

Negotiating Nationalism and Internationalism in the Life of John R. Mott, 1895-1925

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Abstract: When John R. Mott (1865-1955) accepted his Nobel Peace Prize he summed up his life “as an earnest and undiscourageable effort to weave together all nations, all races and all religious communions, in friendliness, in fellowship, and in cooperation.” This retrospective and idealistically inclusive vision in 1946 about the global fellowship he hoped to craft looks different when one examines the complex and even contradictory ways Mott did his “weaving.” Looking specifically at Mott’s peak years of influence from 1895 to 1925, this paper examines four interrelated ways Mott promoted both nationalism and internationalism. These may be described as (1) Mott’s work in formal diplomatic efforts for the Wilson administration in the United States and as a statesman for Christian internationalism; (2) Mott’s effort to encourage nationalisms for the sake of internationalism with members of so-called “younger churches;” (3) His growing realization of the problem of racism inhibiting Christian internationalism; and (4) The practices of “conferencing” as the primary method Mott used for enacting his internationalist ideals. Mott’s actions – and those of his friends – were sometimes unsuccessful or prompted more conflict than international harmony, but these different dimensions of his work illustrate how Mott sought to lead key organizations to embrace an internationalism which shaped the young ecumenical movement.

On 4 October 1895 John R. Mott (1865-1955) wrote a letter from Constantinople in which he described one of his greatest accomplishments, the founding of the World’s Student Christian Federation (WSCF) at Vadstena Castle in Sweden.¹ Mott was proud of this achievement that knitted together in fellowship student movements in Europe and the United States. Hope for the future global growth of the movement as a means for Christian evangelism infused his writing.² Mott expressed the significance of the Vadstena meeting as the “first

¹ This letter was written almost precisely 125 years before the start of our Berlin conference. See Mott report letter #4, 4 October 1895, “The Formation of the World’s Student Christian Federation,” RG 46, Box 42b, folder 343, World Student Christian Federation Archives, Record Group No. 46, Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library. (subsequent citations of RG 46 may be assumed to be references to the Yale Divinity School Archives.)

² Mott was, of course, not alone in his enthusiasm for an organization like this. Just a few months earlier his YMCA colleague, Luther Wishard, who was also present at the Vadstena meeting representing the YMCA, published a book noting the growth of Christian student organizations and efforts to connect them which he had begun decades earlier. Luther D. Wishard, *A New Programme of Missions: A Movement to Make the Colleges in All Lands Centers of Evangelization* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1895).

conference ever held in which there were delegates present from all of the prominent Protestant powers of the world. I was deeply impressed with this fact one day as I noticed over the speaker's platform a grouping of the flags of these great powers."³ Flags are surely symbols of nationalism, but for Mott their "grouping" also inspired dreams of Christian internationalism.⁴

But as he wrote about the WSCF's founding from Constantinople, that ancient center of a different sort of Christian internationalism erupted in a nightmare of nationalistic violence. Frustrated that he had not yet seen reporting of atrocities in the western press, he described what others told him. "500 Armenians were forcibly thrown into prison... 30 Armenians in a coffee house were shot down like dogs... dead bodies could be seen in the Bosphorus."⁵ John described the culprits of the violence as "the most religious and fanatical" Muslims. Leila Mott, who was accompanying her husband on this first world tour, was more pointed in her diary; they were "the most bigoted and fanatical."⁶

³ At the preceding Scandinavian conference there were delegates representing the United States, Britain, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland. This conference took place on 13-18 August. Overlapping with this gathering, from 17-19 August, a series of meetings with just six men took place where the WSCF was formally constituted. John R. Mott, "Work among the students of Scandinavia," 21 September 1895, RG 46, Box 42b, folder 343. John Raleigh Mott, *The World's Student Christian Federation; Origin, Achievements, Forecast; Achievements of the First Quarter-century of the World's Student Christian Federation and Forecast of Unfinished Tasks* (London: World's Student Christian Federation, 1920), 5-6.

⁴ He was also eager to expand the WSCF beyond Protestant countries and successfully organized student movements in Switzerland (which had the highest proportion of international students in Europe), Italy, France, and Austria before arriving in Constantinople.

⁵ John R. Mott, "Work in South Eastern Europe," report letter no. 7, 12 October 1895.

⁶ Leila can be counted on in her diaries to provide considerably more detail about the cultural context she was encountering than her husband. Leila Mott diaries, John R. Mott Papers, RG 45, Box 228, Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library. (Subsequent citations of RG 45 may be assumed to refer to the John R. Mott papers, Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library.)

Tens of thousands of people were killed in the months after the Motts' six-day visit to Constantinople. The complex mix of ethnic, religious, and nationalistic violence against Armenian Christians was part of an effort to unify a fractious Turkish state by Sultan Abdul Hamid II. The visit to Constantinople was Mott's first to a majority Muslim territory; it would remain his most direct confrontation with violent nationalism and religious/ethnic hatred in his life.⁷

The juxtaposition of celebrating the Christian internationalism of the WSCF with Mott's encounter with violent nationalism in Constantinople illustrates an important dynamic in the life of Mott and in the experience of the early twentieth century more generally. Nationalism and internationalism, for better and worse, grew up together.⁸ Alongside the nationalistic violence that unfolded in Turkey and elsewhere in the 1890s, every year of that decade also saw the establishment of ten new international organizations.⁹ Thirty years earlier barely a handful existed.¹⁰ It is important to see the WSCF and other aspects of the nascent world Christian infrastructure of the period as a part of this larger movement of internationalist organizing.¹¹

⁷ By contrast, in 1908, at a speech in London, Mott spoke in glowing terms about the 1908 Turkish Revolution, praising the great potential for the Christian movement there. See John R. Mott, *Addresses and Papers of John R. Mott, Vol. 6*, New York: Association Press, 1947, 250-252.

⁸ Dana Robert, *Christian Transnationalists, Nationhood, and the construction of civil society*, 2014, Draft paper as part of Religion and Innovation in Human Affairs project. (Nb: Amend citation post-covid when Yerxa book can be consulted.)

⁹ It is important to note that the last American nationalist massacre against Native Americans took place just a few years before the violence in Constantinople. This occurred in December of 1890 at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota. Mott has left no record of his thoughts about this.

¹⁰ Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 13.

¹¹ Secular and religious internationalist organizations are frequently not considered as part of a whole by scholars of internationalism, but the list of these organizations and their overlap with one another in terms of purpose and personnel is impressive.

