Evangelicals in Transition

Decolonial Analysis of the Text

*Mexico in Transition* by William Butler, D.D.

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Established by the unification between missionary conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church in 1930, The Methodist Church of Mexico, A.R. (IMMAR) recognizes the year 1873 as its ecclesiastical beginning.

Methodism existed among the Mexican people before 1873. There were Mexican converts in New Mexico, Ambrosio Gonzales and Fr. Benigno Cardenas. In Texas, an Irish Methodist immigrant, William Headen, formed the first Mexican Methodist community among his neighbors[[1]](#footnote-1), and it was to this community that Alejo Hernandez and A. H. Sutherland arrived to prepare for the missionary work that was launched in 1873, the year when the two churches began missionary structures among Mexicans and sent superintendents and preachers with official appointments.

Methodist missionary work was an element of a large, multi-denominational evangelical campaign that responded to the opportunity presented by the Reform Acts in Mexico that ensured freedom of worship. The work was also part of the great American missionary movement of the nineteenth century that sought to extend the Anglo-Saxon evangelical influence for religious, cultural, and political purposes, development, progress toward modernism, and the spread of liberal democracy.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Anglo-Saxon missionary movement of the nineteenth century dreamed of a utopian vision, a Christian world built on biblical morality, enjoying peace, freedom, holiness, education, production, and prosperity. They saw themselves as agents not only of the gospel, but of their home countries. At times, their missionary work depended on the army of that country.[[3]](#footnote-3) Thus, we can see their movements as geopolitical and cultural interventions within the broader context of colonialism.

The year 1873 marks the entry of U.S. missionaries into Mexico, an intervention in a stream of insurrections, rebellions, and wars that had resulted in the loss of a large part of Mexican territory to the U.S. military doctrine of Manifest Destiny.

No more than a generation separated the missionaries from the warriors responsible for the independence of Texas (1836). In the case of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South mission, the father of the first superintendent of the Mexican Border District was a Texian warrior at the Alamo and the author of the story *The Fall of the Alamo*, a hero's tale that would become the basis of many mythologies about that battle.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The missionaries entered a wounded country from a country that had been their enemy, a country that was also wounded. They entered barely 28 years after the war with the United States of America and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, eight years after the American Civil War, and six years after the French Intervention in Mexico. They arrived with the Bible in hand from a country that a few years earlier had annexed half of Mexico's territory, a conquest for the purposes of expansionism, colonialism, capitalism, mining exploitation and the extension of slavery.

If the Spaniards carried swords with their saints and crosses, some missionaries of the 19th century carried carbines. The first superintendent of the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church's Mexican Border District, A. H. Sutherland, relied on Mexican pastors with military experience. Pioneer pastors Alejo Hernandez, Basilio Soto, Policarpio Rodriguez, Santiago Tafolla, and others found that their military experience gave them a talent for the call to itinerant ministry.

Evangelical missionaries came to Mexico from a country with its own struggles, wars, and conflicts to a country that had suffered decades of military interventions. During the nineteenth century, the only things constant were violence, poverty, and the hegemony of Roman Catholicism. In the light of this reality, the liberal rulers still invited them.

If the evangelistic work of Brother William Headen in Corpus Christi was interpersonal and organic among lay neighbors, the missionary entry of 1873 was institutional.

The entry established diplomatic relations between three states: The Methodist Episcopal Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church, South and Mexico. The Methodists sent their superintendents and bishops, bought property, and thus established their embassies so that they could dialogue, evangelize, and collaborate with their sympathizers in Mexico.

They entered a place that already had religion. In Matthew 21:23, Jesus enters the temple in Jerusalem to teach new things. In reaction, the chief priests and elders confront him with the question: By what authority do you do these things? And who gave you this authority?

