



## The Religious Mission of the English-Speaking Nations Henry H. Jessup (1893)

*Henry Harris Jessup was a white American who spent over fifty years working as a Presbyterian missionary in what is now Lebanon, then part of the Ottoman empire. He wrote this paper for the World's Parliament of Religions, a pioneering multifaith conference held in Chicago in 1893, which brought together speakers from different parts of the world, representing different religions. Jessup himself did not travel to the United States for the event, but his paper was read there by a fellow missionary.*

*Due to time constraints at the conference, Jessup's paper was probably not read aloud in its entirety, nor was it ever published in its entirety. Two substantially different versions of Jessup's paper appeared in print: one in the official conference proceedings, edited by John Henry Barrows; the other in a rival edition by publisher F. Tennyson Neely, based on stenographers' transcriptions made at the conference while the papers were read. Each published version is an abridgment of Jessup's paper, and each abridgment contains passages not found in the other. You are reading an amalgamated text, which combines both published versions in an attempt to reconstruct the complete paper, as Jessup wrote it.*

There is a divine plan in all human history. It embraces nations as well as individuals and stretches on to the end of time. Every nation and people is a part of the plan of God, who has set to each its bounds and its sphere of service to God and man.

For I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs,  
and the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.<sup>a</sup>

But no nobler service has been given to any people, no nobler mission awaits any nation, than that which God has given to those who speak the English tongue.

In 1800, the English-speaking population of the globe numbered 24 millions. It now numbers not less than 108 millions, an increase of over 400 percent, and it rules over two-fifths of the total area of the globe. It stands on a vantage ground of influence. Its voice sounds through the nations.

The four elements which make up the power for good in the English-speaking race, and fit it to be the divine instrument for blessing the world, are: (1) its historic planting and training, (2) its geographical position, (3) its physical and political traits, (4) its moral and religious character—which, combined, constitute (5) its divine call and opportunity and result in its religious mission, its duty and responsibility.

**(1) *The historic planting and training.*** In the beginning of the seventh century, the Saxon race in Britain embraced the religion of Christ. From that time through nine centuries, the hand of God was training, leading, disciplining, and developing that sturdy northern race, until the hidden torch of truth was wrested from its hiding place by Luther and held aloft for the enlightenment of

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<sup>a</sup> The quotation (not quite precise) is from "Locksley Hall," by 19th-century English poet Alfred Tennyson.

mankind, just at the time when Columbus discovered the continent of America and opened the new and final arena for the activity and highest development of man.

Was it an accident that North America fell to the lot of the Anglo-Saxon race, that vigorous northern people of brain and brawn, of faith and courage, of order and liberty? Was it not the divine preparation of a field for the planting and training of the freest, highest Christian civilization, the union of personal freedom and reverence for law? This composite race of Norman, Anglo-Saxon, and Teutonic blood, planted on the hills and valleys, by the rivers and plains, and among the inexhaustible treasures of coal and iron, of silver and gold, of this marvelous continent, were sent here as a part of a far-reaching plan whose consummation will extend down through the ages.

(2) *The geographical position.* A map of the world, with North America in the center, shows at a glance the vantage ground, the strategic position, of Great Britain and the United States. Their vast littoral, the innumerable harbors facing the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the maritime instincts of the two nations, their invigorating climate, matchless resources, worldwide commerce, facilities for exploration and travel, and peculiar adaptation to permanent colonization in remote countries give these peoples the control of the world's future and the key to its moral and ethnical problems.

(3) *The physical, social, and political traits of the English-speaking peoples* are a potent factor in their influence among the nations. Restless and migrating, they are still home-loving and stable. They are diffusive, yet constructive; free and liberty-loving, yet reverent to law; intolerant of tyranny, yet considerate of the lowly and the poor. Their strong individuality, their spirit of enterprise, their quiet self-control, their courage, tenacity, and perseverance, their gravity and calmness are elements of prodigious strength. In dealing with Orientals, their generosity, their innate sense of liberty and fair play have given them a firm and enduring hold upon the confidence of the people. They bear those traits and principles with them to the ends of the earth. While no other European race has succeeded in planting successful colonies and keeping them unmixed with the blood and the vices of inferior races, the Anglo-Saxons have transplanted the vigor of the original stock to the temperate climates of North America, South Africa, and Australia. If we add to this the phenomenal growth of scientific discovery and invention, we are prepared to expect from such a race the final and complete subjugation of the powers and forces of nature for the benefit and uplifting of mankind.