Until recently, historians have given most attention to the growth of nationalism in the twentieth century rather than the many different internationalist impulses at work in the world.¹² The eruption of nationalist violence in World War I so soon after a number of conferences which had trumpeted a new internationalist age has been the most obvious reason for internationalism's neglect among scholars. In the field of world Christianity, Joel Cabrita, David Maxwell, and Emma Wild-Wood have pointed out a somewhat similar tendency to focus on regional particularities in the field of world Christianity at the expense of better understanding the threads of continuity and connection among Christians across regions.¹³

John R. Mott's fame as a so-called "World Christian statesman" makes an analysis of his life an excellent way to understand the entanglement of internationalism and nationalism in the young ecumenical movement. And yet, biographers' avoidance of critical remarks about Mott's life, his own hypersensitivity to criticism, and his "larger than life" reputation have limited our understanding of the contradictions and conflicts – internal and external – in his life and that of the movements he led.¹⁴ Because Mott gained notoriety in secular diplomatic circles as well as among Christian internationalists, an examination of Mott makes it possible to see

¹² Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, 46; Patricia Clavin, "Introduction: Conceptualising Internationalism between the World Wars," in *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars*, ed. Daniel Laqua (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

¹³ Joel Cabrita, David Maxwell, and Emma Wild-Wood, eds., *Relocating World Christianity: Interdisciplinary Studies in Universal and Local Expressions of the Christian Faith* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene, eds., *Religious internationalists in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities Since 1750* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹⁴ A lack of critical evaluation of Mott's life is most evident in the booster biography of Mott written by Basil Matthews in 1934, but it is also evident in Charles Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979). Sherwood Eddy spoke most directly about Mott's sensitivity to criticism four years after Mott's death. "I wish to speak with equal frankness about Mott's greatest weakness. *He was hypersensitive to criticism.* This was so evident that it was a standing joke throughout the British Student Movement. [emphasis in the original]." Eddy in Rick L. Nutt, *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Sherwood Eddy and the American Protestant Mission* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 59.

how Christian internationalism related to other expressions of internationalism (cultural internationalism, political internationalism in its 'liberal,' 'legalist,' and 'proletarian' forms, etc.) on which scholars have focused more attention.¹⁵

The purpose of this paper is to highlight four interrelated ways Mott promoted internationalism and its complex interplay with nationalisms in his work. I will begin by discussing Mott's efforts in diplomacy primarily in the Woodrow Wilson administration. Mott did this in formal ways through service as an official diplomatic envoy as well as in informal ways as he sought to influence governments and treaty negotiations to strengthen the organizations he led or the missionary cause at large. By examining Mott's connections with high-level diplomats and controversies of his day we can begin to ascertain what Mott's working theory might have been in promoting internationalism as well as American foreign policy.

A second way Mott promoted internationalism was by encouraging the nationalism of members of so-called "younger churches." This usually involved encouraging leaders in the WSCF, YMCA, and national Christian councils. In this paper I will limit consideration to Indian and Chinese leaders who were most strongly affiliated with nationalist movements and whose

¹⁵ Jewish, Marxist, and feminist expressions of internationalism in this period is discussed in Glenda Sluga and Patrica Clavin, *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). For a discussion of 'legalist' internationalism see Stephen Wertheim, "The League That Wasn't: American Designs for a Legalist-Sanctionist League of Nations and the Intellectual Origins of International Organization, 1914-1920," *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 5 (2011); Benjamin Allen Coates, "Transatlantic Advocates: American International Law and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1898-1919" (PhD Columbia University, 2010). See also Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*; Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

relationships with Mott were most longstanding.¹⁶ As C. A. Bayly has noted, it is important to underscore that the nationalism expressed by Asian leaders discussed here (as well as others) was not simply derivative of western nationalism (although Mott mostly saw it that way), but also grew out of complex dynamics, including religious dynamics, in many Asian countries themselves as well as their own experience of “the international.”¹⁷

Third, this paper will explore Mott’s growing realization that racism was a significant inhibitor to the progress of Christian mission and world peace more generally. Racism is not entirely identical to nationalism, but in the thinking and practice of John R. Mott and many others of his day it was not so easily disentangled either. Mott’s attitudes about race and racial differences also represents the area of thought which, by his own admission, experienced the most change during his life.¹⁸

Finally, and most briefly, this paper examines the role “conferencing” played in Mott’s life as a force for Christian internationalism. Bringing people together in conferences was

¹⁶ Examples could be provided of Mott looking favorably upon nationalistic expressions in Europe and Russia as well. The list of nationalist leaders with whom Mott interacted or corresponded is extensive. It includes Honda Yôichi and Nitobe Inazô of Japan, Syngman Rhee and Yun Chi-ho of Korea, Wellington Koo, Chengting Wang, David Yui, and T. Z. Koo of China, Surendra Kumar Datta, Kanakarayan Paul, and (later) Mohandas Gandhi of India, and Tomas Masaryk of Czechoslovakia. I discuss the Chinese and Indian contexts below. For Japan see Jon Thares Davidann, *A World of Crisis and Progress: The American YMCA in Japan, 1890-1930* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1998). For Mott’s encouragement of Masaryk see John W. Long and C. Howard Hopkins, “T. G. Masaryk and the Strategy of Czechoslovak Independence: An Interview in Russia on 27 June 1917,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 56, no. 1 (1978).

¹⁷ For an excellent overview of some of these dynamics see C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: 1780-1914* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 336-43. For evidence of how Mott and his friend Sherwood Eddy saw Asian nationalism as drawing primarily from western ideals see John R. Mott, *Addresses and Papers of John R. Mott: Volume Six: Selected Papers and Addresses on Evangelistic, Spiritual, and Ecumenical Subjects and the Outreach of Life and Influence* (New York: Association Press, 1947), 248-49; Sherwood Eddy, *The New Era in Asia* (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1914), 5.

¹⁸ In a 1926 speech in Australia Mott noted that on the topic of race he had “completely changed his mind.” On no other topic does Mott ever express undergoing such a shift. John R. Mott, “The Race Problem,” Address at the Australian Missionary Conference, Melbourne, 12 April 1926. RG 46, Box 248, Folder 2061.

Mott's favorite method for achieving the internationalist goals discussed in this paper. As a method for achieving internationalism, this fourth section of the paper is qualitatively different from the other three because conferencing was used in all of Mott's work. Mott possessed unflagging confidence that by gathering a diverse set of people together in conferences they would attain a form of global Christian fellowship that would inspire and strengthen the world Christian movement.