We can imagine the same question in 1891 proposed to the American missionaries. With what authority did the Methodists arrive in Mexico? Who gave them this authority? Why did they think it was necessary? William Butler, the first superintendent of the Mexican work of the Methodist Episcopal Church, offers an answer in his book *Mexico in Transition from the Power of Political Romanism to Civil and Religious Liberty (1891).*

The book *Mexico in Transition* provides a historical overview of the economic, cultural, religious, and political situation of Mexico in the nineteenth century, presenting the entry as part of a broader cultural transition initiated by Mexican elements. In actuality, the book served to justify the U.S. evangelical intervention in Mexico.

William Butler (1818-1899) played an important role in the history of nineteenth-century Methodist missions. Born in Dublin, Ireland to English parents, he grew up within the Anglican tradition (Church of Ireland) and then joined the Irish Methodist Wesleyan movement before immigrating to the United States to the Methodist Episcopal Church. As an itinerant pastor in the northeastern United States, he greatly emphasized the importance of foreign missions through his talks and writings, moving the church toward more activity. He suffered the death of his first wife, became a single father, and remarried Clementina Rowe, who came from Ireland to share in every aspect of ministerial and missionary work.

Along with his wife Clementina Rowe Butler, William Butler accepted appointment as the first superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal mission in India in 1856, leaving two of their four children behind in American schools. His work in India followed the pattern of English colonialism. In this model, the English impose their political order in order to tame unconverted cultures, develop civilization, improve the social status of the people, extend ties for the market, and spread Christianity. Their mission suffered a violent attack at first, resulting in a massacre of Europeans and the destruction of property. The Butlers and their small crew escaped and survived. With the support of the English army and foreign financial support, they established a mission that grew numerically to 100,000 parishioners with schools, institutions, an orphanage, and a Methodist press.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In her biography, *William Butler: Founder of Two Missions,* William Butler’s daughter describes his character*.* She presents him as a willing worker, strategic and evangelistic, always looking for the opportunity to share the Christian experience and faith impartially in the spirit of Wesleyan Methodism.

Returning from India in 1865, William Butler composed the book  *Land of the Veda* that attracted much attention for its details of the sacrifices and cultural realities on the mission field.[[6]](#footnote-6) His presence in India allowed him to be abroad during the time of the Civil War (USA). He learned of the end of the war and the death of President Abraham Lincoln on his return trip.[[7]](#footnote-7)

After returning to the United States of America, Clementina Rowe Butler participated in the founding of the Methodist Foreign Missionary Women's Society[[8]](#footnote-8) which still exists under the name *United Women in Faith.* In 1872, the Butlers were appointed to open a new Methodist Episcopal mission in Mexico. They arrived in Mexico in 1873, the same year that the Rev. Alejo Hernandez arrived from the West Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

METHODISM AND POLITICAL ROMANISM

In his book  *Mexico in Transition,* William Butler recounts a history of Mexico primarily from the nineteenth century. Its focus is on the history of the French Intervention as the last expression of Catholic imperialism in Mexico. Quoting various authors and witnesses, Butler presents events, personalities, and events in the style of a journalistic novelist that was very common at this time[[9]](#footnote-9), freely switching between chronology and description of events, dialogues, relationships, conflicts, and situations between individuals.

Butler’s central thesis is that Mexico had suffered centuries of poverty, ignorance, and violence due to a flawed evangelization by the Spaniards that erased the best of indigenous culture and imposed an inferior, idolatrous, and oppressive religious and political system. The corruption of this system is exposed in comparison to the free, reasonable, and productive system that was established in the United States of America. Butler presents Protestant missionary work as part of the Mexican transition from this inferior system to the system of the United States of America. Seen in this light, American missionary work in Mexico was both a benevolence toward Mexico and an expression of the "right of the United States to evangelize its neighbors."[[10]](#footnote-10) According to Butler, Mexico is a country of wealth, potential, and virtue, but it was victimized by the clerical authorities of the Roman Catholic Church and its system of *Political Romanism*. Thus, we can see the story told in *Mexico in Transition*  as both a work of historical missiology and a work of political science.

