IV
THE GEOGRAPHY OF MEXICAN METHODISM

As we have noted, the first task of the Bishop Haven and William Butler, founders of the MEC Mission in Mexico, was to establish contact with potential sympathizers. With their assistance, the Mission expected to establish the basis for a strong and durable work. Haven was only able to begin the process. His visit to Mexico was more than anything a testament to the interest of the Northern Methodists in opening work south of the border. As a result of his efforts, a Sunday school group began meeting in March of 1873. Seven people, six of them foreigners, participated in the study group. Just six months later, the place in which they were meeting was said to be too small to accommodate the nearly fifty people who were then attending. With this organization as their starting point, the missionaries dedicated themselves to finding additional contacts to create a network of centers of operation in the manner of a military campaign.

The places chosen for the initiation of missions work were localities where there were already people or circumstances favorable to Protestantism. The first of these places—Mexico City—was the site of the dissident Church of Jesus, the main center of activity for the “Constitutionalist fathers.” In Pachuca there was an active group of Protestants led by a doctor named Marcelini Guerrero. Some engineers who lived in Real del Monte were interested in starting a Protestant congregation. Lastly, an Englishman with the surname of Robertson who lived in the town of Miraflores in the state of Mexico and who owned a yarn and textile factory there supported the establishment of the Methodists.
At almost the same time, Butler established or tried to establish preaching centers in Orizaba and Puebla, important points on the Mexico-Vera Cruz highway. Two years later, Butler decided to extend the reach of the mission toward the richest and most desirable part of the country: the Bajío. To accomplish this, he decided to establish congregations in Guanajuato and Querétaro, despite the fact that both places were notable not only for their lack of religious dissent but also for their declared Roman Catholic zeal.

By 1878, the lines of expansion of the Northern Methodists’ missionary work in our country had already been established. From that point on, all of their efforts would be aimed at occupying zones of influence already marked out. For close to one hundred years, the Methodist plan of occupation in the center of the country followed the lines laid down by Butler during the 1870s. We can find only three exceptions to this pattern: 1) the central region of Oaxaca, where the Northern Methodists revived a work that had been begun and then abandoned by the Southern Methodists; 2) the lowlands of the state of Vera Cruz stretching as far north as Tuxpan; and 3) the northern sierra in the state of Puebla along the commercial route that in those days connected the state of Hidalgo with the Vera Cruz coast. It is worth mentioning that the mission abandoned the first two regions in 1918 in response to the so-called “Cincinnati Plan.” The third area disappeared from the Methodist fold after the Revolution. The occupation of each of these places came in response to the wishes of the missions’ directors and created logistical problems. In fact, only during the first six years can we speak of a planned occupation that conformed to a preconceived notion of the strategic importance of these places, and William Butler must be credited with that plan.
A. The Strategic Plan

Selecting the first Methodist center could not have been simpler. It was obvious that they had to begin in Mexico City not only because it was the capital, but also because of its many associations with the nation’s history. In March of 1872, William Cullen Bryant, editor and poet of great renown in the United States, made a trip to our country. The North American writer published his impressions of his sojourn among the Mexicans in the New York Evening Post. His report of the Church of Jesus was the biggest news. Bryant wrote that he had met a large number of believers, mostly men, who were participating actively in religious services. Bryant noted that this contrasted with the Catholic Church where the majority of the attendees were women. The tenor and substance of the account of his visit to the old church of San Francisco sounded like an invitation to North American religious organizations to enter Mexico.¹ Surely it was something more than an astonishing coincidence that these articles were published in March and April of 1872 and the Methodist missionary undertaking in Mexico was approved in May of the same year.

The Church of Jesus, whose existence was already known to Butler even before the Evening Post article, made its own contribution to the selection of Mexico City as the place to begin operations: members of this church extended a “Macedonian call” that the missionaries claimed as the justification for their presence in Mexico.² It was William Butler who in 1869, in his capacity as Executive Secretary of the American and Foreign Mission Society, heard them and offered support. The history of this church is important for the study of dissident religious


² “Macedonian call” is a reference to an episode recorded in the book of Acts in which the Apostle Paul dreamed that a man from Macedonia was calling him to bring the gospel to that province. (See Acts 16: 9-10.)
movements in Mexico because from it came the first pastors of at least four Protestant missions. Moreover it was the direct predecessor of the Mexican National Church of Patriarch Perez in 1926.³

There was no difficulty in deciding to begin work in Pachuca and Real del Monte, in the state of Hidalgo, either. The support that the first two Methodist missionaries met with in those places was crucial in making the decision. Pachuca was one of the sites visited by Bishop Haven who was deeply impressed by living conditions there; the insecurity and violence particularly caught his attention. On the other hand, in contrast to the problems, he was quite interested in the presence of some individuals who were organizing a congregation outside the Catholic Church. Moreover, the location raised the immediate possibility of opening other places of work in the mining towns of the surrounding areas such as Omitlán.

