

The Missionary Imperative in an Age of Destiny and Innocence

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Kenneth Scott Latourette, great historian of the expansion of Christianity, entitled the three volumes of his magnum opus which were devoted to the nineteenth century "The Great Century." In doing so, Latourette wished to celebrate an unprecedented missionary expansion of Christianity which led him to conclude that "in the nineteenth century Christianity had a far larger place in human history than at any previous time."¹ Coming late to the arena of foreign missionary activity (indeed, having been the recipients of it for the first two centuries of their history), American Protestants, once they discovered the call and the lure of serving God in foreign lands, devoted themselves to missionary work with great zeal and confidence. Indeed, by the time that World War I broke out American foreign missions dominated the entire Protestant missionary enterprise.

The story has often been told of the origins of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. In a rainstorm in the summer of 1806 a group of Williams College students took shelter in a haystack and pledged to dedicate themselves to missionary service in other lands. From this beginning an enterprise grew which was to have an incalculable effect on the American churches, the American public's perception of the rest of the world (especially the non-Western world), and the American government's foreign policy—not to mention its effect on the beneficiaries of this missionary activity.

The concern of this paper is with the interrelationship between the missionary imperative, which is an authentic and important religious concern of Christians, and the American people and nation's sense of destiny, which if it is religious, belongs more to the sphere of what the sociologist Robert Bellah has termed "American civil religion" rather than to that of Christianity. In particular, the focus is upon that interrelationship during the two decades at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century when the foreign missions movement in American Protestantism reached its climactic phase.

What follows is an attempt to understand the connection between an important chapter in religious history and the social environment out of which it arose. Medieval historian R. W. Southern's wise observation

provides a license for the endeavor. Southern writes that

it is important to appreciate the forces which continued and directed the development of the church, for ecclesiastical history is often written as if these forces did not exist, or existed only to be overcome. The truth is that they could not be overcome because they were invisible to contemporaries. The historian can recognize them in retrospect only because he can observe their influence over a wide field of human behaviour.²

Consequently, I believe that it is important to examine the missionary activity of the American Protestant Churches in a broader context than is usually done, at least by churchmen. It is not sufficient to consider it as solely a response to the "great commission" of Jesus in Matthew 28:10-20, as one more episode in the long history of Christian devotion and faithfulness. It is, of course, that, and I have no intention of minimizing or belittling the heroic faith of a multitude of missionaries. But if there are "social sources of denominationalism," as H. Richard Niebuhr reminded us in 1929, there are also cultural sources of missionary activity. We must, if we are to understand the phenomenon of American missionary activity, look at it in the context of at least two very significant aspects of American life in the three or four decades before World War I. These aspects are the growing awareness that the United States must assume what Congregational clergyman Josiah Strong regarded as its imperial duty to Anglo-Saxonize the world and the pervasiveness in American life of a spirit which historian Henry May has called "American innocence." We shall find, I think, that the two are very much intertwined.

An Age of Innocence

In his important study, *The End of American Innocence*, Henry May argues that a momentous change took place in American civilization in the years between 1912 and the end of the first World War. Ideas, values, and convictions which had reigned virtually unchallenged in American culture were so effectively shattered that after the war "it was hard to find a convincing or intellectually respectable spokesman for the prewar faith."³ What was that faith which held such a powerful grasp on the American mind of the nineteenth century? May suggests that nineteenth-century American civilization was characterized by three central doctrines which in their various guises dominated American thought. "These were first, the certainty and universality of moral values; second, the inevitability, particularly in America, of progress; and third, the importance of traditional literary culture."⁴ The world which was shaped

by these doctrines was a rather simple one in which problems could be expeditiously dealt with, truth easily discerned, assurance of the right readily attained, and a glorious future counted upon. Complexities such as are commonplace in the modern world, the troubling relativity of values which confronts us at every turn, the perplexing lack of clarity, and the alarming possibility that we live in a world without meaning—all of these were foreign to the American mind of the late nineteenth century. May calls it an age of innocence and asserts that

Innocence, the absence of guilt and doubt and the complexity that goes with them, had been the common characteristic of the older culture and its custodians, of most of the progressives, most of the relativists and social scientists, and of the young leaders of the pre-war Rebellion.⁵

Among the custodians of the older culture who were marked by this innocence and held captive by the optimistic tenor of the age were most of the leading spokesmen of American Protestantism. All across the religious spectrum the American Protestant temperament was unremittingly optimistic. This was obvious in the case of the liberal clergy in the major urban pulpits, men like Henry Ward Beecher and Phillips Brooks, who were secure in their defense of the social and economic status quo. It was less expected but clearly present among leaders of the Social Gospel movement like Walter Rauschenbusch, who, while discerning a social crisis in American society, nevertheless remained convinced that the social order could be (and was being) Christianized. More surprising still was the essential optimism of the great revivalist Dwight L. Moody, who, while he inveighed against sin, did not link it to the social realms, and who all the while remained both a representative and strong supporter of the American bourgeois way of life. Only on the fringes of the culture, among the premillennialist precursors of American fundamentalism, was there a pessimistic assessment of the world and its future. But these were voices which could easily be ignored, if they were even heard, by the leaders of the Protestant community who remained convinced that Christian civilization was emerging in an America which would lead the way to the Christianization and democratization of the whole world. For them, the shape of this Christian civilization was, not surprisingly, remarkably like the civilization that May describes: one marked by moral idealism, faith in a nobler future, and cultural standards rooted in America's Puritan tradition. How could it be otherwise in a society in which "Protestantism. . . permeated the social structure and the value system of the nation"?⁶

