

## Methodism and Aggressive Christianity

### The Detroit Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the US Occupation of the Philippines (1898-1903)

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#### Abstract

This study examines the reaction of the Methodist Episcopal Church through its Detroit Annual Conference (comprising the Eastern half of the state of Michigan and the entire Upper Peninsula) to the American occupation of the Philippines following the conclusion of the Spanish-American War in 1898. The ME Church, like its sibling Protestant Churches, championed the US occupation that opened up the island to the spread of Protestant evangelism. Protestant missionaries were viewed as spiritual warriors combating Catholicism, complementing the American soldiers battling the Filipino insurgency. The emphasis on missionary expansion fused with American imperialism to form a potent combination of “Bible and gun.” A theology of aggression emerged to sanction American foreign policy as seen in DAC sermons, newspapers, and prayers.

#### Introduction

[1] A Republican Methodist President engaged in “regime change” and “nation building,” an American proclamation of the conflict’s end followed by continued resistance and increasing troop casualties, barbarous acts of torture perpetrated by US soldiers: I refer not to events in Iraq during the presidency of George W. Bush, but to the Presidency of William Mckinley (1896-1901) and the War in the Philippines which immediately followed the Spanish American War of 1898. The American occupation of the Philippines was envisioned by the Detroit Annual Conference (DAC) of the Methodist Episcopal Church not as opportunism, but rather, as a divine mission which revealed “the manifest favor and help of Almighty God” with the American military offering “a supreme sacrifice upon the altar of our country’s service.” (DAC, 1898: 65).<sup>1</sup> The goal of this article is: 1. to examine the DAC’s expression of support for the War in the Philippines during the period from 1898-1903 through the advocacy of the Methodist newspaper *Michigan Christian Advocate*, through its Annual Conference meetings, and through the ministerial duties of conference clergy; and 2. to locate this support (and the absence of opposition to the war) in a broader context of Methodist and American history.

#### American Aggression in the Philippines

[2] On December 10, 1898, ignoring the appeal of the revolutionary Filipino government, the Treaty of Paris granted to the US “legal right” to the Philippines (along with Guam and Puerto Rico) for a \$20 million payment to defeated Spain. President Mckinley sought to secure the new possession “under the direction of the United States. The military occupation of the islands is declared to be to protect the people” (*MCA*, Jan 7, 1899: 16). For the President, American duty compelled the US to “uplift and civilize and Christianize them [the Philippines], and by God’s

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<sup>1</sup> The Detroit Annual Conference is the administrative district of the United Methodist Church which comprises the Eastern half of the state of Michigan and the entire Upper Peninsula.

grace do the very best we could for them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died.” (*MCA*, Jan 7, 1899: 6). Since no *actual* Filipino request for “uplifting” ever arrived, the US disregarded the revolutionary government, its proclamation of independence (Summer 1898), and the new Filipino constitution (established in January, 1899), declaring that the Filipinos did not have the capacity to govern themselves. This decision compelled the Filipinos to continue the struggle against colonial domination that had begun under Spanish rule. Filipino General Emilio Aguinaldo, whom the US had earlier restored from exile to fight the Spanish when US land forces were not yet sufficient, led the resistance. Aguinaldo had been a wary ally, conscious of more permanent US interest in the Philippines beyond a benign alliance against Spain. American economic prospects, political concerns, military strategy, and Protestant missionary interests (which dubbed this an “imperialism of righteousness”) pushed for US occupation and control. Yet, when Filipino resistance first appeared in early 1899, it was dubbed a “crisis” to which the US must respond:

A crisis would seem to be at hand in the Philippines. Gen. Aguinaldo is reported to have left Manila for Iloilo, with a view to . . . resisting American possession. The Filipino cabinet is said to be a unit against American military occupation of the Philippines. On the other hand, the United States, having put hand to the plow and assumed the sovereignty of the islands and the obligation that involves, cannot look back, but must make its authority real (*MCA*, Jan. 14, 1899: 1).

