



The Twentieth-Century Crusade
Lyman Abbott (1918)

Lyman Abbott was a white Congregational minister from the northeastern states who, in the late 1800s, became nationally known as a popularizer of modernist theology and the social gospel. He was a political supporter of US president Theodore Roosevelt; the two became personally friendly. Among the social causes Abbott advocated were temperance, government regulation of industry to protect workers and public interests, and the abolition of the treaty-and-reservation system in order to assimilate indigenous people into US society. He opposed women's suffrage. He belonged for a time to the American Peace Society, an anti-war organization, but his membership was suspended when he called for the United States to make military preparations in anticipation of World War I. In these excerpts from a book Abbott published while he was in his 80s, a few years before his death, he defends the United States' then-ongoing participation in the world war. His defense is grounded in his postmillennialist, social gospel-oriented, modernist theology.

[We have no imperial ambitions]

We speak of a war in Europe. In strictness of speech, there is no war in Europe. There is an international *posse comitatus*, representing more than twenty civilized nations, summoned to preserve the peace and protect the peaceable nations of Europe from the worst, most highly organized, and most efficient band of brigands the modern world has ever known. This is not rhetoric. It is an accurate and scientific statement of the facts. [...]

The object of the German government, as avowed by its leaders, is not to determine a question of justice; it is to crush France, humiliate England, and bring the civilized world under the domination of the German sword. [...] Germany has openly, flagrantly, avowedly, and with frankness declared that she does not recognize the laws of nations, nor the laws of war, nor the laws of humanity, nor the laws of God. [...]

The French greeted our boys on their arrival in France as "the Salvation Army." They were right. It is a salvation army. We are inspired by no territorial ambition. We want no more territory. We have been reluctant to take territory lying outside the continent of America even when it has been thrust upon us. We have no political ambitions. We have no desire to govern an alien people. The responsibility for the government of the Philippines we have temporarily assumed with great reluctance. We could not, with honor, escape it. For having destroyed the Spanish government, international law and national honor combined to require us to maintain a provisional government in its place until the Filipinos were prepared to assume its responsibilities and exercise its duties themselves. We have no wish to dictate to any other people what their form of government shall be. [...]

[A Christian crusade for democracy]

The President has said that the object of this war is to make the world safe for democracy. [...] The President has rightly defined that cause. We believe that the right of nations to be free is in peril, and we joined with them in the defense of that right. We have engaged in a crusade to make this world a home in which God's children can live in peace and safety, a crusade far more

in harmony with the spirit and will of Christ than the crusade to recover from pagans the tomb in which the body of Christ was buried. [...]

Jesus Christ recognized the Fatherhood of God and mated with it, perhaps I should say deduced from it, the brotherhood of man. [...] All ye are brethren: that is democracy. One is your Father: that is the spiritual foundation of democracy.

Democracy is not a mere form of government. It is a religious faith. It is a spirit of life—a spirit of mutual regard for each other's interests and mutual respect for each other's opinions. It is government by public opinion. It is liberty, equality, fraternity—in the institutions of religion, of industry, and of education as well as in government. In a word, it is human brotherhood. We are not fighting to impose our political institutions or our political ideals on reluctant peoples. We are fighting to maintain the right of eager peoples to organize their institutions in harmony with this spirit of brotherhood. We have joined with all the free peoples of the world in a stern resolve, not that all nations shall be Christian, but that all nations shall have liberty to be Christian if they wish. [...]

[On the road toward the kingdom of God]

When we look back over the history of the world, we see that the death of Jesus Christ, which to the disciples seemed the end of all their hopes, was the birth of Christianity; [...] that the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, which seemed to the men of that time to be the overthrow of civilization, was but the labor pains of a new and Christian civilization; that in our own country, the Civil War, which at the time appeared to portend an enmity between the North and the South which could only be overcome after two or three generations, did in fact unite the North and the South in the bonds of a friendship founded on mutuality of respect greater than the nation had ever before known. Instructed by such a survey of the past, it is not difficult for us to believe that the present great world cataclysm, when it has accomplished the divine purpose, will advance the world far on its road toward that kingdom of God which is righteousness, peace, and joy in holiness of spirit. [...]

During my lifetime—that is, during the last 83 years—slavery has been abolished in the United States and is now nowhere recognized throughout the civilized world. [...] Child labor has been forbidden; the right of workers to organize for the protection of their rights and the promotion of their interest has been recognized by law both in England and the United States; and suffrage has been so extended that it is either absolutely free or subject to such qualifications as can easily be met by a reasonable degree of industry and thrift. [...] The government of Ireland and of the colonies has been reformed, and the English government is making careful efforts to derive and establish for them some system of self-government that will not hazard the national unity. [...] France has become a free constitutional republic. [...] Italy has become a great united nation and a free nation [...] In Russia, a revolution has overthrown the old bureaucracy; and though anarchy followed immediately after this overthrow, as I am writing this letter there is every reason to believe that the people themselves, with the aid of their democratic allies, will succeed in establishing an ordered and stable government.

He who believes that history is anything more than merely a series of accidental happenings, [...] who believes in any ordered social evolution, should find it difficult to believe that this march of

the century toward liberty will be halted and that, at the command of the Hun, the civilized world will right-about-face and travel back to the unendurable despotisms from which, at such cost, they have wrought their deliverance. He who believes that God is in his world; that above all earthly plans and purposes, there is One who gives to his children their ideals and inspires them with their courage; and that history is in very truth the working out of his plans for his children will find despair for the world impossible. He who looks back only four years may find in those four years food for his doubts and discouragements, but he who looks back a hundred years must have a great genius for pessimism if he can doubt in what direction the unseen forces are carrying the human race.

The Bible and life unite in testifying that the kingdom of God is a kingdom of liberty and that God is the Father of a free people.

Source: Lyman Abbott, *The Twentieth Century Crusade* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1918), 25, 28, 31-33, 61-64, 85-86, 97-100, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t4rj5485s>. Public domain.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. Punctuation emended, some complex sentences broken up, and a spelled-out number converted to a numeral for readability. Several terms that were capitalized in the source publication, sometimes inconsistently, have been converted here to lowercase: *nations*, *republic*, *liberty*, *life*, *brotherhood of man*, *cross*, and *kingdom*. The use of lowercase for divine pronouns reproduces the usage of the source. The capitalizing or not of *Salvation Army* also replicates the source (which appears to be playing off the name of the religious organization).

These edited excerpts from Abbott'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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