Miraflores, was another attractive location. The support offered by Robertson, the factory owner there, was not insignificant. It included the donation of a place to hold services which was helpful economically and was also very important because it encouraged the factory workers to attend services. But this was not the only reason for selecting Miraflores as a site for their work. This little town in the state of Mexico seemed desirable because “being connected with the network of towns that extend through Tlulmananca [Tlalmanalco?], Amecameca, and Cholula as far as Puebla, it gave Methodism access to the most fertile and historic valley in Mexico with its large agricultural populace.”⁴

³ The Mexican National Apostolic Catholic Church was formed in the mid1920s with the encouragement of the vehemently anti-clerical President Plutarco Elias Calles. Calles was hoping that the new church would draw Mexicans away from the Roman Catholic Church with which he was feuding but it never became more than a small schismatic sect. The church was led by a former Catholic priest named Joaquin Pérez.—Trans.

⁴ William Butler to Bishop Simpson, August 21, 1874, Methodist Episcopal Church Archive, Correspondence of William Butler, 1874-1876.
The choice of Puebla and Orizaba caused a bit more difficulty. While it appeared that these places were essential for the mission, according to Butler, neither contained any “friends” of the Protestants. To occupy these places necessitated the acquisition of appropriate real estate and the sending of reliable preachers. The first obstacle proved to a serious one. The entire year of 1874 passed in efforts to acquire a suitable building in Puebla. In Orizaba, it did not take long to buy one, but the result was worthless because of the poor condition of the property. The lack of preachers was another huge difficulty. For Orizaba, a missionary was designated—William H. Cooper, which in itself represented a problem because of his advanced aged, poor health, and bad temper. In Puebla, it was not even possible to find a property suitable to house a church and there was no North American missionary available to do the work. The only preacher at hand was a Mexican named Aguilar in whom Butler did not have much confidence.

A different prospect opened with the possibility of establishing a mission in Apizaco in the state of Tlaxcala. Wrote Butler, “our friend, Pablo Gonzales, chief of the machine shop,” was transferred to this important railroad center. In addition, noted Butler, there were already Protestants in the place. With the occupation of this town, linked to Orizaba and Cordoba where Butler was also thinking about starting work, the Methodists would have a presence in the entire series of cities along the length of the Mexican Railway. The likelihood of constant rail service meant that the Mexico City—Vera Cruz—New York route would always be open and raised the possibility that there could be rapid communication between the preaching points, guaranteed by the closeness of the congregations to the railway. With this argument, Butler hoped to put sufficient pressure on the Missions Society to send more missionaries to carry out the work.

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5 William Butler to Bishop Simpson, November 12, 1874, Methodist Episcopal Church Archive, Correspondence of William Butler, 1874-1876.
Evidently there were different criteria for selecting which localities to occupy. Most important was the existence or absence of support in the area. Then there was the importance of the place in itself and as a gateway to populous and wealthy areas. This reflected the strategic mindset that Butler utilized in laying out the mission. It was also necessary to take into account the existence of appropriate facilities and the possibility of acquiring them. Two other important factors were the availability of personnel to manage the work in the particular circumstances of each place and the possibility of rapid communication with the “headquarters” in Mexico City.

If we try to rank these criteria we encounter serious problems. For example, Puebla and Orizaba received more resources than Apizaco. Puebla was one of the most important cities in the country because of its industry and commerce. Nevertheless, the Mexican Railroad discriminated against it by connecting it to a mere branch line. Thus, the general importance of the city weighed more than the difficulty of communication. It was just the reverse with Orizaba. This city was situated on the main railroad line and that was not its only virtue. In fact, Orizaba provided quick access to Veracruz, the missionaries’ point of entry into the country. This was important because the unhealthiness of the port did not permit the establishment of missionaries there permanently. It is worth noting that North American missionaries were sent to Puebla and Orizaba as often as possible to sustain the work. Apizaco, on the other hand, a station on the way to Puebla with a potentially receptive population that had been drawn by the railroad and where there were already some “friends of the cause,” never received comparable attention. As a result, Orizaba appears as a center of preaching in 1873, Puebla in 1874, and Apizaco not until 1877. In the first two cases, the circumstances of their strategic role as leading cities of the region weighed more heavily than the existence of local support or even the presence of a favorable environment as represented by the existence of railroads and workshops.
On the other hand, the cases of Miraflores and Pachuca show that the presence of local support could outweigh the lack of railroad connections. Nevertheless, we should remember that both locations allowed access to promising new mission fields. Pachuca, for example, received a large amount of attention and resources as indicated by the presence of two schools superintended by North American missionaries. Miraflores also received a substantial amount of attention, though fewer resources.