[3] From Manila, which Spain had surrendered to over ten thousand US troops in August 1898 rather than to its erstwhile subject Filipinos, the US began to “make its authority real” for the islanders’ “protection.” Troop levels increased throughout 1899: 36,000 in June, 46,000 in July, 60,000 by year’s end. US command understood the difficult task ahead, envisioning that 100,000 troops would be needed and even imagining that “it may be necessary to slaughter one-half of the rebellious Filipinos in order to bring the other half into subjection” (*MCA*, June 3, 1899: 1; July 16, 1899: 16; April 29, 1899: 1). By the declaration of the war’s end on July 4, 1902 (which merely marked the transfer of authority from US military command to US civil command, rather than the end of resistance which continued until 1913), 126,000 US troops had served and over 4,000 died. 16,000 Filipino combatants were killed and as many as 200,000 Filipinos lost their lives.

### **Methodist Episcopal Support for the War**

[4] The Detroit Annual Conference expressed tremendous interest in these events overseas. During the war, nearly every issue of the bi-weekly *Michigan Christian Advocate* contained at least one article which provided war news, editorials, and miscellaneous information, ranging from geographical reports to descriptions of Aguinaldo’s character. Frequently, such information was highlighted in front-page editorials by editor James Henry Potts. The DAC, like the nation as a whole, wanted to keep up-to-date and the flow of information from the frontlines to the media fed the public demand. For the DAC, the *Michigan Christian Advocate* served as a fundamental portrait of Methodist opinion and information on the war.

[5] From the Filipino perspective, however, it appeared that the US public did not receive an accurate picture of events, due to American censorship of reports from the Philippines. There, the US Authority had closed down newspapers that were critical of the military government and refused to allow the publication of the Filipino newspaper *La Independencia*. The media’s presentation of the war remained in the English language and crafted by the US authorities

(Pomeroy: 64ff). The US government was accused of whitewashing reports in order to deceive the American public. Potts rejected these accusations (made even by the US press), considering the idea that US authorities manipulated news releases for their own interests as utterly preposterous. The mere thought that “. . . the cable dispatches” were “modified to suit the whims of the military authorities” was “hardly credible” (*MCA*, July 29, 1899: 1). *The Michigan Christian Advocate* maintained complete faith in the character and virtue of the American leadership: “General Otis [the US Military Governor] is too much of an American to dream that an autocratic policy of this kind could redound of this glory in the end. He knows that every fact will come out sooner or later, and if he adds folly to failure his disgrace is all the more certain and complete” (*MCA*, July 29, 1899: 1). Since Potts believed that the US mission in the Philippines was part of a divine call, he was confident in the integrity of leadership, believing that it prioritized personal honor over strategic ends and concluding that the reports were accurate and the criticism misguided. Not a hint of doubt either in the accuracy of such reports or in the leadership of the US mission was presented to the public in the *Michigan Christian Advocate*.

[6] The Methodist paper, in fact, championed the war, regularly informing the Conference of the advantages of the US occupation. Any sense of apprehension stemmed not from the war itself, but from the fact that Filipinos continued to resist. The paper portrayed the resistance leaders as not expressing the general will of the Filipinos but their own self-interest: “. . . [T]he millions of ignorant and half-civilized natives, under the leadership of ambitious and unprincipled adventurers, have assumed an attitude of opposition if not defiance . . . They have not known, nor cared to know, that America proposed to give in due time to her new subjects as just and generous a government as she has to give to her old subjects” (*MCA*, Feb 11, 1899: 1). Potts explained that it was incomprehensible to suppose that the “adventurers” actually fought *for* the interest of the Filipino people. In his eyes, the generous gifts of Americanization – institutional, technological, and religious – were irresistible and the Filipinos *necessarily* desired them. The Americans knew what was best for the Filipinos like parents nurturing their children. The Filipinos, in this view, needed American guidance. Therefore, resistance commander Aguinaldo and his supporters demonstrated an infantile defiance and a woeful lack of respect for American benevolence, showing “no appreciation of the fact that America had lifted the galling Spanish yoke from their necks . . .” (*MCA*, Feb 11, 1899: 1).