The contrast between *Political Romanism* and the system that the United States of America supposedly has is key to his argument. Butler asserts that the French intervention and the empire of Maximilian were aimed at perpetuating this political Romanism over the Mexican people.

According to William Butler, Political Romanism was an imposed system, not accepted by freedom of will or defended by reason. Catholic identity and acceptance of its dogmas, rituals, and authority were prerequisites for citizenship. The hegemony of this system was maintained by means of horrific punishments, some mediated by the Inquisition, and others by the state. There was no separation of church and state and no freedom of worship. Butler includes illustrations of the instruments of torture[[11]](#footnote-11) and testifies to what the Methodists found in Puebla, skeletons enclosed within the walls of a property that belonged to the Inquisition.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Second, Political Romanism was allied with a foreign authority, the European aristocratic monarchy and the ultramontanism of the Vatican. Butler takes us to Europe to see the political movements that resulted in the intervention, portraying the elites in their hypocrisy, greed, and vice. He describes a colonialism that imposes and ultimately sacrifices Maximilian for not sufficiently complying with the totalitarian Romanist agenda. Butler presents the politics of Romanism as autocratic, monarchical, and totalitarian in authority and corrupt and violent in administration.

Third, Butler presents political Romanism as a system of aristocratic and clerical privilege in which priests and religious orders occupied the center of the political and economic life of the country and enjoyed the best social position. Butler presents the religious as lazy people who are supported by their haciendas, riches, and taxes, owners of a large part of the Mexican territory. Their temples are filled with jewels, gold, silver, works of art, and other goods, while the people suffer scarcity. While most of it is lazy, others, like the Jesuits, meddle in all the affairs of government and politics, always pulling the conservative side and undermining the liberal republican government by their machinations of sabotage, agitation, and treachery.

According to Butler, the poverty suffered by Mexico under Political Romanism was not only economic. It was cultural and intellectual. The combination of clericalism with intellectual repression allowed for a religious syncretism that disguised indigenous cults in Christian garb and fostered a religious zeal that manifested itself in radical asceticism and violent fanaticism against anyone who dared to reject Catholic hegemony. The credulity of irrational and harmful doctrines, enforced by the Inquisition, combined with the repression of all kinds of free, academic, and scientific thought to create public policy against the free press, against freedom of worship, and against public education. The result is a country in ignorance, illiteracy, and superstition.

According to Butler, the liberation or *transition of the Mexican*  people from this oppressive system did not begin with the missionaries but with the process of independence and democratization led by Mexican revolutionaries. The reader can deduce that the introduction of the missions did not suffer from the vices of political Romanism because 1) it was part of a process already underway within Mexico, 2) they were invited by the legitimate government of Mexico, and 3) the work is benevolent with the potential to liberate the Mexican Republic from its own history of oppression and poverty.

DECOLONIAL ANALYSIS

To give a *decolonial analysis*, we begin by acknowledging the text *Mexico in Transition* as a work of *apologetic missiology.* It is a very detailed and elaborate justification in defense of the American evangelical intervention at the end of the nineteenth century, what we call missionary work. This intervention sought to transform Mexico's religious and public life to establish a free and evangelical American-style society. Its author was directly involved in this work as a Methodist superintendent. *Mexico in Transition* helps us discern his perspectives, values, motives, methods, and goals. Written in 1891 in English,  *Mexico in Transition* tells us about events and ideas essentially related to colonialism in Mexico, foreign and military interventions with the aim of dominating or transforming society. The *transition* advocated and recounted by Butler is one more intervention.

Our analysis will have three steps: 1) naming the dominant ideology of the text, 2) identifying contradictions and errors, 3) using a rubric to identify the mission modality it advocates, 4) evaluating the text for our contemporary context.

