

A BELGIAN VIEW OF THE PHILIPPINES: 1899¹

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IN 1898, AT THE CLOSE OF THE BRIEF SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR, international observers speculated on the future disposition of the Spanish colonial empire. Not until October 1898, was it generally known that the United States intended to annex the Philippines.² Predictably, therefore, the great maritime powers of the world pressed forward to enlarge their realms at the expense of defeated Spain.³ Indeed, Great Britain, while encouraging the United States to annex the Philippines, made it clear that if such annexation did not take place, she wished to be given first option to purchase the islands.⁴

In such an atmosphere of uncertainty, the nationalist aspirations of lesser powers also found expression. Belgium represents an interesting case in point.

For sixteen years, Mr. Edouard André had been a successful businessman in Manila, as well as Belgium's Consul at that city. When the United States had seized Manila, André had been called to the favorable attention of his own government when Rear Admiral George Dewey had publicly thanked him for having served as an intermediary between the contending forces, expediting the surrender of Manila and reducing losses in life and property.⁵ As a consequence of Consul André's modest but favorable notoriety, his ideas received more attention at Brussels than would ordinarily have been his due. Thus, when he supplied his government with extensive reports on the resources and commercial potentialities of the Philippines, he played a major role in strengthening Belgian ambitions to become Spain's heir in the islands. The government of King Leopold II had

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² James F. Rhodes, *The McKinley and Roosevelt Administrations, 1897-1909*, (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1965), pp. 102-103.

³ Germany took the occasion to purchase the Caroline Islands from Spain. See Message of President McKinley to the United States Congress, December 5, 1898. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), p. xxi.

⁴ See R. G. Neale, *Great Britain and United States Expansion, 1898-1900*, (Michigan State University Press, 1966), p. 212.

⁵ United States Minister Bellamy Storer to Belgian Foreign Minister Paul de Favereau, October 14, 1898, Brussels. Belge, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères et du Commerce Extérieur (microfilmed Belgian diplomatic correspondence housed at the United States National Archives, cited hereinafter as "Belge, A.E."), Microcopy T125, Roll 6; Favereau to Storer, November 8, 1898, Brussels, *ibid.*

high hopes for a Belgian protectorate or at least a joint Belgo-American condominium in the archipelago. All of that was dashed to the ground, of course, when the intentions of President McKinley became clearly known.⁶

Even after the signing and ratification of the Peace of Paris in December 1898, the Belgians persisted in the hope that they might yet play an expanded role in the Philippines. Frustrated in their daydreams of political power, they seriously pursued efforts to replace the Spaniards as caretakers of Roman Catholic interests in the islands.

Edouard André, who had asked leave to return to Belgium on personal business, was instructed to stop at Washington, en route. He was to report to the Belgian Minister at that capital and to place himself at his orders.⁷ Before leaving Manila, the consul had visited Monsignor Bernardino de Nozaleda, Archbishop of Manila. The Spanish prelate had given him a letter of introduction to James, Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore. Despairing of the future of his church in the Philippines if it was entrusted to the native clergy, Archbishop de Nozaleda entrusted a lengthy and dismal memorial in Spanish to André, for delivery to Cardinal Gibbons. André, in turn hoped to enlist the good offices of the cardinal in obtaining the appointment of Belgian prelates to posts in the Filipino hierarchy.

Having arrived at Washington in February 1899, André composed a lengthy written report for the information of Count Lichtervelde, the Belgian envoy at Washington. It is intrinsically interesting because it reflects the frank and ingenuous impressions of an intelligent European observer describing the conflicting nationalisms of Filipinos, Spaniards, and Americans. It also contains the sort of stereotyped generalizations about "national characteristics" which would horrify modern sociologists.