[7] In the war’s early stage, the *Michigan Christian Advocate* expressed with certainty that American power would quickly and easily win the day: “The energy of our armies and the prowess of our battleships will quickly scatter the insurgents as an organized force.” It depicted for readers the image that the subjugation of the Philippines was an example of the US awaking to God’s plan for America in the wider world: “Every citizen of the United States is more conscious now than every before that God has not clothed us with power nor flooded us with intelligence for merely selfish ends. Life on earth means service for humanity” (*MCA*, Feb 11, 1899: 1). Philanthropic service meant conquest of the Philippines in order to spread American civilization. Patriotism and evangelization fused together so that the Church could not distinguish imperialism from the mission of evangelization.

[8] Over the course of the year, as the cost and challenge of the occupation became clearer, the newspaper defended the cause even more fervently, declaring:

Great issues are at stake, not only in those islands but in all the world and in every nation. Ignominious retreat would be moral defeat . . . The die is cast. The

Americans will hold the ground, cost what it may. Americans never yield in war. The insurgents must yield. They can beat off our troops until the rainy season is over next fall, and they can in the meantime kill hundreds or thousands of our soldiers, while other thousands will die of disease, but as surely as the world revolves Aguinaldo and his misguided followers must bow to authority and learn that civilization and the public good are the purpose of the Americans (*MCA*, April 29, 1899: 1).

Potts was so confident in the righteousness of the cause that the human cost simply did not matter. He did, however, express frustration at the continued Filipino resistance, but remained determined: “Meantime the great body of the American people, while wishing that the trouble were at an end, are agreed that our government must be sustained in its policy to conquer the rebellious Filipinos and then give them the blessings of the best administration possible of construction at the present time.” The war must be brought to a successful completion, declaring resolutely: “Those islands are ours” (*MCA*, Jan 27, 1900: 1).

[9] This frustration was apparent through the *Michigan Christian Advocate*'s own reassessment of Spanish rule in the Philippines. During the Spanish-American War, Spain had been portrayed as the great tyrant who ruled with arbitrary cruelty, ravaging its subject colonies mercilessly. This tyranny prompted the US to initiate a policy of “regime change” in Cuba and the Philippines for their humane protection. Potts wrote that the Americans “. . . were simply doing our duty when we released the oppressed from Spanish tyranny,” and must now secure the land out of a sense of “. . . duty in maintaining the rights of the oppressed against the assumptions of misguided and ambitious adventurers” (*MCA*, Feb 25, 1899: 5). The American perspective was transformed by the enduring resistance confronting the occupying army. The former perception of the atrocity of the Spanish “reign of terror” now became viewed as necessary measures: “We are learning, however, that Spain’s troubles with her colonies were not all one-sided . . . Severe measures in dealing with these semi-barbarous and vengeful hordes do not seem as cruel now as when the Spaniards were employing them. We have discovered that an iron hand is as essential in controlling some elements as is the persuasive voice” (*MCA*, April 29, 1899: 1). What had stirred moral outrage before occupation which instigated military intervention, subsequently became viewed as justified behavior after occupation. The blame for violent action was transferred from the perpetrator of the action to the victim. This became clear when the public learned that US soldiers perpetrated grave atrocities, including the brutal torture and execution of prisoners, the burning and looting of Filipino towns, and the forced relocation of civilians. Public concern was pacified by military authorities who professed that American policy called for “necessary acts to contend with a foe that relied on concealment” (Pomeroy: 84ff, quote from 89). Neither the *Michigan Christian Advocate*, nor the DAC took issue with these brutal acts which were even justified by one eye-witnessing Methodist clergyman in a sister paper (Pomeroy: 89; *Central Christian Advocate*, June 4, 1902).