Although  *Mexico in Transition* devotes much of its narrative to the Mexican historical, political, and cultural events of the nineteenth century, its purpose is to justify the North American evangelical mission in Mexico. The plot of the text revolves around a conflict between good and evil. The protagonists are the Liberal Republicans (Juárez) allied with the evangelical missionaries, and the antagonists are clerical conservatives and their allies, the imperialist Europeans (Maximilian, French intervention).

If Seymour's book, *Nights with the Romanists*, drew attention to the doctrinal and ritualistic differences between Catholicism and evangelical Christianity (for proselytizing toward Catholics), *[[13]](#footnote-13) Mexico in Transition* emphasizes the ideological and political struggle to liberate Mexico from an imperialist religious system. William Butler is clearly sympathetic to Benito Juárez and sees the goals of liberalizing, secularizing, and democratizing Mexico in the style of the United States of America as God's plan. According  *to Mexico in Transition*, Mexico sought the help of evangelical missionaries to establish an emancipated, pluralistic, enlightened, free, democratic, tolerant, modern, and secular society.

In addition to sharing the gospel and establishing the practices, structures, and methods of their denominations, the role of the missions was to share the goods of North American development with their neighboring country. Its usefulness in the great transition to freedom and prosperity lies in its advocacy (assimilation) to the liberal and secular system, its talent for challenging Catholic hegemony through its populist biblical and doctrinal polemics, and its institutional capacity for organization, communication, education, and development, especially the education of the female sex and marginalized peoples.

Butler identifies the following characteristics of Political Romanism:

**Paternalism*.*** Political Romanism could not be sustained without foreign intervention. The Romanist believes he knows the true needs of the Mexican people and uses the military to impose his own conservative solution. A large part of Mexico in *Transition* describes events in Europe to make us understand the true origin of the problem outside of Mexico.

The expression of paternalism is the French intervention and imposition of Maximilian[[14]](#footnote-14), Archduke of Austria as emperor in Mexico. Maximilian believes himself to be benevolent to Mexico, and Butler presents him with a more liberal ideological stance than the conservatives who brought him in. Although slightly more decent than the conservative clerics, Maximilian exercised power violently without sacrificing his own superior status, privilege, and control, bringing him into conflict with Benito Juárez and the reformers who had popular and divine support.

**Clericalism.**  The main authority in Political Romanism is the Catholic, conservative, male clergy. Others derive their power from the clergy who enjoy unequal privilege and social status.

Butler portrays the clergy as lazy men, living off the stolen goods of the people. It presents them as indifferent to the suffering, poverty, ignorance, superstition, and idolatry of their parishioners. Specifically, he mentions the Jesuits as meddling in political affairs, manipulating the government against the interests of the people.

This clericalism, with power and privilege over church and society, is autocratic and corrupt. The missionary work of Romanism, then, has been flawed, inferior, and incomplete, creating a moral, spiritual, and social crisis. The corruption is not just religious. It includes politics, economics, and morality. It affects the whole culture. For this reason, Mexico could not easily free itself from its evil influence and needs help from evangelical missionaries. This liberation, a reformation and revolution, has been a slow and painful process, a *Transition*, and evangelical missionaries, allied with the Reformers, form a large part of the transition.

**Aristocracy.** Butler presents Political Romanism as a system for maintaining the socioeconomic status quo. Much of the information it presents comes from the writings of people of privilege and superior status allied with Political Romanism. The issue of the poverty of the people in comparison to the Church and the rulers is prominent. Having amassed wealth and controlled much of the property within Mexican territory, the Roman Church itself is kleptocratic, aristocratic, and plutocratic.

**Ignorance.** In addition to being ignorant of biblical teachings and the true Christian faith, the Romanist system sustains social inequality through public ignorance and fanatical agitation. In several places, Butler presents Political Romanism as opposed to reforms for public education, women's education, the free press, free speech, freedom of worship, and the rational and natural sciences[[15]](#footnote-15). Ignorance leaves the country in prejudice, superstition, fanaticism, illiteracy, and poverty, delaying Mexico's integration with the new world order. This ignorance helps to maintain aristocratic order while opposing the development of the country and the individual.