Guanajuato, on the other hand, was chosen precisely because the railroad would pass through it. It was this circumstance that made Butler prefer the mining city to the commercial city of Lagos, his other option in the area. It should be added, however, that the mission Superintendent also saw Guanajuato as the link that the Northern Methodists would need to unite the undertakings that they were developing in the center of the country with those that were being undertaken by the “New Mexico” mission in the states of Sonora and Chihuahua. That was why they needed to be close to the railroad. It is not strange, therefore, that Butler went before the governor of the state to explain his intentions and ask for his protection. Guanajuato’s possibilities as a link between the center and Mexico’s northwest gave the place a singular importance.

Butler’s selection of these locations as centers of operations earned him glowing praise from the Secretary of the Missions Society, despite the fact that he was prone to impulsiveness. In his desire to plant the mission on a solid foundation, he bought properties that could not be utilized at that moment, but which granted the Methodists an advantageous position upon which to build in the future. This practice led Butler to run up debts that were beyond the mission’s current capabilities. Eventually, it led to his dismissal as first Superintendent of Mission Work.

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6 William Butler to Bishop Haven, July 23, 1875, Methodist Episcopal Church Archive, Correspondence of William Butler, 1874-1876.
But before Butler abandoned his post, Secretary of the Missions Society, Robert L. Dashiell visited him to evaluate his accomplishments. In his final report, Dashiell informed the Society: “it was with uncommon satisfaction that I observed the wise placement of our mission fields in Mexico.”

Dashiell justified his by praise pointing out some of the circumstances that, in his judgment, a mission had to consider with respect to geographical distribution. He noted that “the centers should have opportunity for growth and for becoming self-sustaining because they are the bases of support for the surrounding territories … one cannot commit a greater error than to extend the mission field so far without a large, healthy, life-giving heart to supply and direct weak, remote, and dissimilar stations.” For that reason, he argued, one had to be careful that the centers of preaching were connected in such a way that it was easy to reach them and they could offer each other mutual assistance. This became even more necessary because of “our peculiar itinerant system of supervision.” As he explained “the direct and personal supervision of each portion of the undertaking by a superintendent, with periodical official visitation by the bishop in charge of the mission, gives our mission work unity and effectiveness.” Thus, continued Dashiell, “The most humble native preacher feels himself a part of the grand system that he belongs to, and that helps and inspires him.”

Yet there was another circumstance that made Butler’s planning pertinent and praiseworthy according to Dashiell: “In Mexico, our system of circuit riding preachers corresponds admirably to the people’s conditions and needs. A series of small towns exists, none of which require a full-time missionary. By linking these towns in a circuit, we serve a greater number of

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7 58th Annual Report of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1876.

8 Ibid.
people.” Thus, there was a clear need for mission centers to be close each other, well connected, and with the potential for opening new areas for preaching.

The need for good communication became evident several times during the history of the mission. In the middle of 1880, John W. Butler pointed out to the Secretary of the Missions Society:

In terms of mail communications, I think Mexico is almost the most difficult territory our society has entered. In general we only have daily mail along the railroad lines. In other locations we only have it two or three times a week and during the rainy season (June to October), often only once a week. Even this is subject to interruptions and delays.¹⁰

The problem this presented was that sending money was incredibly difficult, resulting in problems for the missionaries when anticipated funds did not arrive. We recall that, according to William Butler, all expenses had to be paid up front and in cash. The most extreme instance of these problems occurred during the Mexican Revolution between 1913 and 1915, when the entire Oaxaca missionary field was isolated from Mexico City. On that occasion, Eduardo Zapata, Superintendent of the District, was compelled to administer the congregations independently of the mission board.

### B. Successes and Failures

Following the process of creating a network of centers around which to construct the mission came the process of filling in the zones bordering those centers. Mexico City was the first site of

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this endeavor. In the course of three years from 1873 to 1875, at least nine small congregations emerged in the areas surrounding the central congregation. These congregations occupied territories ranging from the quiet neighborhood of Mixcoac to busy San Cosme, the colony of Guerrero, and the garrison of Santa Inés. The criteria for selecting these locales were similar to those used in choosing the main locations except that in the occupation of neighboring zones, greater importance was given to the existence of local support while the possibility of later territorial advances mattered less.