(4) *The moral and religious character and training of these nations.* A divine voice summoned the Anglo-Saxon race out of paganism into a positive faith and the cheering hopes of the gospel; but centuries of discipline and gradual growth were needed to fit them as a nation to be the messengers of light and life to the world.

The native love of truth of these peoples has been confirmed and intensified by the English Bible. Integrity, veracity, and impartial justice are, to great extent, national traits. These great nations are permeated with the principles of the Bible. Their poetry, history, science, and philosophy are moral, pure, and religious. They are founded on a belief in the divine existence and providence and in final retribution; in the sanctions of law and in the supremacy of conscience; in man's responsibility to God and the ruler's responsibility to the people; in the

purity of the family, the honor of woman, and the sanctity of home; in the obligation to treat all men—white, black, and tawny—as brothers made in the image of God. Such principles as these are destined to mold and control all mankind. The United States are impressing deeply the semi-Latin populations of South America, and England and America are affecting France. The Havelocks and Farraguts and Gordons,<sup>b</sup> the men of sturdy faith and sterling sense, of pure morals and serene trust in God, are the men who are respected, trusted, and loved, even to the remotest parts of the globe. A sincere religious spirit, a God-fearing integrity, will mold a nation only in one way, and the upward, Godward growth of such a people will affect, by its vital energy, other nations and peoples.

**(5)** With such a unique combination of historic, geographical, political, and religious elements, it is easy to see what constitutes *the divine call and opportunity*, the religious mission and responsibility, of these great nations. The true ideal of the religious mission of a nation embraces its entire intellectual, moral, and social relations and duties, to its own people and to all other peoples. It is thus a home [mission] and a foreign mission.

**(a)** *To its own citizens*, this mission is one of religious liberty, the promotion of Sabbath rest, temperance, social purity, and reverence for the laws of God. The fear of God cannot be enforced by legal enactment; but nations who owe their liberties and laws, their happiness in the present and their hopes for the future, to the word of God should see to it that every citizen, native or adopted, shall be able to read, and be taught to reverence, this divine Magna Charta of human rights and human happiness. The Anglo-American peoples should foster and defend those principles which their fathers sought to secure and [should] keep pure the foundation whose streams are to gladden and refresh the world.

It is treason to liberty, disloyalty to religion, and a betrayal of the sacred trust we hold from God, for our children and our country, to surrender the control of our educational system, our moral code, and our holy Sabbath rest from toil to our brethren from other lands, who have come, at our disinterested invitation, to share in these blessings but who, as yet hardly free from the shell and the shackles of Old World absolutism or the despair-begotten dreams of unbridled license, are not yet assimilated to our essential and vital principles of liberty and law, of perfect freedom of conscience tempered by the absolute subjection of the individual to the public good. Let us each rear his own temple for the worship of his God according to his own conscience, but let the schoolhouse be reared by all in common, open and free to all and patronized by all.

**(b)** *To the civilized nations*, this mission is one which can only be effective through a consistent moral example. The English-speaking nations are not set as dumb fingerposts of metal or stone, but as living, speaking, acting guides. They are set for an example—to exhibit moral reform in act, to shun all occasions of war and denounce its horrors, to show the blessings of arbitration by

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<sup>b</sup> British general Henry Havelock was regarded heroically in Britain for his role in suppressing the Indian Rebellion of 1857, during which he died. David Farragut was a US naval officer during the Civil War; he became famous for the line, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!" Charles George Gordon was an internationally famed British army officer and adventurer, who helped put down the Taiping Rebellion in China in the 1860s, governed Turco-Egyptian Sudan during the 1870s-1880s, and was killed in 1885 while defending the Sudanese city of Khartoum during the Mahdist Revolt.

adopting it as their own settled international practice, and to treat all social questions from the standpoint of conscience and equity. The *Alabama* and Bering Sea arbitrations<sup>c</sup> have been an object lesson to the world more potent in exhibiting the true spirit of Christianity than millions of printed pages or the persuasive voices of a hundred messengers of the cross.