Diplomacy

John R. Mott's diplomatic work extends far beyond the ways Mott sought to make an impact in U.S. diplomatic circles and on US foreign policy. It included efforts he made as a YMCA leader to negotiate agreements among belligerent nations to provide for prisoner of war relief and extended after the war in enabling relief work among student refugees.¹⁹ It also included a kind of lobbying effort before and during the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, mostly to ensure missionary freedoms in colonial territories.²⁰ In order to best illustrate how Mott likely thought about matters of nationalism and internationalism I focus, in this section, on Mott's relationship

¹⁹ I have previously written about Mott's involvement in post-war student relief efforts in Benjamin L. Hartley, "Saving Students: European Student Relief in the Aftermath of World War I," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 42, no. 4 (2018). For an excellent review of YMCA prisoner of war work during World War I see Kenneth Steuer, *Pursuit of an "unparalleled opportunity" American YMCA and Prisoner of War Diplomacy among the Central Power Nations during World War I, 1914-1923* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

²⁰ His efforts in this regard are best summarized in "Report to Committee of Reference and Counsel on visit of Drs. J. R. Mott and C. R. Watson to the Paris Peace Conference, March 14 to May 18, 1919." RG 45, Box 97, Folder 1721.

with Elihu Root and Mott's experience in the most high-profile diplomatic work of his life – that of serving as a member of the Root Commission to Russia in 1917.²¹

Elihu Root was the US diplomat with whom Mott had the longest relationship and whom Mott most admired. Perhaps no statesman in the United States in the early twentieth century was more committed than Elihu Root to the potential of international organizations to resolve world conflicts. The list of such organizations Root helped to create or strongly influenced included the Central American Court of Justice, the American Society of International Law, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the League to Enforce Peace.²² In 1913 he was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for his work in this area. In 1917, two years after finishing his term as a U.S. Senator, Root was asked to lead a diplomatic mission to Russia – subsequently known as the “Root Commission” – after the Russian revolution deposed the czar (a few months prior to the Bolshevik Revolution).²³

Mott first met Root in Rio De Janeiro in August of 1906 when Root was Secretary of State for the Theodore Roosevelt administration. Root was in Brazil for the third Pan-American Congress while Mott was visiting YMCA affiliates in both Brazil and Argentina. Mott reported that he was able to obtain “a special interview” with Root where Mott “laid before him the

²¹ Admittedly, these different aspects of Mott's diplomatic work are difficult to separate. For example, Hopkins and Long argue that it was precisely the diplomatic work Mott did for the YMCA in Russia which had the most long-lasting effects on the people of Russia. Four hundred YMCA workers saved countless lives during the Russian famine and many also helped Russian student refugees in Europe after the war. John W. Long and C. Howard Hopkins, "The Church and the Russian Revolution: Conversations of John R. Mott with Orthodox Church Leaders, June-July 1917," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (1976): 179.

²² Root's relationship to the League to Enforce Peace was complicated. Ruhl J. Bartlett has noted that Root's influence on the League to Enforce Peace was greater than anyone else even though he was never a member. Bartlett cited in Martin David Dubin, "Elihu Root and the Advocacy of a League of Nations, 1914-1917," *The Western Political Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1966): 439.

²³ Dubin, "Elihu Root and the Advocacy of a League of Nations, 1914-1917," 440.

policy for the development of the Association movement in Latin America.” Root was no stranger to the YMCA. He had served as a delegate to the 1866 YMCA convention in Albany, New York and probably wanted to encourage Mott in his work.²⁴

Mott was inspired by this first meeting with Elihu Root. He noted the increased interest in the Monroe Doctrine which had been “tremendously quickened” due to Root’s Latin American visit. Mott argued that it “suggests religious responsibility as well as political” and appealed to his North American supporters to “extend the hand of helpfulness” to the people of Latin America.²⁵ The confluence of religious and political responsibilities that Mott affirmed with regard to Latin America would be repeated several times in his life to good and bad effect.²⁶

The interrelationship of these “responsibilities” was something Root apparently felt as well. A few months after seeing Mott in Rio De Janeiro, Root wrote to encourage him in his organizing efforts surrounding the upcoming WSCF Tokyo conference in April of 1907.

The Conference... with delegates from... twenty-five nations, is an occasion of international significance... Now that the interests of the Eastern and Western Worlds are so closely identified, this mingling of the young men of Occident and Orient to discuss questions pertaining to the highest life of men, must result in much good to all countries.²⁷

²⁴C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the YMCA in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951), 436.

²⁵ Letter from John R. Mott to supporters, 10 August 1906. John R. Mott papers, Box 6, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota. The Monroe Doctrine was an aspect of US foreign policy that opposed European colonial influence in the Americas.

²⁶ The most famous instance of Mott merging political and religious responsibilities occurred a few months after his trip to Russia. Mott unequivocally declared that winning the war was “a religious duty.” John R. Mott, Address at the Hotel Savoy, New York City, 14 January 1918, War Work YMCA, Box X391, Kautz Family YMCA archives. For an account of German mission leaders’ disdain toward Mott’s actions see Richard Pierard, “John R. Mott and the rift in the ecumenical movement during World War I” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23, no. 4 (1986).

²⁷ Letter from Elihu Root to John R. Mott, 31 December 1906, RG 45 Box 76, Folder 1385.

A year later, in the third issue of the WSCF magazine, *The Student World*, Mott wrote an editorial that somewhat exaggerated the internationalist reality of what Elihu Root foresaw as the potential for the WSCF.

The Federation is not a missionary organization in the sense that it exists in one part of the world and sends its representatives to some other part. It is a world organization as indigenous to the Orient as to the Occident. On its General Committee each of the student movements of the East has as many representatives as any movement in the West.²⁸

Mott would be less sanguine in the future about the WSCF's internationalism, but at this stage Mott truly believed that the WSCF embodied these ideals.²⁹

Some years later, Mott wrote to Root informing him of a resolution that had been passed at the 1916 International Convention of the YMCA, fifty years after Root had attended a similar gathering. The resolution praised Root for his career "marked by wise achievement toward that international peace and brotherhood which has been and is also the goal" of the YMCA "looking forward to 'The Parliament of Man,' 'The Federation of the World,' 'The one far off Divine event toward which the whole creation moves,' ..." ³⁰ At the time Mott wrote to Root in May of 1916 the United States was moving ever closer to war, and the hope for peace expressed in the "Parliament of Man" rhetoric from the Hague Peace Conference of 1899 was becoming increasingly dim.³¹

²⁸ John R. Mott, "Editorial," *The Student World* 1 no. 3. (1908), 113.

