, Lamy had sent him to Socorro in April of 1853 to succeed Padre José Antonio Otero, the very priest whom Valencia had chased out of Belen in his initial schism of 1848.<sup>45</sup> Padres Otero and Cabeza de Baca of Tomé had left their respective parishes toward the end of March 1853 and had gone south to offer their services to Bishop Zubiría in Mexico, fed up with a civil government that had countenanced the illegal actions of Judge Otero in backing the Valencia-Cárdenas schism and disgruntled with a church regime that had taken Valencia to its bosom.<sup>46</sup> Judging from a few archival notations, some of which are suspect as to their accuracy, Valencia stayed in Socorro as pastor for five years.<sup>47</sup> Not open to question, however, is his historic ministration of the last rites and Christian burial to ex-Gov. Manuel Armijo on 20 January 1854. Armijo was the very man who, in August 1846, had failed to engage General Kearny's American forces and had fled south to Mexico—shortly before Valencia, if the supposition presented here is correct, had gone to warn Kearny about Mexican Colonel Ugarte's having left El Paso del Norte to back Armijo.<sup>48</sup>

Valencia's signed entries next appear in the Jémez mission books from February 1856 until August 1864. An archival notation tersely states that Lamy suspended Valencia on 3 September 1864, but the reasons for the suspension are not given.<sup>49</sup> From Jémez on 30 December 1865, while perhaps still under suspension, he wrote to a Santa Fe newspaper that the Jémez Indians had successfully routed a raiding party of Navajos.<sup>50</sup> By the following year he was again in charge of the Jémez missions, and he served from November 1866 until November 1870, evidently having reinstated by his old friend Bishop Lamy.<sup>51</sup> As already shown, he was in Albuquerque

for his mother's funeral at Atrisco on 5 February 1871, when the Jesuit pastor wrote that he himself had gone there "for the almost solemn burial [a liturgical sarcasm referring to Valencia's assistance] of the deceased mother of Padre Valencia, who has only paid the graveyard fees, and as a sign of gratitude has given us a slaughtered hog."<sup>52</sup>

Was he again under suspension at this time? The same Jesuit source refers to him as the "ex-priest" who passed through town with some cattle on 15 March 1872. Then, on 10 April 1873 he is mentioned as having assisted the Jesuit fathers with the ceremonies of Holy Thursday. Finally, he is mentioned in passing in June 1875 as the priest at the village of Valencia.<sup>53</sup> This evidence indicates that he had been coming under Lamy's suspension off and on for the past ten years, but for reasons that must not have been too radical. A reasoned guess is that he had been engaging overmuch in the livestock business, as noted in the transactions above. At this period Bishop Lamy had threatened all clergy with suspension, including his fellow Frenchmen, if they engaged in ranching and other kinds of commercial ventures.<sup>54</sup>

One archival notation reveals that Valencia died in 1885 at La Posta del Rio Puerco in the Jémez region, but it does not say whether he was in disfavor at the time. As late as forty years ago, a tradition existed in Jémez country that he had married and lived on as a cattle rancher in the Cabezón area of the Rio Puerco. This tradition suggests that he had left the ministry, but, if so, one can safely presume that he had not married and that the local folk had mistaken the woman who kept house for him as his wife. He was up in years by then, and he was definitely not the marrying kind.

#### NOTES

1. Fray Angelico Chavez, *But Time and Chance: The Story of Padre Martinez of Taos, 1793-1867* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 1981), pp. 129-56.
2. Log of Official Acts, Vicar of Santa Fe, 1840-1851, Accounts Book C-1, February 1845, Archives of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe (AASF).
3. "Diario de la Residencia parroquial de la Compañia de Jesus, Albuquerque, N.M.," various volumes 1867-1966, Archives of the New Orleans Province of the Society of Jesus, Grand Coteau, Louisiana, (ANOPSJ-GCL), courtesy of Father Thomas J. Steele, S.J. Burials (Bur), Albuquerque, 20 January 1871, AASF.

4. See Fray Angélico Chávez, *Origins of New Mexico Families in the Spanish Colonial Period* (1954; reprint ed., Albuquerque: University of Albuquerque in collaboration with Calvin Horn, Publisher, 1973), pp. 109, 181–85.

5. See Chavez, *But Time and Chance*, p. 44.

6. Book of Baptisms (B) 9, Albuquerque, and B-12, Belen; Loose Documents, Missions, 1839, no. 2, Belen, AASF.

7. William Hemsley Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance from Fort Leavenworth in Missouri to San Diego, in California, including part of the Arkansas, Del Norte, and Gila rivers, 1846–1847* (Washington, D.C.: Wendell and Van Benthuyzen, 1848), p. 33.

8. Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, pp. 40–41.

9. B-12, Belen, February–April 1848; Belen, Book of Marriages (M) 7, 9 November 1850, AASF.

10. Book of Patentes (Patentes) XIX, Santa Cruz, 12 September 1848, AASF.

11. Patentes XIX, Santa Cruz, 6 September 1849, AASF.

12. J. F. Ortiz File, 1851, no. 1, January 14 with bishop's edict, 6 December 1850, AASF.

13. [Las Vegas] *La Revista Católica*, 29 April 1882.

14. *Santa Fe Gazette*, 3 September 1853.

15. M-7, Belen, 9 November 1850, AASF.

16. Chronological data from U.S., Congress, Senate, Sam G. Bratton, *New Mexico: A Brief Historical Outline*, S. Doc. 147, 71st Cong., 2d sess., 1930.

17. R. E. Twitchell, *The History of the Military Occupation of the Territory of New Mexico from 1846 to 1851 by the Government of the United States* (Denver, Colo.: Smith-Brooks, 1909), p. 84.

18. Chavez, *But Time and Chance*, pp. 87–88.

19. Accounts, C-1, 17 September 1849, AASF.

20. Loose Documents, Missions, 1851 (1849), no. 16, AASF.

21. William A. Keleher, "The Year of Decision," *New Mexico Historical Review* 22 (January 1947): 44–45; see also Twitchell, *Military Occupation of New Mexico*, pp. 175–80.

22. Patentes XII, Belen, 8, 9 November 1850, AASF.

23. M-7 and B-12, Belen, 9 November 1850, AASF.

24. M-7 and B-12, Belen, 9 November 1850; see also Patentes XIX, Santa Cruz, 6 September 1849, AASF.

25. Chavez, *But Time and Chance*, pp. 98–99. The *Revista Católica* source cited therein has a "Padre Chaves" in Socorro instead of Otero, but the latter had already succeeded José Vicente Chávez, now in Mexico.

26. *Santa Fe Gazette*, 3 September 1853.

27. Chavez, *But Time and Chance*, pp. 102, 106, 114–15.

28. See *Santa Fe Gazette*, 3 September 1853.

29. *La Revista Católica*, 29 April 1882.

30. *La Revista Católica*, 29 April 1882.

31. See *Santa Fe Gazette*, 3 September 1853.

32. Horgan Collection, "Propaganda Fide," 1859, May 13, no. 3, AASF.

33. *La Revista Católica*, 29 April 1882.

34. Chavez, *But Time and Chance*, pp. 118–20, 125.
35. *Santa Fe Gazette*, 3 September 1853; also Paul Horgan, *Lamy of Santa Fe, His Life and Times* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), p. 233, who misdates the incident by three years.
36. *Santa Fe Gazette*, 27 August 1853.
37. *Santa Fe Gazette*, 3 December 1853.
38. *La Revista Católica*, 6 May 1882.
39. W. W. H. Davis, *El Gringo, or New Mexico and Her People* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1857), p. 369.
40. Davis, *El Gringo*, p. 247.
41. *La Revista Católica*, 6 May 1882.
42. Davis, *El Gringo*, p. 247 n.
43. *La Revista Católica*, 6 May 1882.
44. *La Revista Católica*, 6 May 1882.
45. B-1850–1853, Socorro, AASF.
46. Chavez, *But Time and Chance*, p. 116.
47. Parishes, I, Socorro, no. 4, AASF.
48. William A. Keleher, *Turmoil in New Mexico, 1846–1868* (Santa Fe: Rydal Press, 1952), p. 114.
49. Clergy of Archdiocese I, no. 2; B and M Jemez, 1846–1870, AASF.
50. *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 12 January 1859.
51. Clergy of Archdiocese I, no. 2; B and M, Jemez, 1846–1870, AASF.
52. “Diario de la Residencia parroquial de la Compañía de Jesus,” ANOPSJ-GCL; Bur, Albuquerque, 20 January 1871, AASF.
53. “Diario de la Residencia parroquial de la Compañía de Jesus,” ANOPSJ-GCL; Bur, Albuquerque, 20 January 1871, AASF.
54. Fray Angélico Chávez, *Archives of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe* (Washington, D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1957), p. 131, 1864, no. 1. The two copies listed here are now missing.