The creation of these centers was a product of the mission’s propaganda efforts and their permanence was not considered essential. By 1885, for example, none of these first preaching points in Mexico City existed any longer, they had all been abandoned, “due to the limitations of the budget and urgent appeals from other places.” This circumstance was a marked characteristic of the churches that arose in these “peripheral” regions. It was quite normal for them to be born, to plateau, and five or six years later to disappear from the lists of preaching points. There may have been several reasons for this pattern. It could be that a particular congregation stagnated with a very small number of faithful and so was incorporated into another nearby congregation. But the most common reason that a local congregation disappeared completely, as was the case of the small missions in Mexico City that were mentioned previously, was because of the obligations that were imposed upon the new believers.

The new creed appealed powerfully to the people with promises of “free and immediate salvation,” “direct communication” with the Divine, freedom from the material obligations of the church, etc. A noteworthy example is a letter published in El Abogado Cristiano Ilustrado in which a preacher describes his first contact with a group of people who invited him to preach in

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11 Minutes from the Methodist Episcopal Church’s Annual Mexican Conference. 1910. pp. 42.
their town. The preacher, José Chávez, says that he went to the countryside to rest. While reading his Bible, he was surrounded by farm workers with machetes who asked him what he was reading. The Bible, he answered. Then came a series of questions: What is that book about? Does it say that we should pay a peso to the priest so that we can get married? Does it say that we should give our best sheep to the priest? Do we have to pay to bury our dead? Pastor Chávez’s answers were simple. The Bible speaks about God and what he offers to the people. It does not say anything about what someone has to give to the priest, etc. As a result, the tale concluded, “the brothers” invited him to open a church in their town.12

The location mentioned in the letter never appeared on the mission’s list of preaching sites. One has to wonder, what happened to those people who were so interested in the new religion? Probably they lost interest when they learned that they would have to give their money to support the pastor and the church. Moreover they would have to attend church every Sunday. They would have to change, at least in appearance, their way of life by ceasing to drink, gamble, and womanize. They would have to endure the pressure that resulted from their new religious commitment because their family and friends would ask them why they had not attended Sunday services at the Catholic Church. They would have to endure the contempt of the community. In the face of all these “disincentives,” it is not strange that populations that demonstrated an initial interest in freeing themselves from the obligations imposed on them by the Catholic Church did not always form permanent Methodist congregations.

Even so, Methodists were able to create a large number of small rural congregations, so many that one missionary proposed abandoning work in the urban areas that “yielded little fruit”

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12 El Abogado Cristiano Ilustrado, 8/4 (March 10, 1880), pp53.
in order to dedicate more resources to rural zones that were more “promising.”\(^{13}\) As a result, all of the zones bordering the principal centers witnessed the emergence of Methodist churches. It was something like a smallpox epidemic. First, a focal point was created and from there it spread to the surrounding areas. The only limitation on this “infection” was the zeal and mobility of the believers. It could be said that the most important agents in spreading the new creed were the faithful who, on moving to a new community or visiting their relatives, brought the message with them. Nor was it surprising that when foreign missionaries and national preachers opened new mission fields they would visit “friends of the cause” who were disposed to receive them. This is where literature distribution fit: preachers would provide “friends of the mission” with brochures so that they could pass them on to their acquaintances.

While there was a certain rationality in the location of many congregations, Methodist groups also emerged in zones far from the previously planned mission centers. Reflective of the first case were the congregations established in textile zones. In general, textile workers were characterized by their labor mobility. An example of this mobility is the case of the workers at the recently opened factory in Río Blanco in the 1890s. Among them was Manuel Avila,\(^{14}\) who had come from Miraflores where there was a strong Methodist congregation. It is not coincidental that this worker carried the last name of the most well known Methodist family in Miraflores, that he was a friend of José Rumbia, renowned Methodist pastor of the tropical lowlands, and that the Methodists chose to open a new congregation at the textile factory in Río Blanco. The same could be said of the case of José Morales,\(^{15}\) another church leader and worker

\(^{13}\) 69\(^{th}\) Annual Report of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1887, p. 269.


\(^{15}\) Ibid, p. 72.
from Río Blanco who had lived in the towns of Hércules, Querétaro, and Miraflores, all places where Methodist churches existed. On the other hand there were cases of congregations that started up in places far removed from the main preaching centers. For example, the congregation in San Andrés Tuxtla, Veracruz, was abandoned in 1896 because it was too expensive in both economic and human terms, and others like El Oro in the state of Mexico which was turned over to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in 1909 because it was too far west in the state of Mexico to be adequately supported. In this way, the Methodist Episcopal Church mission came to possess a large number of congregations that went beyond the geographical limits of the original plan.