The recent action of Congress and the House of Commons with regard to a treaty of arbitration is pregnant with promise for the future peace of the nations and cause for profound gratitude to God. It is only ninety-nine years since the eminent Edmund Burke used language respecting the French people which would now be denounced as unworthy of a civilized man.<sup>d</sup> It is the religious mission of the English-speaking nations to form a juster estimate of other nations, to treat all men as entitled to respect, to allow conscience its full sway in all our dealings with them. Let these closing years of this noble century of progress be crowned with the glorious spectacle of a heaven-born and heaven-blessed covenant of lasting and inviolable peace between these great nations, one in history, one in faith, one in liberty, one in law, one in future service to God and all mankind.

(c) *To the semi-civilized and heathen nations*, our religious mission is one of helpfulness, uplifting, and enlightenment. The sympathies of our Christian faith are all with the poor, the suffering, the ignorant, the oppressed. We are bound in honor and gratitude to give to those hundreds of millions the word of God, that golden key which shall unlock to them all our precious treasures of knowledge and truth, of faith and happiness.

The highly favored northern races are called by every prompting of the law of love to go to the help of the less favored continents of the south. Christ bids the strong to help the weak, the blessed to succor the unblessed, the free to deliver the enslaved, the saved to evangelize the unsaved. We owe them the benefits of civilization, the principles of justice, honor, and veracity, our social comforts and joys, intellectual education and uplifting, the relief of physical suffering, the blessings of medical science and skill, and, above all, the bright hopes and celestial promises of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>c</sup> *During the US Civil War, Britain provided the Confederacy with warships, in violation of Britain's official neutrality. Following the war, the United States demanded compensation from Britain for the damage done by those warships. (Some US expansionists hoped to acquire part or all of Canada as compensation.) This dispute was known as the Alabama claims, Alabama being the name of the most famous of the warships in question. Two decades later, the United States and Britain quarreled over whether British ships had the right to hunt seals in the Bering Sea, over which the United States claimed exclusive control as a consequence of having purchased Alaska. In both these cases, the US and British governments agreed to let an international tribunal, with members appointed by other countries, settle the dispute—a novelty in international relations at the time.*

<sup>d</sup> *This appears to be a reference to Burke's vehement condemnation, while a British MP, of the French Revolution of 1789. Among other things, Burke insinuated that the French had degenerated from a noble ancestral race into "savages," on a level with African slaves and Jews.*

*Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France (London: J. Dodsley, 1790), esp. 51-52, 72, 127; A Letter from Mr. Burke, to a Member of the National Assembly (Dublin: William Porter, 1791), esp. 15.*

But we find ourselves confronted and thwarted at the very gateway of the Asiatic and African, as well as the Polynesian, races by that monster of hideous mien, the *sacra auri fames*, the accursed European greed for gold—gold earned at any price; gold in exchange for opium; gold for poisonous, maddening liquors, degrading and crazing, with their flood of foulness and death, men, women, and children made in the image of God. African chiefs and insular kings, pagan princes and Mohammedan sheikhs, entreat us with tears to save their people from devouring fire enkindled among them by our own countrymen.

American citizens and British subjects vie with each other in pouring these streams of "distilled damnation," these brain-poisoning, nerve-destroying narcotics and intoxicants, into the dark continent, the solitary islands, and the colossal empire of China. The European and American liquor traffic in Africa is pronounced by commercial and philanthropic men to be a greater evil than the slave trade and to threaten the entire extirpation of the African races. We are denounced by these children of nature, in their helplessness and woe, as worshippers of a god of gold, as willing to sacrifice the bodies and souls of men to this gilded fiend of avarice.

We who are strong are bidden by our Master to bear the infirmities of the weak; and instead of this, men bearing the name of Christians are shamelessly taking advantage of their weakness, for the lowest and most groveling motives, to betray and destroy them. Where is the inspiration of our marvelous providential history? Where the fruitage and outgrowth of our political, moral, and religious training? Where our obedience to the divine call and summons to the rescue of the sons of men? Where our following of the Golden Rule? Where is our sympathy, where our gratitude, where our honor?