²⁹ Even in 1918 Mott wrote that he believed that if the WSCF had been established earlier the world war might have been prevented.

³⁰ Letter from Mott to Root, 17 May 1916, 45:76:1385. The resolution would have been passed less than a year after William Jennings Bryan's resignation as Secretary of State in the Wilson administration. From June 1915 onwards, the Wilson administration made a significant shift in its foreign policy ranks to include those who were disciples of Elihu Root.

³¹ On the use of this language at the Hague Peace Conference see Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, 18. This phrase was previously used by Alfred Tennyson in his 1835 poem, "Locksley Hall."

A few months after the US formally declared war, during June of 1917, Mott and Root traveled along with a dozen others across the Pacific Ocean and Russia's Trans-Siberian railway as part of a delegation from President Wilson to the new Russian government to encourage the regime's continued engagement in the war. In letters home to Leila, Mott wrote about the abiding respect he had for Elihu Root.

It has been a very rare privilege to be thrown in this most intimate way with Senator Root. I have had unhurried conversations with him on all sorts of subjects... My estimate of him as a leading statesman - national and international - has not changed. He would have made a great President, but it may prove to have been Providential that he has been kept free for the larger and more difficult international tasks which lay before our nation.³²

John also noted to Leila the six books about Russia he was reading and others on foreign policy. The four foreign policy texts Mott read were by Elihu Root and John Watson Foster, both Republican international lawyers.³³ Foster was the father-in-law of Robert Lansing, Wilson's Secretary of State.³⁴

Mott's appreciation for Root is not at all surprising given their previous correspondence, political inclinations (Republican), and common history with the YMCA. Even Root's career as a corporate lawyer, prior to becoming Roosevelt's Secretary of State, would have resonated with Mott. He had a lifelong respect and even friendship with prominent American business leaders, most notably John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Cyrus McCormick, Jr.³⁵

³² John R. Mott correspondence with Leila Mott, 2 June 1917. RG 45, Box 107, Folder 1838.

³³ The books by Root were *Addresses on International Subjects* and *Military and Colonial Policy of the United States*. Books by Foster included *A Century of American Diplomacy* and *The Practice of Diplomacy*.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ The son of the inventor of the McCormick Reaper, Cyrus McCormick, Jr., was the person with whom Mott developed the closest relationship on their trans-Pacific and trans-Siberian voyage. Ibid.

Root championed a kind of internationalism that was growing in popularity in the Wilson administration after the resignation of William Jennings Bryan in 1915. His replacement, Robert Lansing, considered Root his mentor.³⁶ Politically, two years prior to the Root Commission's trip to Russia, there was a significant reversal in Republican / Democratic positions on the war. Republicans became less willing to engage in the conflict while Democrats became more so.³⁷ Woodrow Wilson's primary political opponent, Theodore Roosevelt, also became increasingly opposed to the internationalist organizing efforts like the League to Enforce Peace. Root maintained qualified support of this League's proposals.³⁸ Mott never publicly endorsed the League to Enforce Peace, although he appears to have been known by its president, William Howard Taft, as a supporter. Taft invited him to give an address at the first annual meeting of this League in May of 1916, the very meeting where President Wilson first outlined his support for a post-war League.³⁹

³⁶ Other prominent advisors in the Wilson State Department, James Brown Scott and Chandler P. Anderson, were also mentored by Elihu Root. Coates, "Transatlantic Advocates: American International Law and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1898-1919," 332 and 351.

³⁷ John Milton Cooper Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1983), 300-01.

³⁸ The League to Enforce Peace was the leading internationalist lobbying organization in the United States without official government support that argued for rules of arbitration and a rigorous military alliance among members to prevent warfare among any of its members. Coates, "Transatlantic Advocates: American International Law and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1898-1919," 381-82.

³⁹ Mott did not accept Taft's invitation. Letter from Taft to Mott, 14 April 1916, RG 45, Box 90, Folder 1594. In March of 1919, immediately prior to going to the Paris Peace Conference himself, Mott wrote Taft a warm letter praising him for the "large-souled and convincing address" he gave (and for which Mott was present) at a gathering of the League to Enforce Peace at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. Mott described Taft's address as "the most satisfying statement regarding the League of Nations which I have heard or which I have read during these recent months." Letter from Mott to William Howard Taft, 12 March 1919, RG 45, Box 90, Folder 1594. Even though Wilson gave a speech after Taft at this event it is doubtful that the two men entirely agreed on the precise terms of the League of Nations. It is also doubtful that Mott was acquainted with the highly nuanced debates among legal scholars about the proposed League at this time. See Coates, 408-421

By the time the Paris Peace Conference began in January of 1919 President Wilson and Elihu Root did not agree on the details of the League of Nations. By this time, it is likely that Mott would have sided with Wilson. Mott deeply respected Root, but Wilson was his friend.⁴⁰ Root was more interested in rigorous, accountable, structures to enforce international agreements than was Wilson, who was more willing than Root to leave matters open-ended in international relationships hoping that the good and the right would prevail. Elihu Root condemned this approach of the League of Nations that “rests the hope of the whole world for future peace in a government of men, and not of laws.”⁴¹ By contrast, when Wilson heard that American legal scholars were working on the League of Nations documents he declared with equal scorn, “Who authorized them to do this? I do not want lawyers drafting this Treaty.”⁴²

Mott’s record of seeking to avoid conflict over theological criteria and race relations, his over-used rhetoric that “the best days were still to come,” and unwavering confidence that anything was possible if the right people were at the table, all suggest that he would have been more closely aligned with Wilson than Root on League of Nations debates.⁴³ Like Wilson, Mott trusted in men more than laws. When one reads the final paragraph of Wilson’s “Fourteen

⁴⁰ The existing correspondence between President Wilson and Mott during and after World War 1 reveals that they did not disagree in the slightest – at least not in their letters to one another. Mott’s primary work as a fundraiser for the YMCA’s work among prisoners of war and the United War Work Campaign also would have made it politically very undesirable for him to publicly or privately express views that contrasted with the President. Mott needed his unequivocal support.

