



The Acquisition of the Spanish Colonies from a Missionary Standpoint

Frank F. Ellinwood (1899)

Frank Ellinwood was a white American from New York. For 35 years, he headed the board that oversaw the foreign missionary work of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the largest American Presbyterian denomination at the time. The following selections come from a book he wrote on conducting Christian missions in the modern world. In these selections, Ellinwood defends the United States' recent war against Spain as a selfless—and divinely orchestrated—campaign to liberate Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Filipinos from Spanish colonialism and Catholic oppression. Intervening in a political debate of the day, Ellinwood argues that the United States should continue to administer the Philippines, both for the sake of enhancing the international influence of the United States and for the sake of promoting Protestant missions and “Anglo-Saxon civilization” in the Philippines.

The great body of the American people, save the soldiers who have fought so bravely and the sorrowing kindred who mourn the untimely death of sons and husbands, have scarcely felt the shock of “The Hundred Days’ War” with Spain. Our shores have not been invaded by hostile armies; there has been no perceptible influence with the general prosperity of the country; and yet seldom have issues so momentous been decided.

When the conflict first seemed impending, Christian men generally deprecated it [...] But [...] the one question of putting an end to a tyranny of four centuries and emancipating a crushed and struggling people came to the front. Had Spain heeded the demand for the release of Cuba, there would have been no conflict. The destruction of the *Maine* would have remained unavenged, and Spain would have lost no further territory in either hemisphere. Just there was the pivotal question of the war. All attempts to show that it was undertaken as a political measure, or in the interest of business speculation, or for territorial expansion, or to gratify the ambition of military aspirants, or to increase the prestige of our navy, are as futile as they are sinister. [...]

Mohammedan nations are lured to battle by the prospect of booty and female slaves, if their lives are spared, or the delights of a sensual paradise if they die. The Spanish conquerors who, four centuries ago, overran Cuba and nearly all the Western hemisphere were inspired by a hope of boundless gold and silver. [...] But it may be doubted whether any government ever entered upon a foreign war with so little prospect of self-aggrandizement as was presented by this war with Spain.

[...T]he most striking element in this three months’ history is the way in which Providence seems to have held us to the logical conclusions of our own professed aim and intent. We had proclaimed to the world that we were moved by broad considerations of humanity. [...] We had only thought of Cuba, but it now looks very much as if God had thought of something more. Our enemy was guilty of other oppressions, in the Eastern hemisphere as well as in the Western; and, as divine ordering would have it, we had made our conquest in the East before Cuba was even touched [...]

If we are right in believing that this has been a providential war, that the hand of God has been in the marvelous victories which have been gained with such celerity and with comparatively so little expenditure, we may conclude that it was, in effect, a missionary war. If missions are simply a current work of God's providence for the redemption of the world, then we have fought not merely for the Cubans of today or the Filipinos of today, but for the coming generations in these tropical island groups. We have lifted the arm of justice [...] against the tyranny of four centuries. The real question has been whether Cuba shall remain for four centuries more as in the past, or shall take her place among the enlightened and prosperous nations of the earth; and whether the papal hierarchy, under the flag of an effete nation, shall long continue to oppress the Philippines as in the past, or whether the standard of liberty, good government, and Christian regeneration shall be raised. [...]

I am not advocating any particular theory for the government of Porto Rico or the Philippines. It seems probably that for the latter, at least, a protectorate may be the only ultimate basis of control; but we are dealing with a situation. The Philippines are actually under the flag of the United States, and on the American people rests the responsibility of either maintaining order and justice and protection, or of surrendering them to worse chances than those from which they have been delivered. Especially does it become the Christian people of this country to ask what are the duties which the interests of Christ's advancing kingdom now lay upon us. [...V]ery evidently, the great American republic is destined now to take a larger place, and exert a wider influence, in the affairs of mankind and is no longer to be shut up within her own boundaries and to her own selfish interests. [...]

There are some special grounds of belief that the missionary influence of the American churches will be greatly increased by the remarkable changes which have been wrought in our national prestige. It cannot be denied that, politically and diplomatically, the American government has exerted but a slight influence in many of the great and difficult questions which have stirred the Eastern hemisphere. In repeated instances, the efforts of an American minister at the Sublime Porte have been snubbed or ignored when the sharp demands of a first-class European power would have been granted. In various provinces of China, an American consul has often been baffled by official indifference or harassing delays, when a French or Russian or British consul would have gained his point promptly. The United States have scarcely been recognized as a naval power.

We would not advocate the use of gunboats in the propagation of missionary enterprise, but the prestige of naval power is certainly of value. It is the only diplomatic argument that a power like the Turkish empire can comprehend. It may often be a means of maintaining peace. It should be understood that the United States government is able to defend all its citizens, missionaries or otherwise, as citizens, and that on its own impulse. [...]

There is another thing which is worth considering from a missionary point of view, and that is the limitation which may be put upon the access of American missionaries to the depressed races of the world. There can be no doubt that all, or nearly all, of the outlying realms of heathendom will soon be brought under the various flags of the civilized nations. Looking far ahead, what will be the probable effect of all this upon American missions? Could we be assured that the Philippines and Hainan, Korea and Cambodia, the Shan states and the dismembered Chinese

empire, would all be held under British protectorates, we should have no concern about open doors for our missionary labors. But if Russia or France should possess the Philippines, they would be about as inaccessible as they have been under Spain. The well-known policy of Russia in excluding missionary operations from her own territory will undoubtedly prevail in all her dependencies. The Presbyterian Board has virtually been driven from the Ogowe because it is claimed as French territory. In the German possessions of West Africa, there is also more or less of restriction.

With respect to the Philippines, the momentous question now being decided is: Shall that great archipelago ever be opened to British or American missions? Shall the elevating influence of Anglo-Saxon civilization, with its free institutions and its intellectual and moral stimulus, ever be admitted? [...] The major verdict of thoughtful men seems to be that God in his providence has laid a burden of moral responsibility upon the United States, which should be met in the interest—whether including their own interests or not—in the interest of humanity. [...] The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister; and this is the highest duty of the individual man—the highest duty of a nation.

Source: Frank F. Ellinwood, *Questions and Phases of Modern Missions* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1899), 254-269, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/ia.ark:/13960/t0rr24666>. Public domain.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. Spelling and punctuation emended in line with modern American conventions, except that the source publication’s antiquated spellings are retained for Puerto Rico and the Ogooué River basin. A ship’s name that was enclosed in quotation marks in the source is here italicized instead. For the sake of modernization, several terms capitalized in the source publication have been converted here to lowercase: *republic*, *consul*, *empire*, *government*, *states*, and *missions*. The capitalizing of compass directions used to designate global regions—*Western* and *East(ern)*—replicates the usage of the source, but the source’s inconsistent capitalizing of *hemisphere* has been regularized by consistently lowercasing the word.

These edited excerpts from Ellinwood’s book are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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