### **Methodist Episcopal Outrage (over Alcohol, not War)**

[10] When the DAC actually voiced moral outrage, it was neither over occupation nor atrocity, but over an issue that it also championed in the domestic sphere – temperance. The DAC was disturbed by the alcohol consumption of US troops in the Philippines. A soldier from Detroit reported to the *Michigan Christian Advocate* that American entrepreneurs had arrived in the Philippines to profit from the alcohol trade: “About all the Americans who have gone there [to the Philippines] so far seem to have gone into the whisky business. There are some 600 saloons

in Manila, I believe, where formerly there were only eight or ten” (*MCA*, June 23, 1900: 1). The *Michigan Christian Advocate* dubbed this “Satan’s Arts in Manila” (*MCA*, Aug 4, 1900: 1). Rev. Potts alerted the DAC that “many of our soldiers in the Philippines have gone insane, desperately wicked or violently diseased. Some have been brought home to be confined in insane asylums, some have unexpectedly died and many have been arrested and tried for crimes unusual to soldiery” (*MCA*, Aug 4, 1900: 1). He diagnosed the cause as not “climactic heat, homesickness, exposure, etc.,” but “bad whiskey, debauchery and reckless habits.” He argued that this was the origin of the army’s severe breakdown in discipline and order: “The history of our army furnishes no parallel for the number of court-martials which have taken place since our occupation of the islands, and it is my sincere conviction that the vile liquors sold in Manila are responsible for most of them.” Neither US leadership, nor military policy were at the source of this brutality, instead it was Satan via alcohol. Therefore, the DAC discerned no call to address US policy, but only to combat “Satan’s arts.” DAC resources and attention were marshaled against the war on alcohol, since “[d]runkenness, gambling, licentiousness are eating like a cancer into the American army.” To combat this, the DAC petitioned the US government to establish firm moral guidelines for its troops:

We respectfully demand from the president and Congress of the United States such legislative action as shall make forever impossible the appointment of our gallant soldiers or sailors as attendants at the canteen; and we further urge upon the president a prompt reversal of the decision lately given on the subject by the Attorney-General.

The importation of American liquors to our new possessions, Cuba, Porto [sic] Rico, Hawaii and the Philippines, with the consequent demoralization of the inhabitants, is, in our judgment, a blot upon the fair escutcheon of our country, and a disgrace to our boasted civilization and Christianity (DAC, 1899: 55).

[11] Since the US did not heed this demand, the DAC continued to campaign for the prohibitionist cause.<sup>2</sup> The moral outrage over alcohol resulted in a myopic focus that prevented the DAC from discerning the image of torture and violence perpetrated by the heroes of “our boasted civilization” as specific problems worthy of attention. The abuses by US troops were not considered serious matters that called for accountability and change, since the epidemic’s origin was believed to be alcohol, not policy. These violent episodes were, in fact, only marginally even topics of concern. The DAC’s wholehearted support of the war led it to ignore the structural problem of occupation and attribute troubles as arising from immorality among *individual* Americans. The intense focus on one issue – namely temperance – along with the committed belief in the war’s righteousness, blinded the Church to the more fundamental issues of human dignity overseas (McKenzie: 108-10).

[12] The DAC expanded its public advocacy from alcohol to opium by 1903. The international drug trade was fueled by the profit arising from supplying the demand of Chinese users. In contrast with the present US interdiction, at that time the US facilitated the lucrative drug trade that ended in China. The US authority banned the sale of opium to Filipinos, but allowed it to

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<sup>2</sup> The failure of government response had perturbed the church for several years as noted in a sermon by Rev. Dr. Isaac E. Springer, Presiding Elder of the Port Huron District: “It is notorious that the accursed saloon has its foul hand on the throat of national, state, and local politics. The “practical politics” of the day pays more attention to the whisper of the saloon power, than to the loudest voice of the church” (in Eastman: 84).

Chinese merchants and reaped the revenue benefits. In reaction to this policy, the DAC resolved to “. . . most respectfully, but earnestly, request that representatives of our Government in these isles absolutely prohibit its sale to the Chinese and all other classes, for all are in dire need of protection from the debasing and destructive effects of the opium habit” (DAC, 1903: 22). Despite these ongoing and vocal efforts, the Church did not move the American government to establish temperance in the Philippines, but it refused to give up the fight.