⁴¹ Root cited in Coates, 420.

⁴² Wertheim, “The League That Wasn’t: American Designs for a Legalist-Sanctionist League of Nations and the Intellectual Origins of International Organization, 1914-1920,” 829. The nuances of disagreement in US foreign policy circles in 1919 is very difficult to untangle. The last chapter of Coates’s dissertation is an excellent and recent effort to understand the divisions within the US foreign policy establishment (including the views of Root).

⁴³ Mott’s frequent remark, “the best days were still to come,” was said so often it was something of a joke among his colleagues. Wilhelm Visser ‘t Hooft, “Transcript (from tape-recording) of Dr. Visser ‘t Hooft’s speech on the occasion of the John Mott Celebrations 25 May 1965.” Kautz Family YMCA Archives, John R. Mott papers, Box 1.

Points” speech given in January of 1918 alongside Mott’s speeches one gets the sense that Mott could have given it with few alterations.⁴⁴

The hopeful rhetoric of Wilson’s “Fourteen Points” and the profound disappointment in his failure to get the League of Nations legislation passed by the U.S. Congress is comparable to the contrast around the same time between Mott’s soaring rhetoric about the promise of Russia and intense disappointment of Germans toward Mott for even being a part of the Root Commission to Russia in June of 1917.⁴⁵ Just a few years earlier Mott and his friend George Sherwood Eddy had witnessed what they believed was an epoch-making trend of nationalism in many Asian countries. They believed that the rise in nationalistic feeling would help the Christian movement and world peace more generally.⁴⁶ Mott believed Russia was following in this pattern.

Mott’s speech to church leaders in Russia during the summer of 1917 was filled with praise concerning Russia’s history – both sacred and secular – and concluded with religious nationalist rhetoric by Mott which one imagines could have just as easily been uttered by a Russian military commander.

Go back to all your parishes... and tell the Russian people that America is with them... Tell them to stand firmly behind the Provisional Government. Tell them to be true to the Church that it may in this time of colossal strain preserve the solidarity of the nation.

⁴⁴Woodrow Wilson, “Fourteen Points Speech,” presented to Congress, 8 January 1918, <https://kr.usembassy.gov/education-culture/infopedia-usa/living-documents-american-history-democracy/woodrow-wilson-fourteen-points-speech-1918/>.

⁴⁵ For a recent detailed review of John R. Mott’s own recounting of his experience in Russia in 1917 see Matthew Lee Miller, *John R. Mott, the American YMCA, and Revolutionary Russia* (Slavica Pub, 2020).

⁴⁶ The praise of Asian nationalism is especially clear in Eddy, *The New Era in Asia* (1913). During his time in Russia Mott also had several interviews with Jewish leaders in Russia to ascertain the nature of their religious freedoms under the new government in Russia. American Jewish leader Oscar Strauss may have been the person who first suggested to Wilson that the US send a delegation to Russia. C. Howard Hopkins and John W. Long, “American Jews and the Root Mission to Russia in 1917: Some New Evidence,” *American Jewish History* 69, no. 3 (1980).

Above all let the Church be unfailing in reminding the people that God only can enable us to accomplish His high and holy purpose. While everything else is changeable and changing Jesus Christ "is the same yesterday, today, yea, and forever."⁴⁷

After returning home from Russia, Mott spoke about the importance of supporting and being patient with Russia, even after the October Bolshevik revolution.⁴⁸ Mott famously repeated an aphorism told to him by a Russian leader, "You may not understand Russia but you must believe in Russia."⁴⁹

By contrast, in the same speech given just six days after Wilson's "Fourteen Points" speech to congress, Mott made it exceedingly clear that he did not believe in Germany. Mott condemned German efforts to encourage Russia to seek peace with Germany after their czar was deposed and he criticized them as "the last nation under heaven it would seem that should be teaching internationalism."⁵⁰ On this last point, international legalists like Elihu Root had long held the same opinion. As early as 1909 Root argued that Germany's approach in international affairs was one that stood opposed to progress in law.⁵¹

Mott's rhetoric against Germany was only the last of several actions of Mott's during the war to which German mission leaders objected as violations of trust by Mott as a world Christian ecumenical leader. German mission leaders pointed to instance after instance of Mott

⁴⁷ "Address of John R. Mott, at the Great Sobor of the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow, June 19, 1917," Box X391, World Alliance of YMCA's Archive, Geneva, Switzerland.

⁴⁸ Manuscript of John R. Mott address at the Hotel Savoy, New York, 14 January 1918, Box X391, World Alliance of YMCAs, Geneva, Switzerland.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Not all of Mott's colleagues were as enthralled as he was by what they witnessed in Russia, however. See Paul Anderson, "Reflections on Religion in Russia," in Richard H. Marshall et al., *Aspects of Religion in the Soviet Union, 1917-1967* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 12-13. Unlike his friend, George Sherwood Eddy, Mott never publicly supported communism as such in his statements about Russia. He also never condemned Eddy for doing so.

⁵⁰ Manuscript of John R. Mott address at the Hotel Savoy.

⁵¹ Coates, 366.

claiming neutrality in the war when his actions and sometimes his words contradicted that.⁵²

Mott's diplomatic work on behalf of the United States resulted in a loss of trust between him and some German mission leaders that lasted into the mid-1920s.⁵³

With regard to Mott's understanding of nationalism and internationalism, his disagreement with the Germans is most telling because it may be the first time that he really understood how differently and perhaps naively he saw the interrelationship between nationalism and internationalism. In one of the first meetings after the war between Mott and German mission leaders he acknowledged a measure of fault. "It was more difficult, apparently impossible, to go the way I did. I may have made a bad failure; but I was right in attempting it. It is part of the task of the Christian to render the impossible possible." Mott went on to express how he believed that "democracy was more nearly Christian," suggesting that his diplomatic efforts on behalf of democracy and opposed to Germany during World War I were warranted.⁵⁴

At the same meeting with German mission leaders after the war Mott's personal notes from the meeting suggests that he was beginning to empathize with the German position. The Germans noted that he wrongly "tried to combine the national and international function" and

⁵² The details of German disagreement with Mott are well laid out in Pierard, "John R. Mott and the rift in the ecumenical movement during World War I." German mission leaders were not even aware of the fact that shortly after the US declared war on Germany in April 1917, the US Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, wrote Mott to declare that the Defense Department recognized the YMCA's "service as directly in aid of the men in our own army." Letter from Newton D. Baker to Mott, 28 April 1917, John R. Mott correspondence files, 1907-1917, World's YMCA Archive, Geneva, Switzerland.