A characteristic aspect of American Protestant thought in the nineteenth century is its optimism both about man himself and the world in which he dwells. Living in a land which was changing more rapidly than they could keep up with, citizens of a nation whose people and resources were expanding at a dizzying rate, Americans were, almost without reflection, firm believers in progress. They were convinced that the democratic civilization they were advancing and the religious faith on which it was grounded—an increasingly liberal form of evangelical Protestantism—were twin champions of ideals and values which would soon transform both humankind and the world itself into the glorious kingdom of God.

This optimism is not confined to those early theological liberals who, believing with William Ellery Channing in man's perfectibility, transformed much of the early New England tradition in the direction of Unitarianism, nor is it confined to the later liberal heirs of Horace Bushnell, who exhibited so much confidence in the redeemed man's ability to act upon the "susceptibility to good" which each man possesses. One expects theological liberals, with their diminished understanding of the magnitude and extent of man's sinfulness, to be optimistic, but many of the leaders of the more conservative wing of evangelical Protestantism shared their optimism. This was especially true of the leading revivalists of the nineteenth century, who, while insisting that salvation is by grace, nevertheless encouraged men to use their native capacities to the fullest in bringing about their own salvation. "Religion is the work of man," said Charles Grandison Finney, and only by seizing the initiative can men expect revivals of religion with the benefits they bring.⁷ "Let all take hold and help," exhorted Dwight L. Moody, "and then religion will be like a red-hot ball rolling over the earth and nothing can stand against it."⁸ Sin was real to these men, but it was not debilitating, not a weight that drags one down in a Pauline sense. Nor were they sensitive to that profound truth which Luther discussed so eloquently in *Contra Latomus*, the persistence of sin in the actions of the saints in accordance with the statement in Ecclesiastes: "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and sins not" (Eccles. 7:20). Quite the contrary, these two great revivalists both tended in the direction of Christian perfectionism, the strange doctrine which assumes that it is within the range of possibility for redeemed men to become perfect in this life. Such an idea is almost to be expected in an American context.

It should not be surprising that men like Finney and Moody were as optimistic about man as they were when one considers the nature of their audiences. They did not, as one might on first thought expect, preach

primarily to the unchurched, but rather to church members who sought spiritual reinforcement or rejuvenation. James F. Findlay says of Moody's meetings that it was not possible to enter one "without noticing that Christianity apparently had become the religion of the comfortable and the well-to-do."⁹ The revivalist's message was essentially one in which his audience was assured of God's love rather than reminded of His judgment. Moody identified himself with the businessmen who supported his work and never really questioned the ideals and values of America's "gilded age."

If conservative churchmen like Moody shared the optimistic outlook of the age, it was, however, among the spokesmen of the liberal wing of evangelical Protestantism that its most enthusiastic expression was found. These men sought to reconcile the Christian hope of a redeemed society with the evolutionary ideas which were in the air. In a juxtaposition which Darwin would have rejected, they identified evolution with progress, and then boldly asserted that this was God's way of doing things. The material progress which was undeniable was extended to embrace all of life—from Creation, through the present age, to the Kingdom of God, there was a continuous line of development. As H. Richard Niebuhr has observed, the idea of the kingdom was thereby robbed of its dialectic element. This naively optimistic liberalism had a "one-sided view of progress which saw the growth of the wheat but not of the tares, the gathering of the grain but not the burning of the chaff."¹⁰ This is the innocence that May says characterized the whole culture. Niebuhr's harsh and accurate judgment of such a stance would have fallen on uncomprehending ears: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."¹¹

A National Destiny

Turning from the optimistic innocence of nineteenth-century American Protestantism, we encounter another belief that helped to shape the missionary enthusiasm of the period, the idea of America's divinely ordained mission. American Protestants have long cherished the conviction that God was acting decisively in their midst, that they and their nation were to play a major role in the concluding drama of human history. The Puritans settled Massachusetts in the belief that they were God's "New Israel," called to establish "a city on a hill" which would stand as a beacon and guide for all the world. Jonathan Edwards, perhaps the

greatest theologian the American churches produced, reflecting on the momentous events associated with the Great Awakening, expressed his conviction and that of many of his countrymen that "the latter-day glory is probably to begin in America." The millennial age which Christians had earnestly awaited since the resurrection of their Lord was at last in the offing.