It was not always possible to find easy avenues of communication between all of these preaching points. In 1912 Eduardo Zapata declared that thirty-eight congregations existed in the District of Oaxaca. While ten of them were situated along the railroad line, “the rest are scattered among the ravines of the Sierra Madre in such a way that one needs a trip of two or three days by horse to reach them.”

For this reason, the itinerant system, characteristic of the Methodist church from its English origins, was especially well suited to the peculiarities of the Mexican mission. A number of congregations would form a circuit that was attended to by a single preacher who periodically visited each location. This practice gave the preachers an amazing mobility in the area of their circuit and allowed them to become very familiar with the terrain. If we add to this that the itinerant system involved a change in pastors every so often, we can see that Methodist preachers generally had in an incredibly broad field of action and came to be well acquainted with many different regions in the center of the country.

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16 94th Annual Report of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1912, pp. 382.
Originally, there were four zones occupied by the Methodists: the Valley of Mexico, the Mexico City-Veracruz corridor, the Puebla-Tlaxcala valley, and the mining region in the state of Hidalgo. Three years after the start of the missionary effort they had added a broad region that included the Bajío and the route that united this region with the Republic’s capital. Finally, by the middle of the 1880s, they added two completely new zones, the central Oaxaca region and the Veracruz lowlands.

As we have already noted, the occupation of the first five regions was contemplated in the missionaries’ plans from the start. Butler wanted to introduce preaching centers in the areas that were the richest, the most economically active, the most heavily populated, and the ones with the best communications between them. From this perspective one could say that the last two zones, Oaxaca and the Veracruz lowlands, were always distant from what we could call the main body of the mission.

The results of the Methodists’ missionary efforts differed greatly from one region to another. Some zones presented many more problems and consequently required greater efforts than others. The state of Hidalgo responded the most rapidly and with the greatest zeal to the missionaries’ efforts. In the space of twenty years, congregations were created in four distinct zones of the state, two of which continue to be mainstays of Methodist work in the region to this day. Starting from their work in the mining zone of Pachuca and Real del Monte, the mission extended to other mining centers such as Omitlán, Atotonilco el Grande, and el Chico. Another area of strong Methodist occupation was the broad plain in the eastern portion of the state. This region was attacked from two fronts: from the side of the mining zone to the west, and from the center of the region itself, the town of Tulancingo, which was also the Episcopal seat of the Catholic diocese. As a result, the Methodists were located in a predominantly mining zone and in
an agricultural region, one which mainly produced *pulque*. A third area of preaching was towards the north of the state, close to the borders of San Luis Potosí and Veracruz. The church in that location became so strong that on its own initiative it expanded its activities to Tuxpan in Veracruz, however there is no longer any Methodist work in that area. The fourth area of mission work was in the western portion of the state, but little progress was made. The work was located at a hacienda in Alfajayucan. A short while after acquiring this property, the Methodists initiated religious services there, but by 1880 they had abandoned the effort. Another congregation was established in Santa Ana Nextlalpan on the banks of Lake Zumpango, not actually in the state of Hidalgo, but inside its area of influence. The Methodists were invited to the community by some merchants who had listened to a sermon in Pachuca. Nextlalpan became the only Methodist church in the area so when the Methodists organized administrative Districts, Nextlalpan was always included within the boundaries of Hidalgo.

The Puebla-Tlaxcala valley was another region where Methodist preachers were well received but the process was much slower there, occurring mainly in the first decade of the twentieth century. A crucial aspect of the work in this region was the presence of the Methodist primary school in Miraflores which attracted students from all over the region and the college and seminary in the city of Puebla, which was one of the only available options for higher education in the entire state. In general, the Methodist congregations that formed in this area were comprised of people who lived by farming. The missionaries extended the work in this region to the southern portion of the state of Puebla and beyond to Morelos where the Northern Methodists entered into competition with the Southern Methodists who eventually left field to the “northerners.”
Another zone of Methodist influence existed in the northern mountains of Puebla, along the boundary with the states of Hidalgo and Veracruz. Although this place was never considered in the missionaries’ original plans, it had developed considerably by the end of the 19th century. The success of Methodism here was primarily due to the encouragement of “the three Juans” (Juan N. Méndez, Juan Crisóstomo Bonilla, and Juan Francisco Lucas), local businessmen who were establishing an enclave of economic development in this highland zone that would compete with the plains region of Puebla. This area produced several Mexican pastors who became great preachers.