⁵³ In a letter of advice to Mott to be especially attentive to German missionaries during an upcoming trip in 1926 to the Dutch East Indies, German mission leader Martin Schlunk noted that Mott's trip to Russia in 1917 remained a point of contention. Letter of Martin Schlunk to John R. Mott, 6 January 1926. RG 45 Box 79 Folder 1446.

⁵⁴ John R. Mott handwritten notes from 25 May 1920 speech given at a gathering of German mission leaders. In these notes Mott also appears to have recorded his belief that if the Federation had been organized 20 years earlier that the "World War could have been prevented."

that he thought he was “impartial,” but that he failed to recognize that the war against Germany “is an intellectual war.”⁵⁵ In a typed (but rough) translation from an article written by a Pastor Beyer a few months after Mott’s meeting with Germans, Mott drew three vertical lines in the margin where an English translation of Beyer’s article stated,

[T]he American conscience is otherwise constructed than the German. It does not feel the sharp line of cleavage between religion and politics which for us is so important. Upon this presupposition I can believe that Mott thought himself absolutely justified... I thus find in Mott in exemplary form, but in the more portentous reality that intermingling of religion and politics which sees in the spread of democratic ideas a bit of proclamation of the Gospel...⁵⁶

This criticism would not have been entirely new to Mott in 1920. European mission leaders continued to express similar sentiment toward Mott in subsequent years as well.⁵⁷

Ultimately, Mott recognized the bind he was in due to the actions he took during the war, but he did not see a way out of the conflict. In a letter to his sister, Clara, a month after difficult conversations with German mission leaders in Berlin, Mott conveyed to her both the intense frustration he experienced during the meetings and the empathy he felt toward the Germans with whom he interacted. “Every hour I was reminded of their physical depletion and exhaustion, of their isolation and loneliness, of their long-suffering, extreme pessimism and

⁵⁵ John R. Mott, personal handwritten notes from meeting in Berlin, 27 May 1920. RG 45 Box 153 Folder 2549.

⁵⁶ English translation of article by “Pastor Beyer” in *Mitteilungen*, a magazine of the DCSV, 1 August 1920.

⁵⁷ One of the more revealing bits of correspondence in this regard was between Swedish Christian student leader Karl Fries and John R. Mott in 1923. Fries noted that he agreed with the critique of German mission leader Paul Humburg that Mott had failed to stress “sin and grace and the need of conversion” in an Atlantic City address in 1923. Mott fired back a letter of exasperation. “The fact that I do not [address such theological themes] in every address should not be interpreted, at least by my friends, as showing that I am one whit behind them in appreciation of its importance, or that I am neglecting a matter of such transcendent importance.” Letter from Karl Fries to Mott, 23 January 1923; Letter from Mott to Karl Fries, 13 February 1923, RG 45, Box 31, Folder 567.

despair... All these intense feelings and convictions were concentrated on me as the representative of the Christian forces of the Allied nations.”⁵⁸

These words of Mott’s express a similar sentiment to those of Hartford Seminary president Douglas MacKenzie who wrote to Mott just prior to the end of the war. Mackenzie articulated that all thinking about the war must “start out with the fact that the Church of Christ from the beginning has been supernatural.” And yet, Mackenzie argued that in the wake of the war it is important for Christians to help craft a new kind of nationalism in Germany, to “build in Germany a new conception of the German future and their place in the history of the world.” This, he points out, is “perfectly consistent” with true patriotism on our part. “[W]e belong to a nation and also to a Kingdom which is above all nations. There is no immediate and easy solution of this contradiction. It is our share in the cross.”⁵⁹ Mott drew two vertical lines in the margin beside these final two sentences.

In the years after World War I, John R. Mott continued to engage political leaders in the United States and elsewhere around the world to promote the work of the organizations that he led. He continued to believe in Russia as well and was a steadfast supporter of Russian Orthodox leaders in exile in France and elsewhere. His rift with German mission leaders also healed. In 1931 Mott was even asked to serve as a mediator in a dispute between French and German YMCA leaders still stemming from World War I and its aftermath.⁶⁰ Elihu Root and

⁵⁸ John R. Mott, letter to sister Clara, 10 June 1920, Box 5, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁵⁹ Douglas Mackenzie, letter to John R. Mott, 16 March 1918, RG 45 Box 54. Mackenzie was president of Hartford Seminary at this time, the leading seminary involved in missionary training in the United States.

⁶⁰ Visser ‘t Hooft, “Transcript (from tape-recording) of Dr. Visser ‘t Hooft’s speech on the occasion of the John Mott Celebrations 25 May 1965.”

Mott also corresponded a few times. In 1922, sixteen years after first meeting him, Mott wrote an especially endearing letter to Root. "I have never been able to tell you personally all that your life and constructive service and lofty messages and your expressions of confidence have meant to me."⁶¹ Mott may have never articulated a personal theory of internationalism, but his continued admiration of Elihu Root suggests that it probably never strayed too far from the views expressed by him. However, after the armistice and for years thereafter Mott invested more confidence in the League of Nations than Root whose opposition to it was instrumental in the US Congress's failure to approve the United States' participation in the League.⁶²

2. Encouraging Nationalisms

John R. Mott did not simply encourage nationalism wherever he saw it around the world. He condemned Turkey's nationalism in 1895 and Germany's nationalism during the war. But he typically did not write about Germany or Turkey as having a problem with nationalism as such.⁶³ When Mott spoke or wrote about nationalism it was almost always in a positive way, even in those cases where a country was at war (Poland) or had recently been victorious in war (Japan).⁶⁴ In the case of Japan in 1895, Mott admitted that Japan had an "excessive

⁶¹ John R. Mott, letter to Elihu Root, 28 June 1922, RG 45, Box 76, Folder 1385.

⁶² In a seven-page report submitted to the Committee of Reference and Counsel of the North American Association of Mission Boards which sent Charles R. Watson and Mott to the Paris Peace Conference, the two men express confidence that their work at the Paris Peace Conference will continue to be useful in influencing the League of Nations for years to come. "Report to Committee of Reference and Counsel on visit of Drs. J. R. Mott and C. R. Watson to the Paris Peace Conference, March 14 to May 18, 1919." RG 45, Box 97, Folder 1721.