Edwards' faith was of the type that is called postmillennialist, meaning that he expected the return of Christ after the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. He sketched clearly the contours of that Kingdom in his *Work of Redemption*:

Then shall all the world be united in one amiable society. All nations, in all parts of the world, on every side of the globe, shall then be knit together in sweet harmony. All parts of God's church shall assist and promote the spiritual good of one another. A communication shall then be upheld between all parts of the world to that end; and the art of navigation, which is now applied so much to favour men's covetousness and pride, and is used so much by wicked debauched men, shall then be consecrated to God, and applied to holy uses.¹²

The instruments of God in bringing this to pass, Edwards believed, were the newly reawakened American Christians.

This faith was reinforced with the establishment, later in the century, of the new American nation, a nation which Americans (and many Europeans as well) saw as a new type of nation, democratic in polity and committed to the idea that individuals had certain inalienable rights granted to them by their Creator. The expansion of the United States across the continent gave birth to a secularized concept of the American purpose, labeled "manifest destiny" and focused on the specific destiny of the United States of America. But in Protestant circles, the old millennialist vision of Edwards remained strong, the vision which viewed America as God's agent for bringing His glory to all the world. As the quotation above testifies, Edwards was convinced that the new age which was dawning would benefit not only Americans but all peoples—the world would be united in one amiable society, all nations would be knit together in harmony, the world's commerce would redound to God's glory. Such was the postmillennialist faith, and where it was present, one found an earnestness and sense of mission that was, at its best, concerned with the well-being and upliftment of others. Thus Leonard Bacon in 1845 told the Foreign Evangelical Society that "our country

is destined to act upon the world, not by conquest and dominion, but by moral influences" and expressed the concern that "every thoughtful Christian citizen would feel the relations of his country to the world."¹³ That such a concern could go hand-in-glove with a self-satisfied smugness and arrogance can not be denied, but it is my contention that often its companion was simply that which May has called "American innocence." The assurance of American Protestants that they and their nation were instruments of the Divine Providence made them blind to their own limitations, the narrowness and relativity of their vision, and their too obvious willingness to believe that their moralistic values were writ in stone.

Not all American Protestants who embraced the millennial hope in the nineteenth century, however, were postmillennialists. As the century wore on, an increasing number of evangelical adherents of a vital belief in the second coming of Jesus adopted an alternative form of millennialism, i.e., premillennialism, according to which the millennial age would come only after the return of Christ. Such a faith is essentially individualistic rather than social; it believes that the message of the Gospel is primarily directed to individuals rather than to the world itself and that only individuals, not society, can be redeemed. This is a more pessimistic attitude and, as such, it has not had as long a tradition in America. Where it appears, one finds a certain failure of nerve, a rather un-American loss of confidence brought on by a sense of no longer being in control of things. In certain circles, this attitude became widespread as America moved from a homogeneous society, essentially rural and Protestant, to an ethnically and religiously pluralistic one, in which influence shifted from the countryside to the large industrialized cities. Many Protestants feared that America was in mortal danger of forsaking her ideals and losing her way. Consequently, the old confidence that they were God's instruments gave way to a new vision in which God would act unilaterally to achieve His purpose.

The premillennialists were appalled by the new world in their midst, and they saw the problems which it engendered—problems which other Americans sought to combat in the conviction that a spirit of reform would lead to their eradication—as evidence of God's disfavor and signs of the impending judgment. Their sense of foreboding was dismissed by most of the leading Protestant spokesmen, and premillennialism came to be one ingredient in the faith of those who made up the fundamentalist wing of Protestantism. In the face of the fundamentalist belief that modern culture was scientific and secular in spirit, there was no room for

confidence in the emergence out of it of a millennial age. If such an age were to come, it would only be through a total destruction of this age and the appearance of a totally new age inaugurated by the second coming of Christ.

Such a view would appear to eliminate premillennialists from the considerations to which this paper is addressed. American premillennialists can not, however, easily be lumped together; one must be wary of drawing obvious conclusions. When they give expression to the urgency which a belief in the imminent return of Christ arouses, these millennialists are starkly aware of the deficiencies, indeed the evil, of the world around them. They look out upon the social order—in the period with which we are concerned, one in which the social order is changing at a dizzying rate and which can better be characterized as a disorder—and they do not like what they see. They are equally certain that God does not like it either. The result is a message of judgment and condemnation which is both sweeping and categorical. Corruption, evil, godlessness—these are everywhere, and the social order contrasts sharply with the glorious beginnings of God's new Israel. In the face of such a message, one does not expect the American premillennialist preacher to be a spokesman for and defender of American society. Yet from Dwight L. Moody down to Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell in our own day this expectation has gone awry.

The major revivalists have all been, in their patriotic or civil religious moments, optimistic champions of the United States. They believe that God has blessed the nation richly in the past and will do so more fully in the future. They believe that American culture at its best is deeply Christian, and they are confident that with a renewed effort on the part of the Christian people of the country the aberrations of the present can be righted and a new glory can descend upon the nation. This has a post-millennialist ring to it, yet the premillennialist preachers can not detect it. They see no contradiction between their pessimistic convictions about the state of the world and their optimistic faith in the state of America. Not seeing the contradiction makes it possible for them to believe that they are the instruments of God in proclaiming the impending return of Christ to judge the world and also His instruments in proclaiming the glories of Christian, i. e., American or Western, civilization. We are not confronted by hypocrisy here; we are confronted by intellectual confusion.