While we thank God for the great insurrection of the human mind in the sixteenth century against spiritual absolutism; for our legacy of liberty, its principles, its maxims, and its glorious results; for our pure and peaceful homes; for our sacred day of rest, instituted by God himself, honored and kept pure by our forefathers, revered and enforced by Washington and Lincoln in the critical emergency of war; for the dignity and honor with which our women are crowned; for the growing abhorrence of war; for the spirit of moral and social reform, and for the divine call and opportunity to go forth and bless the nations—let us all resolve that our nation and people shall no longer be compromised by complicity in these accursed forms of sordid traffic.

Our mission is one of peace. Von Moltke, surveying his army of one million panoplied warriors, may declare war to be a divine institution;<sup>e</sup> zealous enthusiasts may call for an Anglo-American alliance which, by its armies and navies, could dictate laws to the world; but we are called to a propagandism of amity and peace. We are to guarantee to our sons and daughters of toil one full day's rest in seven; an equitable adjustment of all social and labor questions that arise; the protection of our children from the gilded tempting cup which at last "biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." We are not ashamed of that divine book which has made the difference between North and South America, between Great Britain and the Spanish peninsula.

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<sup>e</sup> For much of the latter half of the 1800s, Helmuth von Moltke was head of the Prussian army, which he modernized and led to victory in wars against Prussia's powerful neighbors, Austria and France. These wars won new territory for Prussia, culminating in the formation of the German empire known as the Second Reich.

This, then, is our mission: that we, who are made in the image of God, should remember that all men are made in God's image. To this divine knowledge we owe all we are, all we hope for. We are rising gradually towards that image, and we owe to our fellowmen to aid them in returning to it in the glory of God and the beauty of holiness. It is a celestial privilege, and with it comes a high responsibility.

From this responsibility, there is no escape. If we are true to it, we shall stand up for liberty, truth, and righteousness; we shall be pure, we shall be peaceable; we shall use our wealth, our moral and political power to root out wrong and sin from our homes, our public councils, our land, and our commerce, so that wherever our flags may float, neither slavery nor the drink traffic, [neither] legalized impurity nor illicit trade, can lift their heads. The pride of wealth, the consciousness of irresistible military power on land and sea would soon transform our two great nations from being twin sisters of love and justice, truth and peace, into a double-headed monster of war and ambition, consumed with insatiate greed of universal dominion; and we should at length degenerate into that frightful Hindu ideal of the final age of the world, "the age of progressive misery and all-prevailing woe."<sup>f</sup>

In the palace of Behjeh, or Delight, just outside the fortress of Acre on the Syrian coast, there died a few months since a famous Persian sage—the Babi saint, named Behâ Allah, the "Glory of God"<sup>g</sup>—the head of that vast reform party of Persian Moslems who accept the New Testament as the word of God, and Christ as the deliverer of men; who regard all nations as one, and all men as brothers. Three years ago, he was visited by a Cambridge scholar and gave utterance to sentiments so noble, so Christlike, that we repeat them as our closing words:

That all nations should become one in faith, and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled—what harm is there in this? Yet so it shall be. These fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars, shall pass away, and the "Most Great Peace" shall come. Do not you in Europe need this also?

Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind.<sup>h</sup>

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<sup>f</sup> The quotation comes from *The Philosophy of History*, written in the early 1800s by German scholar Friedrich Schlegel. Schlegel was describing the Hindu concept of Kali Yuga.

<sup>g</sup> This is Bahá'u'lláh, founder of the Bahá'í religion, who died in 1892 in the Mansion of Bahjí ("Behjeh"). The admiring treatment that Bahá'u'lláh and Bahá'ís receive here contrasts startlingly with what Jessup wrote about them two decades later, in his memoir. There he called the movement a "Persian delusion"; characterized Bahá'u'lláh as a "fraud" who promoted "delirious blasphemies"; and accused Bahá'ís of "unscrupulous persecution" of others, giving, as example, an anecdote about a Bahá'í who threatened the life of a family member who left the faith. Jessup predicted that the Bahá'í movement, like other religious innovations that "turn up now and then in the East," would "go up like a rocket and down like the stick."