**Intolerance.** Butler presents a Political Romanism totally intolerant of any dissenting and Protestant opinion and expression. This intolerance exists at all levels, from the government to the fanatical mob agitated against evangelicals. Political Romanism allows only one religion, Catholicism, a hegemony maintained by a monarchical system of government. Authority, government, and power do not need the consent of the governed because their power is a divine right. So much so, it lacks the need to limit itself, to check itself, to change itself, or to reform itself, and even less for democratic processes. Intolerant power dictates the law and uses coercion and violence to stay in control.

**Violence.** Butler presents the violence of Political Romanism in three forms: asceticism, fanaticism, and oppression. He explains that the violence of Political Romanism is cultural, religious, and in some cases, self-imposed. He explains that the Inquisition held power in Mexico until the 19th century, and presents us with much evidence of violent religious practices.

Ascetic violence easily transfers to dissidents and Protestants through fanaticism, agitation, and popular violence against other religious expressions. On the political side, religious violence is accompanied by government military and police coercion directed at dissidents, liberals, reformers, and political rivals.

Ignorance, poverty, corruption, intolerance and violence are the bitter fruits of the system of Political Romanism that have oppressed Mexico and justify its uprooting and a new evangelization in Mexico.

*Mexico in Transition* presents us with evidence of the original ideology that motivated Methodist missionary work in 1873. Its purpose is to advocate pluralistic, democratic, progressive, and egalitarian ideals along with social proposals such as the separation of church and state, freedom of worship, freedom of expression, public education, autonomy, pluralism, individual and female development, a free press, inclusive democracy, productivity, and biblical morality.

In their time, these were secular American values. Butler believed that freedom of conscience, dialogue, and "respect for the rights of others"[[16]](#footnote-16) formed the ideal context for genuine conversion, authentic Christianity, and a just society. Butler presents the United States as the example of a society organized by this ideology and frequently cites its relative prosperity as evidence of its superiority and authority.

In truth, the same injustices existed in the United States of America that Butler deplored in Mexico: ignorance, poverty, racism, slavery, prejudice, mistreatment and annihilation of indigenous peoples, and religious coercion and violence. In the United States, the Methodist itinerant system engaged in violence against indigenous peoples. Methodism played a major role in supplying Manifest Destiny with new Anglo-Saxon lands and citizens.[[17]](#footnote-17) The prosperity of the northeastern United States that Butler knew was in total inequality with the poverty of the South after the Civil War. The Monroe Doctrine that Butler cites[[18]](#footnote-18) forbade European colonialism in the Americas, but did not limit U.S. colonialism: the expatriation of emancipated African slaves to Liberia and U.S. military intervention in other countries. The paternalism cited in Maximilian's case would become a tremendous scandal for evangelical denominations and their missionary societies during the first 30 years of evangelical work in Mexico, culminating in the infamous Plan of Cincinnati (1914).[[19]](#footnote-19) According to the biography  *William Butler: Founder of Two Mission of the M.E.C.*, written by his daughter, William Butler arrived in Mexico in 1873 knowing only one word in Spanish: gracias.[[20]](#footnote-20) Progress was a movement, an idealism, and a dream in the United States, not its reality.

By using the term Political *Romanism*, Butler identifies religious imperialism as a unique feature of the Roman Catholic Church without realizing the implications of imperialism for the evangelical movement. When Butler defends the "right of the United States to evangelize its neighbors," [[21]](#footnote-21)does the missionary believe he is an agent of the United States or of Christianity?

*Mexico in Transition* admires Mexico's sacrifice in its struggle for reform and freedom. Butler praises the ability and virtue of Mexicans to free themselves from the yoke of Political Romanism, but continually presents Mexico as a victim and backward. In truth, between the United States of America and Mexico, Mexico is the oldest society, and therefore, in certain things, it is more advanced. For example, Butler acknowledges that Mexico was the first to abolish slavery. Racism existed in Mexico in Butler's time, but not at the systemic level that the United States practiced for nearly a hundred more years.