⁶³ Mott noted that the perpetrators of violence in Turkey were rewarded for their "patriotic" service, but he used quotation marks around the term suggesting it was somehow a false patriotism.

⁶⁴ Concerning Poland during its war with Russia see John R. Mott, letter to sister Clara Mott, 10 June 1920. Box 5, Kautz Family YMCA Archives. One of the few times where Mott unequivocally condemns extreme nationalism as

nationalistic spirit,” but he was brimming with confidence that Japan would now take its place “in the great world-wide student Christian brotherhood” just as the Japanese nation has gained recognition as an important player on the international stage as a result of its war victory.⁶⁵

Although Japan remained a country of abiding interest and activity for Mott, it was with India and China where Mott exerted the most effort to encourage nationalism for the sake of Christian internationalism. Mott encouraged Christian and nationalist leaders elsewhere too, but his engagement in India and China was especially strong, sustained, and involved relationships with nationalist leaders who were most influential in national and even international politics.

India

Over a lifetime Mott developed a good understanding of India from several different vantage points. As a college student at Cornell in the late 1880s Mott became acquainted with the work of Pandita Ramabai, a famous Christian convert from Hinduism, and organized his fellow students at Cornell to support her work.⁶⁶ Mott made many trips to India and promoted

such is in John R. Mott, *Methodists United for Action* (Nashville: Dept. of Education and Promotion Board of Missions Methodist Church, 1939), 16-17.

⁶⁵ John R. Mott, Report letter no. 19, 6 February 1897, John R. Mott papers, Box 6, Travelogues 1895-1898 folder, Kautz Family YMCA Archives. For a discussion of how Japan subsequently entered the ranks of a “civilized” power after its 1895 war victory see Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, 36-39. British scholar of international relations Alfred Zimmern described Japan’s victory over Russia in 1905 as “the most important historical event... in our lifetime; the victory of a nonwhite people over a white people.” Errol A. Henderson, “Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism in international relations theory,” in *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*, ed. Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 22.

⁶⁶ Pandita Ramabai lectured at Cornell in October of 1887. John R. Mott letter to parents, 9 October 1887, RG 45, Box 103, Folder 1805. Mott and his friends formed the “Religious Union” at Cornell at least in part as a response to Ramabai’s visit. Hopkins, 38.

Christian movements, church unity efforts, and in the 1930s engaged in dialogue with Mahatma Gandhi. Two of Mott's closest long-time friends, George Sherwood Eddy and J. H. Oldham, spent significant amounts of time in India. Eddy served as a missionary in India early in his career and Oldham spent his boyhood there and briefly served in India as a YMCA missionary. At the end of Mott's life, two of Mott's children worked for extended periods of time in India. His daughter, Irene, also married an Indian man, Vivian Bose, who was the first Christian on the supreme court of newly independent India.⁶⁷

Early in his career, however, Mott did not always champion Indian nationalism when it was expressed in a way that he thought damaged the missionary movement. In a speech given before an American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) annual meeting in 1902, Mott noted how essential indigenous persons were to the evangelistic efforts around the world and gave examples from India to that effect. He pointed out that sometimes "native workers feel that they are entitled to more power, liberty, and responsibility than they have." He went on to say that "in more cases" native criticisms were "due to a misconception of the motives and spirit of the missionaries." He acknowledged, however, that this "remains a very real difficulty and it is not easy to overcome it."⁶⁸ Friendships with Indian leaders in the next

⁶⁷ Irene Mott Bose received an award from the government in India for her work among villagers in Nagpur. John L. Mott served in India in the 1920s working for "improved working and living conditions for cotton mill workers." Undated column about Irene Mott Bose in *The Indian Witness*; Handwritten obituary of John L. Mott, RG 45, Box 102, Folder 1795; A brief note of Irene's work among villagers near Nagpur is in Diary of John R. Mott on Round the World Tour of 1928-29, RG 45, Box 118, Folder 1950. For an entertaining article about Vivian Bose see Sanjoy Ghose, "Why can't a Judge also be a Rockstar? A study of the interesting life of Justice Vivian Bose," <https://www.barandbench.com/columns/why-cant-a-judge-also-be-a-rockstar-a-study-of-the-interesting-life-of-justice-vivian-bose>

⁶⁸ John Raleigh Mott, *Addresses and Papers of John R. Mott, Volume 1* (New York: Association press, 1946), 347-48.

two decades showed Mott just how real and difficult the conflict among indigenous workers and western missionaries could be.

The Indian nationalist leader with whom Mott had the closest and most long-standing relationship was Kanakarayan Paul, also known as K. T. Paul (1876-1931). Paul came from a family that had been Christians for two generations, was educated at Madras Christian College where he was classmates with V. S. Azariah and, in 1905, was one of the founders of the National Missionary Society, an organization led by Indians. American missionary George Sherwood Eddy was also one of the early instigators of this organization and worked closely with K. T. Paul.⁶⁹

K. T. Paul and Mott first spent extended time together during their All-India tour with Eddy in November and December of 1912. They held conferences on behalf of the Continuation Committee, held meetings to promote unity among Syrian Christians in India, and conducted evangelistic campaigns among Indian students. Mott was enthusiastic about his work to help unify the student Christian movement in India, Ceylon, and Burma. It “constituted the largest and most representative Christian Student Conference ever held in this part of the world.” He also noted with satisfaction that this movement was, for the first time, “truly indigenous.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Nutt, *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Sherwood Eddy and the American Protestant Mission*, 60-61. K. T. Paul’s leadership in agricultural development work in India is worth further investigation for the ways it might have inspired Mott’s engagement in Agricultural Missions, Inc. in subsequent decades.

⁷⁰ “Copy of a Letter from John R. Mott regarding Student Evangelistic Meetings in Ceylon, India and Burmah,” 13 January 1913, John R. Mott papers, Box 5, Kautz Family YMCA Archive. These were heady times for the indigenizing of the Indian Church. V. S. Azariah, K. T. Paul’s classmate, was installed as the first Indian Bishop of the Anglican Church in India around the same time as Mott’s gatherings with students in India. M. D. David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India: A Centenary History* (New Delhi, India: National Council of YMCAs of India, 1992), 106.

The presence and participation of indigenous leaders at Mott's meetings was a high priority for him during his 1912-1913 tour in Asia. In a ten-page letter written to Fletcher Brockman on Christmas Day (!) 1911 Mott mentions twice the importance of having indigenous representation at every "round table" conference he was asking Brockman to organize during his Asian tour with Sherwood Eddy.⁷¹ It was a priority in Mott's work that close colleagues of his in India shared.