Thus we must conclude that the difference in the millennial expectation, profound and striking as it is with respect to the social implications of the Christian message, has no real effect on the belief in America's

unique destiny, more especially the unique mission of American Christians. It is not without significance that two of the early leaders of the Student Volunteer Movement, which optimistically sought to mobilize American young people to evangelize the world in their generation, Robert Wilder and Robert E. Speer, were premillennialists.¹⁴ Like the naively optimistic belief in the progress of civilization toward the kingdom of God on earth, the sense of American destiny was an aspect of the climate of innocence out of which the great missionary activity of the period emerged.

If our argument has merit, we who gather to celebrate the eightieth anniversary of the establishment of this jewel in the crown of the American Presbyterian missionary enterprise¹⁵ can not have the luxury of uncritically praising that establishment as a manifestation of a selfless response to the commission of Christ to preach the gospel to all men or of cynically viewing it as another instance of American cultural imperialism in which a people who were blind to their own faults self-righteously sought to uplift others to their level. In one sense it was both of these things; in another, it was neither. When American Protestants in 1901 saw themselves as instruments of God for the transmission of the Christian civilization through which they had already experienced great blessings, they were not really aware of the magnitude of their own arrogance. Their whole national experience had reinforced the basic soundness of their faith, and their obstinate unwillingness to face the contradiction between their ideals and their actions—a contradiction which their treatment of blacks and Indians at home revealed—made them both sincere and confident that the rest of the world, particularly those peoples living in tropical lands, waited eagerly and hopefully for the message of the gospel of Christian civilization. On the foreign mission field, the great crusade for a redeemed world moved to its inevitable final battleground as American Protestants, in the optimistic spirit which characterized them, sought to “evangelize the world in this generation.”

These generalizations can be substantiated, I believed, by examining the role which arguments arising both from the conviction that America had a God-given destiny to proclaim the benefits of its experience to other people and from the overpowering confidence of American optimism play in promoting missionary activity at the beginning of the twentieth century. The former set of arguments will be taken from two works which sought to encourage American Protestants to assume their responsibilities toward the Philippines, Josiah Strong's *Expansion under New World-Conditions* (1900) and Arthur Judson Brown's *The New*

Era in the Philippines (1903). The latter set of arguments will come from John R. Mott's examination of the Student Volunteer Movement's watchword in his *The Evangelization of the World in this Generation* (1900).

The Missionary Imperative

R. Pierce Beaver has pointed out that the basic assumption underlying American Protestant missionary work with the Indians remained constant from the seventeenth century on, viz., "that 'evangelization' and 'civilization' were the two primary goals and that they must be effected simultaneously."¹⁶ One can argue that this observation applies equally well to the assumptions behind the foreign missionary enterprise. Certainly his further assertion that "the inevitable product of evangelization was believed to be civilization, the Gospel bringing the desire for and persistent effort toward the Anglo-American culture which was the very flowering of the Gospel"¹⁷ reflects the convictions which Josiah Strong, following the lead of President McKinley, used to justify the American assumption of sovereignty over the Philippines and which a missionary leader like Arthur Judson Brown used to encourage the Presbyterian Church to assume its responsibility for the evangelization of these islands. For American Protestants it had become impossible to separate from each other ideas arising from their understanding of the nature of the Christian faith and ideas arising from American political democracy.

Josiah Strong.

In our discussion of the postmillennialist hope dominant in American Protestantism at least since the time of Jonathan Edwards, we saw the faith that God was at work in the experience of the American people and that out of this activity would come the climactic event of all history, the establishment of the kingdom of God. In the century since the establishment of the United States, this divine activity had taken the form of perfecting the Christian civilization that was being shaped in the new nation. Confident that that civilization had progressed to a point that it was almost fully Christianized, spokesmen for the evangelical churches, like the Congregationalist clergyman and social gospel leader, Josiah Strong, began to urge their countrymen to remember that God's actions were not merely for the sake of Americans (or in Strong's case, Anglo-Saxons in general). America had been blessed by God not for herself alone, but so that she might be an instrument for the blessing of

others as a transmitter of the faith and a teacher of democracy. When, following this line of thought, American Protestants and the nation itself were urged to assume their God-given responsibilities, the summons was always cast in selfless terms. It was a burden, an obligation, something that must be done as a sacrifice. Yet there was always another dimension, one that was never fully admitted by evangelical churchmen, though often, as in Strong's case, it was painfully transparent. This dimension was the feeling of American pride and glory; an arrogance, if not yet of power, of destiny. One sees it in McKinley's famous assertion that there was nothing left for America to do with the Philippines "but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them."¹⁸ One sees it even more in Strong's invocation of the spirit of Anglo-Saxon imperialism. The Anglo-Saxon race, he asserts "has been made powerful and rich, and free and exalted—powerful, not to make subject, but to serve; rich, not to make greater gains, but to know the greater blessedness; free, not simply to exult in freedom, but to make free; exalted, not to look down, but to lift up."¹⁹