Monsignor the Archbishop⁸ told me that he did not think himself obliged to remain at his post because he could no longer count on the obedience of the Filipinos in general; as a Spaniard, he was enveloped in the animosity which they show to all that is Spanish; the Filipino curates are no exception and like all the rest show themselves to be very hostile and even vindictive for the prerogatives which until this moment had not been extended to them. They even claim the archbishopric, or at least to occupy the several bishoprics of the archipelago. On the other hand, the archbishop does not think that the American authorities would be happy

⁶ For a full treatment of this subject in its larger context, see Arnold Blumberg, "Belgium and a Philippines Protectorate; A Stillborn Plan," *Asian Studies* [University of the Philippines], Vol. X (December 1972), 336-343.

⁷ André to Favereau, February 22, 1899, Washington, Belge, A. E., Microcopy T125, Roll 6.

⁸ The present writer has translated the document which follows from the original French. Omissions are indicated in the standard way. Only repetitious materials or trite introductions or conclusions have been excluded.

⁹ Archbishop Bernardino de Nozaleda.

to see him continue to occupy this important post and his situation would be more difficult and therefore very unfavorable to the good direction of religious affairs. He understands that for the good of religion and of general good understanding, that an archbishop belonging to a neutral nationality should replace him.

The same reasons as those concerning the archbishop have already motivated the departure of about 300 religious of different monastic orders established at Manila and who were charged with parishes in the Philippines; about 200 religious are prisoners of the Filipinos and suffer a cruel captivity. All will certainly abandon the archipelago as soon as they are liberated. The procurors of the several orders have said and repeated to me that they were resolved to abandon the islands without hope of return and were even disposed to sell the goods they possessed. At the most, they will retain some rare parishes at Manila and some schools. The Jesuit Fathers, alone, think to be able to remain, but they occupy only Manila and some parishes in Mindanao, which like the remainder will more than likely be abandoned unless they are efficaciously protected against the Moslem Malays.

The intellectual capacity of the Filipinos is quite comparable to that of the Japanese; they learn quickly and their intelligence is lively; it does not exceed certain limits, however; they are neither creators nor inventors; but they are the most excellent musicians, painters, sculptors, etc., which the Japanese are not. This suffices to give an idea of what the Filipinos are who have received an education The remainder of the population is submitted to those who are superior to them in intelligence; before it was the Spaniards; now it is the half blood and the different party chiefs and later it will be the American authorities or those who will be appointed by the Government of the United States.

Outside of these, there are the native curates who have remained and who still have an enormous influence on the masses, above all on the women, and these are a most important element, for the Malay women have the finest minds; finer than the men, and it is almost always the women who decide the important questions. These curates, however, felt a very great disillusionment when the rebel congress¹⁰ decreed religious liberty and that the parish curates would not be paid by the revolutionary government. These decrees have made the curates the declared enemies of the insurgent government and they are the unconditional allies of those who offer them a treatment which permits them to live without exposing themselves to begging for the means of sustaining themselves . . . ; in return they will be the most ardent propagators of a government which offers them an assured future. On the other hand, complete freedom of religion would

¹⁰ The Filipino nationalist leader Emilio Aguinaldo had been transported from exile at Hong Kong by Admiral Dewey and landed in the Philippines to raise a native army against Spain. When it became apparent, after the capture of Manila, that the United States had no intention of recognizing Aguinaldo's regime as the government of the islands, he withdrew to Malolos and made that the capital of the territories he held. When, ultimately, the Treaty of Paris provided for the outright sale of the Philippines to the United States, conflict ensued between Aguinaldo's forces and the Americans. The last major Filipino guerilla force surrendered in April, 1902. See Jean Grossholtz, *Politics in the Philippines*, (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1964), pp. 22-23. Having lived to see the establishment of an independent republic in 1946, Aguinaldo made his peace with the United States when close to his ninetieth birthday. See Emilio Aguinaldo y Famy and Vicente A. Pacis, *A Second Look at America* (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1957).