There were two very important regions in Butler’s plans that turned out to be more difficult than he had anticipated. The “border” area between the hot lowlands and cool highlands of Veracruz where the Mexican Railway passes through the mountains (the cities of Orizaba, Córdoba, Jalapa), and the Bajío region. In both cases there were many attempts to establish congregations but the results were meager. The Methodists acquired properties and sent North American missionaries and national preachers. Of the centers that interested Butler, only Orizaba actually started a Methodist congregation, and this was due mostly to the arrival of the railroad office with its entourage of North American employees. Curiously they did manage to create congregations in places such as Atzacán, Huatusco, Zentla, and Acultzingo, all of them deep in the mountains, far from effective means of communication such as the railroad.

The Bajío and Querétaro were also difficult locations; indeed they still are for Protestants. The opening of mission work in Guanajuato and in Querétaro was met with popular protests that forced the missionaries to leave. Moreover, the small following of the new religion suffered ostracism in the two communities for a long time. In both places, Protestants needed the protection of the army. In León, mission work had to be started several times since the efforts
were unfruitful. Even in locations that seemed promising such as Silao which contained a railroad office and North Americans disposed to support the mission, the evangelistic effort failed. Thus it is understandable that in 1914 John W. Butler confessed that “those places…León and the surrounding area… have always been difficult.” Even so, the state of Guanajuato witnessed the rise of many Methodist congregations. Towns as far north as Pozos, as far west as Cuerámaro, and as far south as Valle de Santiago had Methodist churches (and the Valle de Santiago still does).

The strong attachment of the local populace to the Catholic Church made it necessary for the missionaries to consider novel ways to penetrate the area; the means they found were medical work and education. The opening of medical offices in Guanajuato, Romita, Pozos, and Silao granted the Methodists a presence in these communities at the end of the 19th century. Indeed, there were two strong congregations in Guanajuato that were financially self-sufficient. Their influence was so pronounced that in 1915 and 1916, the Methodist missionary in Guanajuato served as a close advisor to the state governor. In Querétaro, Methodists decided to create a boarding school that would serve to bring together the young men of the surrounding area who wanted to continue on to secondary and graduate studies. This school’s existence was the Methodists’ gateway to that region. Nevertheless, the church and the institution were periodically attacked. The most violent attack occurred in 1914 when all the furniture in the building was destroyed. As late as 1965, the Methodist Institute of Querétaro, then named “Benjamín N. Velasco,” was attacked because of its Protestant character. Nowadays, the region’s most active

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17 Interview with Ana D. De Romero López, February 16, 1985.
18 94th Annual Report of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1912, p. 382.
Methodist work is located in León and in the agricultural zone of small proprietors between Salamanca, Cortazar, and the Santiago valley.

The two regions that were not included in the missionaries’ original plans, Oaxaca and the lowlands of Veracruz, developed in completely different ways. Oaxaca, a territory initially cultivated by the Southern Methodist Church, passed to the care of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1883. The region demonstrated an admirable dynamism in regards to the birth of congregations and the production of church leaders. This is even more impressive when one takes into account that it was the region in which the Mission Board invested the least money. There was no great school in Oaxaca like those in Puebla, Querétaro, or Pachuca. Nor was there any strong institution like the hospital of Guanajuato. One could even speak of a degree of racism on the part of the missionaries who were so reluctant to take the initiative in this region. In fact, the missionaries were convinced “beyond a doubt” that there were cases of cannibalism in the deeper recesses of the mountains. Even so, for two generations the mission’s best national workers were people from Oaxaca, people such as Benjamin N. Velasco, José Rumbia, and Sixto Avila. Still, the territory of Oaxaca was turned over to the Presbyterians as a result of the agreements of the Cincinnati Plan.

The Veracruz lowlands on the other hand only gave headaches to the mission. The first problem was that the congregations established there were completely isolated from the rest of the mission. In 1896, the churches of Tuxpan and Sand Andrés Tuxtla were totally outside the reach of the mission’s superintendents. As was the case with Tuxtepec, to arrive at either Vera Cruz location, one had to charter a boat. Because of their isolation, both mission fields were abandoned that year. Another problem was that the mission could not send preachers from

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20 88th Annual Report of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1906, p. 335.
highlands, the birthplace of the majority of the mission’s pastors, without running the serious risk that they would die due to the region’s unhealthiness. Perhaps the most notorious instance of this difficulty was the death of Abundio Tovar y Bueno, Superintendent of the Orizaba District, after a visit to the region. His loss was all the more painful because Tovar was one of the mission’s best teachers and had helped to develop the school in Miraflores. His death contributed to the missionaries’ belief that the lowlands were simply too costly in money and manpower to be worth the effort required to evangelize them.