The problem with all of this is that Strong was convinced that this, vocation of service, of making others free and lifting them up, was not a temporary vocation but a permanent one. Most white Americans in the late nineteenth century accepted the ugly doctrines of racial superiority, and Strong articulated their implications for America's role in the world. In his view, the differences between races and civilizations were fundamental, and not differences of degree and time. There was no way for "belated races" to catch up to "advanced ones," since they were "not traveling the same path."²⁰ Since the tropical races were thus seen as inherently inferior, the responsibility which God had placed on the Anglo-Saxons was a perpetual one. There is in Strong's call to duty the language of service, the appeal to altruism and Christian charity, but the overwhelming spirit of the summons is imperialistic.

This becomes clear as he sketches out the "new world conditions" which necessitate American expansion. These conditions are essentially economic and geo-political. Since American manufacturers were on the verge of becoming the masters of the world market, Strong examined the fundamental conditions for success in manufactures and concluded that American supremacy in this area was likely to be permanent. Thus, the enlargement of America's foreign markets became a great necessity if the nation were to remain prosperous and avoid the perils of revolution at home. If, as seemed likely, the European nations began to protect their own manufactures, America would have to look to Asia and the

tropics for these markets. China becomes especially important in this respect, and Strong insists that it is essential for America's future interests that she play a major role in the awakening of China. An awakened and prosperous China, yoked in interest with the United States, would make the Pacific Ocean the "new Mediterranean" of the world, the center of commerce. In the face of this reality, Strong asserts that "it is not difficult to see a providential meaning in the fact that with no design of our own, we have become an Asiatic power."²¹

In a strangely prescient chapter, Strong argues that it is essential that this new Mediterranean be an Anglo-Saxon sea, controlled economically and militarily by the two great Anglo-Saxon nations, along with Canada and Australia. The alternative would be control over it by the Slav—Russia. Strong maintains that these two races, which are roughly equal in numbers but both rapidly growing, both possessed of remarkable powers for assimilating other peoples, and convinced of their unique religious missions, are locked in a "stupendous struggle" for the future. Their differences are absolute—"the Anglo-Saxon is the supreme representative of civil and religious liberty; the Slav is the supreme representative of absolutism, both in state and church."²² Anglo-Saxon civilization is based on the development of the individual, Slavic civilization on his suppression. In a touch of irony, Strong suggests that Russia is "deeply imbued with the dangerous notion that Heaven especially favors 'Holy Russia.'"²³ The obvious question, especially for such a determined advocate of the holy mission of the Anglo-Saxons, of why such a notion is dangerous when it is Russian and not dangerous when it is American does not occur to him. At any rate, in the face of this great struggle for the future, Strong insists on the strategic importance of Hawaii and the Philippines to the United States. This, coupled with our duty—religious and civilizing—toward these peoples, requires America to possess them. Only then does he speak of the blessings that this possession will bring to these Pacific islands. One can not help but conclude that it is the political motive and not the religious one that leads Strong to say that for America to abandon the Philippines would "be treason to ourselves, to the Anglo-Saxon race, to humanity, and to Western civilization."²⁴

Having quoted with approval an incredible statement by a Columbia University professor, Franklin Giddings, to the effect that Dewey's victory in Manila Bay was the most important historical event since Charles Martel's victory over the Muslims in 732 A.D., Strong insists that the victory ushered in a new age for America, one in which isolation was

no longer a legitimate option. Washington's famous strictures against foreign involvement are no longer appropriate for the nation's manhood.²⁵ In the face of the new conditions, ideas, ideals, and necessities of the twentieth century, in which America has already willy nilly expanded, the only recourse for the United States is to courageously and intelligently adapt to this new situation with "a new world policy, the aim of which shall be not national aggrandizement, but the noblest ministry to the new world life."²⁶

Strong thus tries to soften the blatantly political character of his argument by speaking of America's ministry and asserting God's providential role in the events that have made America a Pacific power (no pun intended). This has all come to pass because God's interest in human affairs stems from His concern for progress and the advancement of civil and religious liberty. It is to promote civil liberty that American sovereignty over the Philippines has been asserted and it is to promote religious liberty that Protestant missionaries are sent there. Strong rejects the arguments of the anti-imperialists against such a role and concludes that "it is time to dismiss 'the craven fear of being great,' to recognize the place in the world which God has given us, and to accept the responsibilities which it devolves upon us in behalf of Christian civilization."²⁷

In all of this discussion, the innocence that we have said characterized the American mind of the age is apparent. In fact, the only thing that prevents one from viewing Strong's work as the rantings of a dangerous imperialistic racist is that innocence. Clearly, he did believe that America was called to serve and lift up—also to rule and lead. He believed that armies in Anglo-Saxon lands no longer did what armies have always done, but rather they now served as builders of civilization. He sincerely believed that the time called for "an enlightened world conscience" by means of which men realized that their "interests, sympathies, and opportunities have become as wide as the world" and that their duties had expanded commensurately.²⁸ Believing all of this, he could argue that the world good must supersede and take precedence over national good, that nations must be held to an ethical standard common to all the world, and that America was called to show the way by demonstrating "the practicability of righteousness in international affairs."²⁹ There is nothing here to find fault with except the naivete of it all—the incredible naivete. In Strong's view, "the world is gradually being civilized and civilization is gradually being Christianized."³⁰ Christianity will in due course eliminate the cause of war, war itself will be made impossible, and human nature itself will become "unselfish and pacific." Realizing that this new day

has not yet dawned, he nevertheless invokes its vision as a summons to action.