In *Mexico in Transition,* Political Romanism is the ideology behind colonialism and oppression. In contrast, Butler presents an alternative, evangelical missionary collaboration with Mexico's liberal government. How does Butler's proposal compare to colonialism?

We can classify different missionary modalities according to their way of relating to the culture and autonomy of the evangelized people. Does the mission desire to subdue or pacify the evangelized, or does it wish to train and liberate them? Does the mission want to assimilate the evangelized, or does it want to preserve or adopt the evangelized culture? These considerations can form two axes of a graph. The horizontal axis will be autonomy and the vertical axis will be culture. On the axis of autonomy, we have autonomy and subjugation. At the heart of culture, we have assimilation and preservation.

Our graph yields four quadrants revealing four mission modalities: *colonialism, segregation, integration, and contextualization.*



**Colonialism** represents a combination of assimilation with subjugation or pacification from the missionary culture to the other culture. Historically, it has been an instrument of imperialism, and so it tends to use military or paramilitary violence to achieve its ends. The missionary serves his government and culture of origin and seeks to assimilate the missionary context into his own culture. It considers the missionary culture to be superior and seeks to eliminate any opposition of the subjugated culture to the authority of its government and church. In this modality, the gospel, theology, and the Bible are understood only under the norms, dogmas, and perspectives of the colonizing culture.

**Segregation** seeks to subjugate and pacify the evangelized culture, but allows this culture to preserve certain cultural differences (language, style of worship, dress, food, social structures) at the cost of marginalization and social isolation. The evangelized culture maintains relations with the dominant culture through paternalistic relationships marked by dependency and inequality, while the dominant culture believes itself to be benevolent and philanthropic. The segregated community is indoctrinated with separatist perspectives.

**Integration** seeks to liberate and emancipate the evangelized (or revolutionized) culture through levels of assimilation with the missionary culture. In integration, the evangelized culture adopts the culture, technology, and ideology of the missionary in order to improve their social status by enhancing their autonomy and freedom to serve their own interests. The missionary seeks to elevate the evangelized culture to its own status by sharing the goods of its own culture, but its lack of objectivity can also introduce harmful elements.

**Contextualization** seeks to accompany and dialogue with the evangelized culture and respects that this culture adopts original forms and actions made by its own agency in response to the gospel and its social situation. The evangelized culture maintains its identity, diversity, and autonomy, and the missionary accompanies it in a process of contextualization and creative response. In contextualization, the missionary does not know what will come out of the intercultural encounter and may be acculturated to this new reality, leaving his culture of origin.

In terms of the four missionary modalities, the system of Political Romanism is presented as an example of **colonialism**. Butler blames the Spaniards for annihilating indigenous cultures, for burning their books and histories[[22]](#footnote-22), for imposing their will, worldview, and religion, and for subjecting the people to a foreign authority and culture, the European Roman Catholic.

When Mexico begins to become independent, secularized, and liberated, it is the clerics and conservatives who defend the system. They betray Mexico, bringing Maximilian with the French army, and build a puppet regime whose real boss is the power of the Vatican.

In Mexico, as elsewhere, colonialism did not achieve total assimilation. That's why **segregation** also existed. A large part of Mexico was never assimilated and adopted syncretic forms of religion. What was not assimilated to the aristocratic European remains marginalized, isolated, and pacified through dogma, ignorance, superstition, labor exploitation, and racism.