C. The Cincinnati Plan of Reorganization

Nineteen-fourteen, one of the most violent years of the Mexican Revolution, saw a very important change in the history of Protestant missions in Mexico. As a result of the United States’ occupation of Veracruz, all North American missionaries were compelled to leave the country.\textsuperscript{21} While the missionaries waited for the violence to subside, they gathered in Cincinnati to coordinate their evangelistic efforts in Mexico. The meeting, in which eleven missionary societies participated, sought to end denominational competition in order to eliminate one of the great complaints made against Protestantism: its fragmentation. The missionaries also hoped to save money by dividing and consolidating the mission field into agreed upon zones of work, thus avoiding duplication of effort.

The idea of an “economic plan” was first suggested by the Methodist Episcopal mission. In 1896, during an economic downturn that stretched the mission’s resources, John W. Butler

\textsuperscript{21} In April of 1914, President Woodrow Wilson authorized the U.S. Navy to occupy the Mexican port of Vera Cruz in order to avenge a supposed insult to the United States by the forces loyal to the government of General Victoriano Huerta. Wilson opposed Huerta because he had come to power in a military coup; the U.S. occupation of Mexico’s primary port served to prevent his forces from receiving shipments of military equipment. Wilson’s action provoked anti-U.S. riots throughout Mexico and many U.S. citizens felt compelled to leave the country for their safety.—Trans.
laid a document before the Convention of Evangelical Workers in Mexico in which he suggested the partition of Mexican territory among the different Protestant missions.\textsuperscript{22} At the time, the idea was rejected by the national preachers and by the rest of the missions. By 1914, not only was there an economic crisis in the United States similar to the one in 1896, the Mexican Revolution also called for making some adjustments. The Cincinnati Plan was accepted as part of a wide ranging global plan for North American Protestant missions.\textsuperscript{23}

The plan, coordinated by the Council of Cooperation in Latin America, sought to reorganize missionary work in the region in hopes of making a greater impact. Among other agreements—the union of seminaries and press organs, the creation of a committee to deal with the missions’ educational projects, the creation of united medical endeavors—the most notorious was the redistribution of mission fields. Due to fierce competition among the missions, some popular locations had come to have several Protestant churches in places where the population could ill afford such duplication while less attractive places still had not been reached by the Protestant message. For Methodists, putting “the Cincinnati Plan” into practice meant turning over some territories, such as Oaxaca and Veracruz, to the Presbyterian and Baptist missions. In exchange, the Methodist Episcopal Church took over the work of the Southern Methodist Church in Mexico City and in the state of Morelos. Indeed, exchanges of territory between the two Methodist denominations had already occurred, such as turning over to the “southerners” the mission work in the mining town of El Oro in the state of Mexico, and a congregation exchange on the outskirts of the volcanoes Popocatépetl and Iztaccíhuatl.

\textsuperscript{22}El Abogado Cristiano Ilustrado, 21/6 (February 11, 1897), pp. 42.

\textsuperscript{23} It is worth noting that the “Cincinnati Plan” was approved exclusively by North American missionaries. Those who were most affected by the agreement, i.e., the Mexican pastors, did not participate in the conference. When they did participate in such a conference in 1896, they rejected a similar plan.
After the Cincinnati Plan, the territory occupied by the Methodist Episcopal mission was significantly reduced in extent. Yet it should be noted that the Northern Methodists did not give up any costly projects; rather they received, in exchange, a full medical clinic in the Tepito neighborhood of Mexico City. Unfortunately, the most important consequence of the Cincinnati Plan was that it coincided with an almost total halt to the Methodist mission’s growth. Prior to the Revolution, the mission had been expanding rapidly in both numbers and territorial extent; after adopting the Plan in 1919, such growth practically ceased.

Document for chapter IV

AN ITINERANT PASTOR IN RURAL MEXICO

A characteristic of Methodism is the mobility of its preachers, traveling. This allowed the minister to know different places of action. Enrique W. Adam relates one of his journeys.

Tlacuilotepec

This location in the District of Hidalgo and in the northern region of the state of Puebla, has been helped from this point (Tulancingo) up to the point that it has been possible for me to pay attention a field that remains the distance of fifteen leagues, and that for the most part runs between the faults of the Eastern Sierra Madre mountains.