While Strong's book is primarily aimed at summoning the American people to assume their responsibilities as an imperial power, his argument, coming from the pen of one of Protestantism's most influential spokesmen, provided support for the advocates of foreign missions. Strong himself had always been a vigorous supporter of missionary activity, as his earlier influential work *Our Country* had shown. There he pleaded for greater financial support for the church's missionary endeavors³¹ and argued as well for the missionary's role in the great task of Anglo-Saxonizing mankind.³² "I believe," he wrote, "it is fully in the hands of the Christians of the United States, during the next ten or fifteen years, to hasten or retard the coming of Christ's Kingdom in the world by hundreds, and perhaps thousands of years."³³ A principal means of doing this would be through the nation's fidelity to the task of evangelizing the world.

Arthur Judson Brown.

In Arthur Judson Brown's *The New Era in the Philippines*, one finds an assertion of the missionary responsibilities of American Protestants which complements Strong's argument while addressing the same new conditions. Though Brown does not cite Strong's book, there is ample evidence to suggest that he was influenced by it.

Brown, the Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., wrote his book after a tour of the Philippines in 1903. He sought on the one hand to acquaint American churchmen with the need and challenge of missionary work in their new possession and on the other defend the legitimacy of American sovereignty over the Philippines. His concern was to emphasize the moral obligations that the United States had in the Philippines. As a result, he says very little about the islands' strategic importance and not much more about their commercial significance. The moral obligations that he stresses are grounded in America's role as an instrument of God for the Christianization and civilization of the Filipinos, and they are such that if America refused to assume them "it would be condemned by the moral sense, not only of the world, but of its own people."³⁴ Assaying the possible objects which America might seek in the Philippines, Brown rejects as motives for American activity both the pursuit of national glory and commercial profit. Such motives are "unworthy of us because they ignore the interests of the people over whom we rule and because

they involve a betrayal of the trust which God has committed to us as a nation."³⁵ The only legitimate object, then, for our sovereignty is the welfare of the Filipinos.

Brown's view of America's options in this new world situation is not markedly different from Strong's, in spite of their different emphases. He believes that the United States' aloofness from the rest of the world in the first century of her existence was a self-centered policy of "a hermit country"—a phrase which Strong also used—which must now be cast aside. George Washington's advice against entangling alliances was the product of the gloomy prospects for the nation in his day, and not at all indicative of what a man like him, possessed as he was of common sense and Christian patriotism, would do in the twentieth century. Now, the nation had no moral right to vacate its responsibilities. Like individuals, nations must minister to the poor, the sick, the weak, the half-civilized races. "The wrongs of feeble and oppressed peoples are our affair, and we cannot pass by on the other side, pleasant though it would be if we could."³⁶ Since the United States had been made safe and strong and prosperous by Providence, it could hardly evade duties which that same Providence set before it. Clearly Brown is using the idea of national destiny and responsibility to challenge American Protestants to fulfill their missionary obligations.

Deeply imbued with the optimistic idealism of his countrymen, Brown has no doubts that America, as a Christian nation, can give order and justice to the Philippines. The role of Protestant missionaries in this endeavor is crucial, since they are uniquely equipped to build up character in the Filipino people. By "character," Brown meant the familiar American Protestant virtues—thrift, industry, temperance, godliness, etc.³⁷ Lamenting the fact that too many of the Americans in the Philippines adhered to moral standards lower than those which, under the influence of family, religion, and a purer public opinion, prevailed in the United States, he appeals to the churches to send forth missionaries who will set an example by representing "the purest and highest types of American Christian culture."³⁸ (The unshakeableness of American optimism can be seen in the fact that neither Brown nor Strong allows his candid acknowledgments of deficiencies in American behavior to cast doubt upon the positive nature of his assessment of American civilization.)

A major element in Brown's argument is his criticism of what he calls "Spanish Filipino Romanism." He justifies the sending of missionaries to a Christian country by asserting that the "Christianity of the Filipinos is only a venerated heathenism."³⁹ At the heart of this polemic

is a conviction that Protestantism is a more vital form of Christianity, which not only changes men's hearts but controls their conduct. Missionaries are needed to preach this new form of Christianity to the Filipinos, to provide them with the Scriptures in their own languages and with schools (like Silliman) to educate the souls as well as the minds. The prospect before American Christians is unparalleled in their history, and if they were to undertake it in the right spirit, Brown believed that they would be "the means of bringing to [the Filipinos] untold blessing."⁴⁰ Like McKinley, whom he cites with enthusiasm, Brown is confident that America and her churches have received a great trust of civilization which they must unselfishly discharge. Again, both the President and the mission executive are steeped in the innocence of their age.