Liberals, republicans, and reformers responded to the injustice of colonialism with the mode of **integration**. This modality necessarily has a relationship with a foreign authority. In this case, the authority is the country of the United States that sets an example, an idealism, for the free and enlightened society. The U.S. system is presented by Butler as pluralistic, secular, and rationalist, with an emphasis on developing an educated, morally responsible, and hard-working culture capable of governing itself in democratic and inclusive structures. The United States of America participated in integration through the Monroe Doctrine[[23]](#footnote-23) and the introduction of American capitalists and evangelical missionaries to Mexico. The integration modality sought autonomy and development in Mexico by assimilating its religious, political, and economic system to ideals related to the United States of America.

As an Irish immigrant, William Butler was an example of the power of integration. Naturalized in the United States and the Methodist Episcopal Church, he went on to become the founder of two missions, India and Mexico. His concept of the United States reflects an appreciation, idealism, and romanticism. In *Mexico in Transition,* Butler does not waver in his loyalty to his new country. Despite few examples (criticizing the U.S. invasion of Mexico, slavery), [[24]](#footnote-24) Butler maintains a very positive stance toward the U.S.

*Mexico in Transition* includes a photograph of the altar of the Holy Trinity Temple in Mexico City with an altar adorned with the flags of Mexico and the United States. This reflects the concept of mission as **integration**.

Although integration was the modality advocated by Butler, contextualization exists on the margins of his narrative. Butler would not have been successful without the collaboration of Mexicans whose experience of the gospel occurred through contextualization processes before adopting Wesleyan practices (classes, bands, vigils, public evangelism, social work, building institutes, etc.).

Today we understand that popular Catholicism, condemned by Butler and evangelicals as idolatry and syncretism, is itself an example of contextualization, resistance, and subversion of colonialism. Mexican Freemasonry, not openly mentioned by Butler, was also a contextualization, serving as an invisible hand behind liberal and secular resistance and a common link between Republicans and various Anglo-Saxon missionaries.

There were also expressions of popular Protestant Christianity. The first Mexican Methodist ministers were individuals who converted years before 1873 through communities and contextual experiences among the Constitutionalist Fathers, the Church of Jesus, seminarians, soldiers, and priests such as Benigno Cardenas, Sosthenes Juarez, and Alejo Hernandez. In Hernandez's case, the influence of the war (against Political Romanism), the book *Nights with the Romanists*, a burning heart experience at a Methodist service in Brownsville, and the Mexican Methodist community of Corpus Christi led by William Headen sparked the call to Methodist ministry. Although the missionaries interpreted their hymns, rituals, and publications into Spanish, original and Mexican compositions and traditions also emerged that reflect the process of contextualization.

Researching and producing a broad description of the context is an important first step for contextualization. Butler's elaborate analysis of the injustice that Mexico has suffered could have been a basis for a deeper contextualization of the gospel than what he advocated through integration. In any case, this integration achieved great ends in Mexico and defined the character of the historical epoch now known as the Porfiriato.

CONCLUSION

With respect to a work as elaborate as *Mexico in Transition,* we can ask ourselves: how would William Butler describe the relationship between Christianity and politics today?

The phenomenon of Political Romanism is now known by other terms: Christian Nationalism and Dominionism. Although it was an anti-Catholic polemic, *Mexico in Transition* speaks of conflicts and events similar to what American and Mexican evangelical politics find today:

* Clericalism. Millionaire pastors looking for mega mega churches with luxurious temples justified by a prosperity theology.
* Opposition to the separation of church and state. Imposition of religious perspectives on public order.
* Intolerance and Xenophobia. Oppression of minority groups, women, immigrants, fundamentalist perspectives, and participation in culture wars.
* Anti-intellectualism. Subversion of the public, secular and scientific education system; opposition to academic freedom in historical, theological, and social disciplines.
* Conspiracy theories. Anti-scientific, irrational, esoteric doctrines.
* Indifference to poverty, injustice, and systemic racism.
* Subversion of Structures of Inclusive, Pluralistic, and Representative Democracy
* Violence, proliferation of military weapons, coercion, insurrection
* Fascination with autocratic and misanthropic political personalities

Taken in its proper dimension, *Mexico in Transition* gives us a warning not only against the imperialism of the Roman Catholic Church in the nineteenth century, but also against what we face in our own evangelical movement.