### **The Cosmological Meaning of the Conflict: American Protestant Power**

[13] The DAC believed that the establishment of US control of the Philippines was a progression in the unfolding divine plan which then culminated in the dominance of (American) Protestantism over Catholic and non-Christian countries. The stumbling block to the manifestation of God’s will was not Filipino resistance, but the faltering moral effort of segments of the American “chosen people” who fed the vice. By September 1900, Rev. Potts reported that the alcohol problem had become more severe:

It is asserted that today there are over one thousand places in the city of Manila where intoxicating liquor is openly and publicly kept on sale, and that over one hundred of these palaces are full-fledged American saloons, seventy-five are “beer-houses” and 175 are wine and beer houses, or brothels. These are all essentially American institutions, just such houses of evil as are found in all our large home cities. What Manila really needs, therefore, is the establishment within her borders of the better elements of Americanism, such as business push, public spirit, municipal ambition, political integrity, *and Protestant liberality and uprightness* (MCA, Sept 29, 1900: 1).

The means to bring out this “*Protestant liberality and uprightness*” was through aggressive missionary activity which Methodist missionaries were then beginning in Manila.

[14] Methodist missionary Bishop James M. Thoburn, believing that the US victory in Manila was a miracle on par with Joshua’s triumph at Jericho, arrived in March 1899 to establish an American Methodist presence for the (Protestant) proclamation of the Gospel (MCA, April 29, 1899: 5; May 29, 1899: 4; Bucke: 94-95). US President William McKinley, an Ohio Methodist, supported this effort. (Pomeroy: 47-48; Gaustad: 221-25). An early success was the convert Nicholas Zamora who became the first Filipino Methodist preacher. Zamora’s dynamism and ability accomplished more for the early development of Methodism in the Philippines than any other individual. The Methodist presence was strengthened by Rev. A. F. Bourns of Detroit’s Hudson Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church who, with his wife, served in Manila from 1902-1905, joining his son Dr. Frank S. Bourns who was an official in the city. The DAC supported this enthusiastically, resolving “their appreciation and affection for him and wish for him and Mrs. Bourns safety and health in their long journey and during their sojourn in the Orient, and pray that long and useful years may be added to their lives” (DAC, 1902: 15).

[15] Rev. Bourns fulfilled the call of the DAC for “aggressive and increased missionary work” to “favorably solve the difficult problem of the Americanization of our new possessions” (DAC, 1900: 76). The desire for missionary expansion merged with the reality of American imperialism. In the 1890s the United States annexed or established protectorates over Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines and this aggressive mood was reflected in the discourse of the DAC. Rev. Potts proclaimed that the Methodist Episcopal Church was “an

aggressive Church” (Potts: 195-96). Another Methodist minister expressed the unity of political and religious aggression as follows:

American imperialism is the splendid spectacle of earth’s mightiest and most favored nation taking up “the white man’s burden” of responsibility and bravely bending beneath its mountain weight, not shirking, not whining, not flinching, even though misguided friends abuse and savage foes resist . . . It is our nation’s response to God’s command, the response to that divine bugle blast which makes our national blood tingle and starts our national feet marching to the holiest of wars (MacKenzie: 107-8).

From this popular perspective, both American imperialism (with its explicit racist tone) and Christian mission originated from the same divine source.

[16] Besides Methodists, other American missionaries arrived in the Philippines – United Brethren, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ, etc. – for the process of Protestantization of the Catholic land. The missionaries maximized efficiency by implementing a coordinated effort that paralleled the organized military endeavor to bring the country under American control. In 1901, the missionaries formed the Evangelical Union to allot to each denomination its own sphere of influence within which to evangelize. The Methodist sphere ranged from Manila to Cagayan in the very north of the island of Luzon. This coordinated missionary activity was a response to what was perceived by the Americans as the Philippines reaching out with “outstretched hands of urgent appeal.” It was the responsibility of America to act (DAC, 1901: 77). Here was a present day “Macedonian Appeal.”