John R. Mott.

Earlier, it was suggested that the emergence among conservative Protestants of a premillennial expectation may have been caused by a failure of nerve, a loss of optimism in the face of problems bred by a society which was no longer ethically homogeneous, rural, and overwhelmingly Protestant. Perhaps it is not farfetched to suggest that the widespread appeal which foreign missionary work held for young American Protestants was also related to the changing character of American society. The problems arising from this change—large urban concentrations of people, large-scale industrialization, waves of new immigrants, political corruption, the intellectual challenge of new biological, historical, and social-scientific ideas—may have seemed so formidable a challenge that preaching the Gospel to non-Western peoples appeared as a more appealing and manageable one. Only those, however, who were wrapped in innocence could have failed to see the magnitude and difficulties of such an enterprise.

It is noteworthy that when Dwight L. Moody held his first Northfield Conference for students in 1886, it was not his expectation that out of the conference would spring what one of the participants called "a missionary gusher" in the form of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions.⁴¹ Moody always sought to involve the young college students who were attracted to him in that work which he believed to be of primary importance, namely, home missionary evangelism in the cities of the United States. But the students who came to Northfield that momentous summer were not inclined to adopt Moody's priorities. Whether they shied away from them because they sensed that

the task was not quite as simple of solution as Moody with his revivalistic methods believed, is not clear, but it is certain that they chose instead the exciting opportunity to evangelize Asia and Africa. They did so with an awesome naivete about the peoples and cultures of those two great continents and an equally spectacular optimism which saw nothing to prevent complete evangelization in a generation. Confident products of a confident age, they had no doubts about the superiority of Christianity—especially in its Protestant form—to all other religions, and the superiority of the civilization that was that religion's finest product. Indeed, the Student Volunteer Movement is almost a perfect paradigm of American innocence.

John R. Mott's name has always been intimately associated with the Student Volunteer Movement and also, one might add, with the history of the ecumenical movement in the first part of this century. He was for many Americans the foremost spokesman of both movements; to the former, his name has remained inseparably yoked. In *The Evangelization of the World in this Generation*, Mott seeks to justify the great watchword of the movement and, more importantly, to mobilize young men and women to undertake the great task. One is impressed by his deep commitment to the missionary task and also by the depth of his personal religious convictions. One is further impressed by his sense of urgency, his refusal to be dismayed by great obstacles, his persuasiveness. His is a voice which, unlike that of Strong, seems to rise above the concerns of national destiny and glory. In fact, it is refreshing to note Mott's candor in acknowledging how "the selfish and unjust treatment of non-Christian nations and races by nominally Christian powers" is a hindrance to the work of missionaries by making them suspect as political agents of imperialism.⁴²

Yet Mott is also a parochial creature of his day. He can speak of all of those living in the non-Christian world, regardless of the antiquity and attainment of their cultures, as "living in ignorance and darkness, steeped in idolatry, superstition, degradation and corruption."⁴³ All of the non-Christian religions have failed to accomplish that which Christianity has done in regenerating individuals and transforming society.⁴⁴ The world is divided into benighted and enlightened nations, the former being those in Africa and Asia, the latter being those of Europe and America. The most enlightened are the Protestant nations.⁴⁵ Mott rejoices in the fact that in the past fifty years almost the whole of the Roman Catholic world has opened to Protestant missions⁴⁶ and he counts among the difficulties in the way of accomplishing the task of

evangelization the fact that many millions of people adhere to the corrupt forms of Christianity as well as to non-Christian religions. The reference to the Roman Catholic Church is obvious.⁴⁷ While he does not speak the language of destiny, he cannot forego the opportunity to suggest that the spiritual interests of America and the West are inseparably bound up with the evangelization of the world. Consequently, "the dictates of patriotism, as well as loyalty to our Lord, call upon us to give ourselves to the world's evangelization."⁴⁸

Parochialism, with its inability to see value in other cultures and religious traditions, frequently accompanies the innocence of the nineteenth-century American. In looking at the other great world religions, Mott and his contemporaries were unable to see anything but "heathen superstitions and false systems of belief."⁴⁹ When they encounter the scholars of China and India, men whose intellectual tradition is as ancient as the Western one, they speak of the refusal of those scholars to apprehend Christian truth as stemming from intellectual pride and conceit. Either there is no awareness of how easily the charge might be turned around or, as in Mott's case, there is a categorical rejection of the relativistic notion that Christianity is not the absolute religion and that other religions also might have saving power.⁵⁰ As May pointed out, a belief in the certainty of their own moral absolutes is an essential aspect of nineteenth-century innocence.