Imagine evangelical churches seeking to use the power of the state to homogenize society in their own image, teaching their children that it is the Christian's destiny to dominate and subjugate the world. Imagine segregated congregations, isolated from reality and indoctrinated with conspiracy theories and esoteric and dualistic teachings, totally shielded from any intellectual and critical dialogue or publication. Imagine ultra-wealthy churches, where people gather just to escape the situation around them and express their superiority. Imagine the Christian people deceived by charismatic leaders, swearing allegiance to those who promise to remove the impurity from their surroundings and turn the nation to God. Does it sound similar to what Butler describes  *in Mexico in Transition?*

Faced with this reality, what will the Methodist Church of Mexico do?

What stance should you take in the face of Christian nationalism and misanthropic, dogmatic, and authoritarian movements?

What type of mission should the church adopt?

What are the challenges, injustices, and struggles of the contemporary Mexican context that warrant a new contextualization of the gospel?

There is the talent to respond with integrity, wisdom, courage, and love.

Will there be freedom and opportunity?

These are the questions that *Mexico in Transition* provokes us to consider, questions that show the enduring value of this missiological and historical text.

1. H.G.H. "In Appreciation of William Headen." Source: Unknown, contributed by Larry Rettinger and Deanne Rathke. Transcription by: Geraldine McGloin, Nueces County Historical Commission.
I found him superintendent of the Sunday school, a steward and right-hand man in all good work. Never did a preacher want for a thing while Wm. Headen was about. He taught a large class of Mexican children in our Sunday-school in Corpus Christi, gathered by himself, speaking Spanish as fluently as he did English. He would bring many Mexicans, men and women, to our Church, often interpreting the words of the preacher to them. His zeal for the spread of the Gospel among the Mexicans was active and intelligent, distributing Spanish tracts and holding meetings with them.
Now, I wish to the future historian of Methodism in West Texas to take note of the fact (which has never yet been sufficiently stressed) that under Wm. Headen's influence and zeal the great Mexican work commenced, which has now spread into several annual conferences, and which is attaining proportions which stamp it as one of the most remarkably successful missionary works of the past and present centuries. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This desire was expressed and documented in the book *A Life Under Two Flags,* by James Eaton. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In *Land of the Veda,* William Butler relates that his Methodist mission in India depended on the British army for survival. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sutherland, John. *The Fall of the Alamo*. http://www.sonsofdewittcolony.org/sthland1.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Butler, Clementine. *William Butler, the Founder of Two Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church.* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1902) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\_Butler\_(missionary) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Butler, Clementine. *William Butler: Founder of Two Missions.* p.124 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., p. 128 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. At this time, The *Christian Advocate* was the most widely read newspaper in North America. Butler read this newspaper regularly. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Mexico in Transition,* p.256 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. pp.33-34 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid., p. 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Seymour, Rev. M. H., *Nights with the Romanists: with a preliminary chapter on the moral results of the Roman system.* (New York: American Society of Tradados). This book had much influence on the conversion of Mexican seminarians and priests to Protestantism, including Alejo Hernandez and Father Palacios (Founder of Two Missions, p. 155) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Frederick*Maximilian Joseph Mary of Habsburg-Lorraine* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Mexico in Transition,* p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. "Among individuals, as among nations, respect for the rights of others is peace." July 15, 1867, Benito Juárez. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. https://www.streetroots.org/news/2016/06/02/methodists-reflect-role-sand-creek-massacre [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Mexico in Transition, pp. 64, 82, 173, 204 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. http://templometodistabuenasnuevas.weebly.com/plan-de-cincinnati.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Butler, Clementine, p. 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Mexico in Transition., p. 256 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Mexico in Transition*, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Mexico in Transition, p. 82, 173, 204 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., p. 90 Butler identifies a motive for extending slavery with the U.S. invasion and Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)