[17] Rev. George Elliott of the Central Methodist Episcopal Church in Detroit took this as an opportunity to preach a sermon entitled “The Macedonian Cry” from the text of Acts 16:9: “During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” Rev. Elliott explained (through his ever powerful sermons) that this “. . . is the story of the beginning of world evangelization” which spread the message of Christ from Asia to Europe whence it reached America. The large metropolitan congregation heard how the missionary Paul spread Christianity from “dull Asia” to “energetic Europe,” reflecting a “spiritual struggle” between East and West (Elliott: 34-54). The pastoral representation of the East (including the Philippines) as “dull Asia” reflected current racial attitudes that portrayed “energetic” Anglo-Saxon Americans as superior to Asians, Africans, Native Americans, and other peoples of non-northern European descent.

[18] Paul was by conviction the “apostle of expansion” who saw a man in need and responded, spreading Christianity *westward* so that the West now bore the moral obligation and duty to carry the message to the world. At the present moment “we again face the east” where “God’s call . . . now is loudly thundered by the voices of the day. ‘Come over and help us.’” The call from the Philippines in “dull Asia” had arrived and the Church was ready to respond “aggressively” as U.S. troops were “aggressively” fighting Filipino resistance. From the Filipino perspective, US imperialism and American Protestant Missionary activity appeared as two ends of the same club. Rev. Elliott reflected this in his sermon, first pausing before admitting as such:

Whether or not we care for political expansion and Anglo-Saxon imperialism, we must believe in the expansion of Christianity and the universal reign of the imperial Christ. For our noblest triumph in the Orient the gospel is greater than

gunboats Christian schools cheaper than soldiers, and missionaries mightier than armies and munitions of war (52-53).

But no sooner had he proclaimed the need for evangelism, regardless of one's political expansionist or non-expansionist position, he expressed the fusion of religious and political power:

“God wills it!” So cried the crusaders as they assumed the cross for the rescue of the holy sepulcher. “God wills it!” – this be our cry as we go to conquer, not the grave where the dead Christ lay, but the living world for which He died (54).

[19] “God wills it” was the cry of the First Crusade which rampaged through the Balkans, Byzantium, and Seljuq territory until completing its “missionary” task by conquering Jerusalem and massacring its population in 1099. The Crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries continued this military expansion of Western Christendom against the Slavs in Northeastern Europe (by the Teutonic Knights), against Islam (in the Second, Third, Fifth, and Sixth Crusades) and against Eastern Christianity (in the Fourth Crusade). “God wills it” was the religious justification for the assertion of political power fused with missionary zeal. Rev. Elliott's message reflected this rhetoric: “This holy war is the supreme test of our loyalty to the perfect will of our God and our faith in the coming of the perfect reign of His Son.” It was incumbent upon the American Nation and its people to spread the faith and, like the Crusaders before, military conquest was the first step in this “holiest of wars” (MacKenzie: 97-98).

[20] The historical irony, of course, is that the western crusading armies whom Rev. Elliott holds up as stellar models operated from the bosom of Catholic Christianity. In contrast, at the start of the twentieth century, Rev. Elliot zealously prayed for the evangelization of the Philippines which, after three centuries of Spanish rule, was a Catholic land. From the standpoint of the American preacher, Christianity *was* Protestantism and America was the agent called by God for its expansion, just as America's colonial enterprise was developing.

[21] Such sermons shaped the image of contemporary Christianity for DAC congregations. The crusading message found in the *Michigan Christian Advocate* was affirmed in worship by DAC preachers. The sermons stirred the DAC to the cause of aggressive Christianity. These sermons were, according to Potts, “gospel bullets.” Their delivery, the “discharge of the gun.” The preacher was the “marksman” who must “shoot to kill.” The preacher's influence on the congregation stemmed from “the pulpit [which] has become a throne of power” as the DAC mobilized for “God's holy war” (Eastman: 6-9). The spirit of militant missionary aggression is here reflected in the very concept of the sermon itself, the aim of which is to “kill” from the “bullets” fired by the “marksman's gun” discharged from his place of “power.” The church militant was following in the footsteps and language of the American military.