But the most prominent aspect of this innocence is, as we have argued, its unassailable optimism. The whole idea of evangelizing what Mott conservatively estimated to be 750 million people, let alone the proposal to do it in a generation, is mind-boggling. To be sure, Mott argues that the aim is to evangelize and not to convert, and he acknowledges that it will take centuries to fully Christianize the world. Conversion and Christianization are up to God, but evangelization, the task of making the knowledge of the Gospel accessible to all men so that they will have the opportunity to make a decision for or against Jesus Christ, is well within the realm of human possibility.⁵¹ Not that Mott is unaware of the difficulties, indeed he enumerates them at length⁵²: the sheer numbers of those to be reached, the fact that most of them live in rural areas far from lines of commerce, the inaccessibility of many lands either as a result of geography or politics, the hindrances thrown up by hostile governments, the bad examples of other Westerners, the taint of being associated with imperialist nations, intellectual pride and closed minds, indifference both at home and among those to be evangelized, the lack of a sense of sin in non-Christians, secularism, the difficulty of trans-

lating Christian ideas, materialism, disunity in the church, lack of enthusiasm at home, the spirit of relativism, and worldliness in the church. Do these difficulties daunt him? By no means; he optimistically insists that "not one of these difficulties is insuperable."⁵³ In fact, to him difficulties are advantages, since they bring forth the best in Christians and make them rely more upon God.

Mott would probably dismiss our criticism of his optimism by asserting that his optimism is really in God. Yet the whole tenor of his argument suggests otherwise. It is to individual Christians that he hurls the challenge: "You don't know what you can do until you try."⁵⁴ He argues that this formidable task will be accomplished if this generation of volunteers has the "obedience, courage, and determination to attempt the task."⁵⁵ While one is reminded frequently that the enterprise is not man's but God's, it is individual Christians working together who hold the key to success. As Mott's long-time colleague and another early leader of the S.V.M., Robert E. Speer, says: "Our position on the question of possibility [of evangelizing the world] will be largely determined by our views of its desirability."⁵⁶ Nowhere in Mott's book does one find any doubts that contemporary Christian young people will be united on the task's desirability or that they possess the necessary obedience, courage, or determination. Mott is sure that the great task will be performed. Perhaps nowhere else did the American Protestantism of this period provide such a clear example of its optimistic innocence. The great century was ready to yield to an even greater one.

Notes

¹ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York, 1943), vol. 5, p. 1.

² R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, England, 1970), p. 15.

³ Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence* (New York, 1959), p. 384

⁴ P. 6.

⁵ P. 393.

⁶ Herbert G. Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age," in *Dissent: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, ed. Alfred F. Young (Dekalb, Illinois, 1969), p. 162.

⁷ Charles Grandison Finney, "What a Revival of Religion Is," in *The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (New York, 1969), p. 87.

⁸ Dwight L. Moody, "How Can Non-Church-Goers Be Reached?," in *The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900*, p. 175.

⁹ James F. Findlay, Jr., *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist, 1837-1899* (Chicago, 1969), p. 272f.

¹⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York, 1937), p. 193.

- 11 P. 193.
- 12 Jonathan Edwards, "Work of Redemption," quoted in Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), p. 99.
- 13 R. Pierce Beaver, "Missionary Motivation through Three Centuries," in *Reinterpretation in American Church History*, ed. Jerald C. Brauer (Chicago, 1968), p. 136.
- 14 Findlay, pp. 351-52.
- 15 This paper was originally presented at Silliman University, Dumaguete City, Philippines, on August 13, 1981, during celebrations marking the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the University.
- 16 R. Pierce Beaver, *Church, State and the American Indian* (St. Louis, 1966), p. 156.
- 17 P. 156.
- 18 Quoted in Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York, 1932), p. 102.
- 19 Josiah Strong, *Expansion Under New World-Conditions* (New York, 1900), p. 213. See also Josiah Strong, *Our Country* (New York, 1891, revised ed.) pp. 208-27.
- 20 Strong, *Expansion Under New World-Conditions*, p. 36ff.
- 21 P. 133.
- 22 P. 190.
- 23 P. 192.
- 24 P. 204.
- 25 P. 247.
- 26 P. 264.
- 27 P. 302.
- 28 P. 265.
- 29 P. 273.
- 30 P. 280.
- 31 Strong, *Our Country*, p. 239ff.
- 32 P. 224ff.
- 33 P. 227.
- 34 Arthur Judson Brown, *The New Era in the Philippines* (New York, 1903), p. 26.
- 35 P. 290.
- 36 P. 23.
- 37 P. 157ff.
- 38 P. 153.
- 39 P. 168.
- 40 P. 292.
- 41 Findlay, pp. 345-55.
- 42 John R. Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in this Generation* (New York, 1900), p. 31f.
- 43 P. 17.
- 44 P. 18.
- 45 P. 111.
- 46 P. 46.
- 47 P. 36.
- 48 P. 25.
- 49 P. 12.
- 50 P. 43.
- 51 P. 3.
- 52 Pp. 30-44.
- 53 P. 45.
- 54 P. 104.
- 55 P. 105.
- 56 P. 153.