Henry Harris Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1910), 2:636-638.

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<sup>h</sup> *The block quotation comes from an account written by Edward Granville Browne, a British scholar of Persian history and literature, of a visit he made to Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí in 1890.*

*Edward G. Browne, ed. and trans., A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Báb (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 2:xl.*

**Sources:**

Henry H. Jessup, “The Religious Mission of the English-Speaking Nations,” in *The World’s Parliament of Religions*, ed. John Henry Barrows (Chicago: Parliament Publishing Co., 1893), 2:1122-1126, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3316178>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

Amalgamated with Henry H. Jessup, “The Religious Mission of the English-Speaking Nations,” in *Neely’s History of the Parliament of Religions* [...], ed. Walter R. Houghton (Chicago: Frank Tennyson Neely, 1893), 637-641, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/cool.ark:/13960/t6m04pp2r>. Public domain.

Compared to Henry H. Jessup, “The Religious Mission of the English Speaking Nations,” in *The World’s Congress of Religions*, ed. J. W. Hanson ([Chicago]: W. B. Conkey Co., 1893), 793-795, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiuo.ark:/13960/t22b9161d>. Public domain. Hanson reproduces the first 60% of Jessup’s paper as abridged in the Neely’s edition, with some additional material inserted from Barrows’s edition. Hanson contains no material not found in either Barrows or Neely’s, but some editorial emendations from Hanson are adopted in the present amalgamation.

Text amalgamated, edited, and annotated by John-Charles Duffy. Where the sources present variants of the same word or phrase, the longer or more grandiloquent variant (which is most often Barrows’s) is favored here on the presumption of its more likely being the original reading. The word *ethnical*, possibly but not certainly an error for *ethical*, is used here as in Barrows, Neely’s, and Hanson. Paragraph breaks adjusted for readability. A long sentence broken up. Block-quote formatting used here as in Neely’s. One paragraph break that Neely’s inserted into the block quote from Bahá’u’lláh has been omitted here, but another paragraph break in that block quote is retained from Neely’s to mark a spot where Jessup elided material from his source without an ellipsis. The formatting (capitalization, punctuation, typography) of a numbered list and of numbered and lettered subheadings has been adjusted from the source publications for internal consistency and greater visibility.

Spelling and punctuation Americanized, regularized, or otherwise emended for readability, except that names are spelled here as in the source publications. In one case where a name is spelled inconsistently across sources, the now conventional spelling has been chosen for use here (*Bering*, not *Behring*). The placement of a comma after the word *Norman*, in the phrase “Norman, Anglo-Saxon, and Teutonic blood,” follows the punctuation of that passage adopted in Hanson. The word *million(s)* has been inserted here, in place of strings of zeros, following Hanson’s usage. A ship’s name converted to italics. The name *Magna Charta* converted from italics to roman type. A Latin phrase italicized as per Barrows instead of being placed in quotation marks as per Neely’s. The religious terms *divine*, *gospel*, *providence* (as a divine attribute, not a divine epithet), *word*, *book*, and *cross*, as well as the word *nature*, all capitalized in Barrows, have been converted here to lowercase for the sake of modernization; some of those terms were already downcased in Neely’s. The racialized term *northern*, inconsistently capitalized within and across the source publications, is consistently lowercase here; to match, the word *south*, designating a global region, has been converted to lowercase. The capitalizing of the expression *Most Great Peace*, in the quotation from Bahá’u’lláh, follows both Barrows and the original source (Edward G. Browne).

This edited amalgamation of the published versions of Jessup’s paper is intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the original sources listed above.

**See also:**

An incomplete amalgamation of the Barrows and Neely’s editions of Jessup’s paper appears in Richard Hughes Seager, ed., *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World’s Parliament of Religions, 1893* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1993), 37-42. Seager’s amalgamation omits 80% of the material unique to Neely’s.

On papers presented at the World’s Parliament of Religions being abridged for reading and publication, see Barrows, *World’s Parliament*, 1:253 n. 1; Houghton, *Neely’s History*, unpaginated prefatory note by John W. Postgate; Hanson, *World’s Congress*, 5-6.



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