### **Missionaries and Marines**

[22] In the eyes of the DAC (and Protestant America), American Protestant missionaries were the spiritual equivalent of US ground troops then fighting the “insurgents.” This military struggle paralleled the American Protestant missionary battle against Catholicism: “But, really, we do not see how the Filipinos are ever to be pacified if this condition of things is to be continued. It is simply intolerable that a system of ecclesiastical oppression should be allowed such a hold” (*MCA*, Jan 27, 1900: 1; Methodist Conference: 120-26). By June 1900, as he considered the extent of Catholicism, Potts proclaimed that the “worst war in the Philippines is yet to come,”



since the Protestant missionaries encountered deeply entrenched Catholic beliefs and institutions which were viewed as opposing American principles and systems (*MCA*, June 16, 1900: 1; Nov 4, 1899: 1; Jan 27, 1900: 1). Potts declared Protestantism an arsenal of American civilization in this cosmic struggle in the Philippines, commanding the spiritual soldiers to “[m]ake no compromises with the foe! Insist on surrender in the name of God!” (Potts: 243; *MCA*, Sept 29, 1900: 1). The eyes of the Church were resolutely focused on American Protestant victory against Filipino independence and Catholicism.

### **Missing Voices of Dissent**

[23] American expansionism fused with the Methodist Episcopal Church’s missionary zeal so that patriotism and Christianity became indistinguishable. This message was proclaimed throughout the conference by the editorials and editorial choices of Potts in the *Michigan Christian Advocate*. This view dominated not only Methodist media, but also its pulpits where the position was affirmed. The minutes of the DAC from 1898-1903 verified the institutional consensus. No prophetic voice emerged within the DAC to challenge this perception such as that of African Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop Henry M. Turner who declared the war in the Philippines “an unholy war of conquest” and saw the Filipino soldiers not standing in the way of any divine plan but as “sable patriots” like those who had founded the US in 1776 (Zinn: 311; MacKenzie: 108-10).

[24] In contrast to this discerning perception, Rev. William Oldham declared that “[t]he roar of the (American) cannon was the voice of Almighty God declaring (the Philippines) shall be freed” (MacKenzie: 94). When warfare is blessed and declared not against a political position but against Evil itself, injustice is at hand, since no quarter can *legitimately* be granted for opposition which becomes perceived as unjustifiable resistance operating under the spell of “Satan’s Arts.” Aggression then becomes viewed as *defensive* measures against the ever-offensive power of Evil. Aggression was essential to the very life of the Church as Rev. Potts explained:

The truth is that *aggressive* missionary work is both the token and promoter of spiritual life in the Church. The lack of this spirit is always the sign of weakness and decay, and infidelity is never more rife or powerful than when profession Christians have reached that condition of apathy in which they manifest no concern for lost souls (Potts: 163-64).

The Church and the nation must take aggressive action lest it demonstrate any sign of “weakness and decay” in a threatening world.

### **Conclusion**

[25] As every age reflects on itself, contemporary vision is limited by the blind spots of current collective biases revealed only by the rare prophetic voice which is validated by the distance (and safety) of time. No such prophetic message appeared in the DAC to challenge the normative perception that prioritized missionary opportunity and the expansion of Protestant Christianity. American imperialism served Methodist interests that fused Bible and gun into a theology of aggression that lauded the opportunity to attack Catholicism and to increase the national and international influence of Methodism. This expansion was championed in sermon, in print, and in prayer as the *necessary* obligation of all *true* Christians. Therefore, to challenge American foreign policy was to jeopardize the perception of one’s faith. In this light, the DAC, like its fellow Methodist Conferences and sibling Protestant Churches, was a model for its time.

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