This year, our visits to that place have been by railroad from Hidalgo and northeast, until Tortugas, the terminal station of this line; and from here by horse until Tlacuilo.

From Tortugas, and not very far, the town of Metepec stands out perfectly on a hill and reminds us of Jesus’ words, “A city on a hill cannot be hidden…thus shine your light before men.”
Beyond it, to the east, and from north to south, there is a mountain chain whose peaks are from the mountains already mentioned.

Much further, experts in direction point to a point on the top of the mountains saying, “There is the summit”. This point is the highest of the road to Tlacuilo; to arrive there one needs a little less than three and a half hours, and the road is a little uneven; but from that point you descend and continue descending until you reach the bottom of the river, which is three hours more. During this time, the traveler’s soul has passed through many impressions and emotions!

A little while after beginning the decent from “the summit,” the “acahuales” are on top of a mine of those mountainous areas, through which the road passes; a miserable inn where the mule drivers stop to eat a small and badly prepared meal. The road continues descending, sometimes it cracks suddenly or shows curves that slide down the slopes, by means of an exuberant vegetation; each time the mountains rise up on the right and one notes deep abysses on the left; in the bottom you can see the river and on the other side mountains and more mountains that seem to compete in height, and all around the human hand dominates nature. Here and there and all around, in the lowest and highest of those very steep slopes, you can see the sown fields, pineapple, banana, sugarcane and coffee plantations, and the highlanders, supporting their body on only one foot while the other prevents their body from touching the ground and with their hands, due to the terrain’s incline, laboring nearby. The perspective is highly entrancing; but every time the road is rockier and narrower, soon only one mount will be able to pass through at a time; the depths are impressive, the road retracts into the mountain as if it too was afraid of failing into the abyss, you feel the dizziness that come from heights, it is “the pass of the narrow gorge”. Three times I have seen animals and their load roll into the abyss; various points are designated as places where people have flown with everything and their horse to their death.
“The Slab”...the heart is struck by fear in that place! It is changing the order of that phrase: the ugly side of beauty. Three-fourths an hour of anxiety in those narrow passes, where it seems that the rocks throw themselves into the depths, and then the soul enters into an pleasant rest: the widens and the position is safer. Although sometimes there are hills, we are always descending to the picturesque town of Pauatlán. Half an hour more on the road, and as I said, we will have descended to the bottom of the river.

The descent is over: but not the impressions and emotions that nature produced in the soul when you visit places where human hands have not changed anything from its primitive form, like by this river among elevated mountains. You have to ford the river; not once but fifteen times without leaving the basin through which it runs; one unconsciously holds back the horse to contemplate the rocks on each side, those breaks in the earth produced by prehistoric natural disasters. It is hardly believable that those extensive and heavy layers of rock have been the toy of the earth’s internal forces; are made uneven, rebroken, and folded over themselves. I fancy seeing in those rocks traces of God’s work preparing a dwelling place for humans before creating them.

In that area there are whims of nature, that without even trying, the imagination gives them fantastic forms; but they will not hold me back right now.

A bit further are the last fords. The final and the antepenultimate fords have wire hawsers from one side to the other; these allow the transfer of passengers in the rainy season: those who come headed for Huauchinango pass by seated on a swing, hanging from a wheelbarrow and thrown from one extreme to the other; but in this case, we will have to pass over a wire bridge that is precisely at the end of our mountain descent. The bridge swings under the weight under the cargo animals weight and...there are those who lose their balance! Thus, the path here is as
dangerous as those in the ravines. But supposing that we do not need that path, after fording the river fifteen times, like we have said, the only thing left for us to do is to climb up, up, and further up, for an hour and a half more and enter into the lovely town of Tlacuilotepec. Entering into the town is agreeable; it is not indigenous, the dominant language here is Spanish and you do not need long to be convinced that its inhabitants are lovers of progress, and of an open and liberal spirit.

Our work here is a great hope; the important families of the population more than Protestants are Christians, and its truly sad that there is not a permanent pastor here, since under the present conditions, its only humanly possible to visit them from time to time in seven months of the year, and even then, it is difficult for the preacher and his mount to endure the hardships of the route; even though, on the other hand, the good spirit of those brothers, the kindness, care, and considerations with which they receive the pastor, soothe some of the fatigues he endures.

Thirty to forty-five people or more, with great piety, enthusiasm, and a true desire to hear the Divine message of our LORD Jesus, attend the services we hold in a private home.

Therefore, the results show that the most urgent needs of that place are: a permanent pastor here and a church where the town can freely attend services.


Tulancingo, September 1900.

E.W. Adam.