lead to grave disorders; for a great many denominations would form and from them would come the breeding place of continued dissension. At the most, one could permit the exercise of a religion already practiced in the United States. Again, it would be necessary to supervise that liberty strictly, for these peoples are very passionate concerning anything which relates to religious questions and would hasten to create a religion for themselves, which would permit those vices and passions which still persist.¹¹

The Filipinos, like all peoples who submit to a foreign domination, will soon harbor the same resentments against the Americans that they bore against the Spaniards; all of these rancors, however, would be avoided by an archbishop belonging to a neutral nationality, which would not only permit him to supervise the worthy maintenance of religion, but also to serve as a conciliator between the authorities and the Filipinos; his role would then be fair and noble. In the hands of an intelligent man, it would be of great merit. It would certainly be accepted without umbrage and with more pleasure by the United States if he did not belong to a powerful maritime nation. It is not only on behalf of our compatriots, but in the interest of the Catholic Religion and also in that of those who hold the future of 6,000,000 Catholics in the Far East between their hands that I permit myself to draw your attention to this subject. My long residence in the Philippines has permitted me to become acquainted with the native; he is religious, but he must be guided constantly, for he tends in spite of himself to fetishism; the practices of the native clergy are already too loose, and that will accelerate under the instigation of men interested in bringing about an evolution publicly which already exists surreptitiously.

If you desire more details, I will hasten to give them to you Monsieur le Ministre. I fear trying your attention on a question which, however interesting, is not exactly within my jurisdiction.

His Eminence Cardinal Gibbons listened to me with interest He told me that he would think about it and speak of it to the President of the United States, would see me again, and refer the matter to the Holy See; but as I understood that the decision would be reached at the Vatican, I think it useful to inform you of it, and to draw your attention to the advantages which the choice of Belgian ecclesiastics could bring to our country and to our clergy. Our compatriots combine in so many respects the qualities which render them apt to fill religious posts in the Philippines vacated by the monastic orders. . . .¹²

In the end, of course, the Belgians were to be as frustrated in their hopes for a Belgianization of the Filipino church as they had already been in their projects for political influence in the islands. Cardinal Gibbons kept his promise to André in that he forwarded

¹¹ In forwarding André's report to Brussels, the Belgian minister at Washington dwelt, at length, upon the alleged moral inadequacies of the Filipino clergy. In discussing breaches of the vow of chastity, the envoy apparently accepted André's unprovable allegations at full value. He reported quite solemnly that. . . "They have exaggerated the immorality of the Spanish clergy in the Philippines a great deal. Only eight per cent had illicit relations, and not under the same roof. It is the native clergy which leaves the most to be desired and the proportion there ought to be reversed, since their cohabitation is not disguised. . . ." (Count G. de Lichtervelde to Favereau, February 28, 1899, No. 50, Confidential, Belge, A. E., Microcopy T125, Roll 6).

¹² André to Lichtervelde, February 27, 1899, *ibid.*

the materials from Archbishop de Nozaleda to the Apostolic Delegate to the United States. Archbishop Sebastian Martinelli ended the matter effectively, when he informed Cardinal Gibbons that the Vatican would make all decisions touching the new episcopal status of the Philippines, and declining to make any recommendations to his superiors on the subject.¹³

As for Edouard André, he eventually returned to Manila from Brussels, where he had succeeded in chartering and raising capital for a new *Compagnie Générale des Philippines*. At the end, even he was reconciled to the dominant role of United States citizens in the political and ecclesiastical life of the islands.¹⁴

¹³ F. Rooker to Rev. Father O'Brien, March 8, 1899, Washington, Archdiocesan Archives of Baltimore, Gibbons Papers, Mss. The present writer is grateful to Reverend Father John J. Tierney, Archivist of the Archdiocese of Baltimore for his cooperation in allowing him to examine the 60,000 piece manuscript collection of Cardinal Gibbons' papers.

¹⁴ Lichtervelde to Favereau, November 14, 1899, No. 269, Washington, Belg. A. E., Microcopy T1113, LM43, Roll 15.