No colleague in India held to this ideal more strongly than E. C. Carter; shortly after Mott and Eddy's tour in India, K. T. Paul became Joint National General Secretary of the YMCA with him.⁷² When Carter went to Europe with the YMCA during World War I, K. T. Paul became the first Indian national general secretary in the YMCA, an organization that had existed in India with European leadership since 1854. This was not universally approved by foreign YMCA secretaries in India, but K. T. Paul held firm and Mott supported him in this role.⁷³

K. T. Paul's leadership role expanded in student, church, and political circles and included a strong commitment to Indian nationalism that he shared with colleague S. K. Datta, who played an important but mostly indirect role in influencing Mott's growing sympathy with Indian nationalism. Datta was a close friend of J. H. Oldham since Oldham's three years' service as a missionary in India as a young adult, and Datta wrote freely to Oldham (as did K. T. Paul)

⁷¹ Letter to Fletcher Brockman from John R. Mott, Christmas Day, 1911, RG 45, Box 11, Folder 206.

⁷² "K. T. Paul: A Brief Sketch of His Life," *Ceylon Men* n.d. YMCA biographical files, Box 159. Kautz Family YMCA Archives. David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India: A Centenary History*, 106.

⁷³ A letter between K. T. Paul and Mott detailing YMCA policy of Senior Secretaries' role as representatives from the International Committee illustrates Paul's conciliatory posture toward Mott and other foreign mission personnel. A good friendship between Senior Secretary Frank Slack and K. T. Paul also made for a congenial working relationship. Letter from K. T. Paul to John R. Mott, 13 June 1917, RG 45, Box 69, Folder 1260. See also the letter E. C. Carter sent to Frank Slack about this conflict in David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India: A Centenary History*, 184.

about the challenges he and other Christian Indian nationalists were facing.⁷⁴ Oldham conveyed to Mott some of the substance of these letters which probably helped him to better understand the situation Datta's colleague, K. T. Paul, was facing as well.⁷⁵

K. T. Paul's commitment to nationalism made his role as editor of the YMCA publication, *Young Men of India*, complicated since the Y had strong ties to the British community in India and the publication received financial support from Britain. The magazine became an important outlet for K. T. Paul's nationalist writings beginning around 1917. Indian nationalist fervor increased even more in the wake of the April 1919 Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, the failure of the 1919 Paris Peace Conference to secure claims to "self-determination" for colonized peoples, and the growing organizing success of Mohandas Gandhi.⁷⁶ Although K. T. Paul was one of Gandhi's most ardent supporters among Indian Christians, his support of Gandhi was not absolute. He opposed, for example, the boycott and burning of foreign cloth as part of the *satyagraha* movement.⁷⁷ In July of 1920 J. H. Oldham sponsored a special issue of the

⁷⁴ The exchange of letters between Datta and Oldham between May of 1919 and December of 1920 are especially heart-wrenching. (The Jallianwala Bagh or Amritsar massacre occurred on 13 April 1919.) Datta expresses frustration with the "pig-headedness of missionary bodies" and places a great deal of hope in Gandhi's growing movement. As a moderate on British colonial rule, Oldham tries to be sympathetic toward his friend while ultimately expressing his disagreement with Gandhi's movement, arguing for cooperation rather than independence. Letters between Datta and Oldham are in box one and two of Oldham's papers at New College Edinburgh. For more on their friendship see Keith Clements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J.H. Oldham* (Edinburgh and Geneva: T & T Clark and World Council of Churches, 1999), 44.

⁷⁵ Letter from J. H. Oldham to John R. Mott, 20 October 1919. J. H. Oldham papers, Box 1, Folder 14. New College Edinburgh.

⁷⁶ For an analysis of the Asian implications of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁷⁷ M. D. David, 250.

International Review of Missions on the challenge of nationalisms and explicitly wrote in support of K. T. Paul's advocacy of nationalism in an earlier *IRM* volume.⁷⁸

By 1930 K. T. Paul's reputation among Indian nationalists as well as British politicians had grown in such a way that he was increasingly seen as someone who could possibly lead the way in conciliatory efforts. K. T. Paul wrote *The British Connection with India* in 1928 as part of an effort at negotiating between Indian nationalism and British imperialism. During the same year, Paul also wrote a letter to Mott reflecting on their common internationalist ideals to which they both aspired. "The business to which we are pledged is world wide in its outreach and requires a world mobilization. Nothing less is adequate." The letter then turned more personal.

It was mainly contact with you in that year which decided my line of work for the following years. I was not young then. I was already thirty-six, a time of life when one does not make decisions on impulse. I saw very clearly that your vision was the right vision - at least so far as the investment of my life was concerned. And I have not regretted it a single day. My only regret has been that I have not had as many opportunities as I should like for drawing inspiration from you at close quarters and in direct exchange of views.⁷⁹

Mott and Paul never met again after Paul wrote this letter. He was, however, invited to the first British governmental Round Table Conference in London as part of an effort to accommodate Indian nationalist concerns within the British empire. Shortly after this conference ended K. T. Paul died.

The sixteen-year relationship Mott and K. T. Paul shared, Paul's freedom to express himself with candor concerning difficult political situations within the YMCA, and Mott's

⁷⁸ Joseph Houldsworth Oldham, "Nationality and Missions," *International Review of Mission* 9, no. 3 (1920).

⁷⁹ Letter from K. T. Paul to John R. Mott, 13 August 1928, RG 45, Box 69, Folder 1260.

support of his leadership suggests that in 1928 Mott likely thought rather differently about the “real difficulty” he acknowledged in his 1902 speech to American missionary leaders mentioned above. Subsequent conversations Mott had with Mahatma Gandhi in the 1930s suggest that he remained critical of some aspects of the movement Gandhi led as did J. H. Oldham and K. T. Paul, but Indian nationalism when it was expressed by his friends was always something Mott supported.

China

In February of 1913 Mott had an opportunity to help shape the new Republic of China that was unique among leaders in the world Christian movement. On 24 February 1913, a cable arrived inviting him to serve as President Wilson’s ambassador to China. Two weeks later Mott declined the offer and then, after a second appeal by Wilson through their mutual friend, Cleveland Dodge, Mott turned down the President a second time.⁸⁰ At some point during or perhaps following this exchange of cables and letters Mott made his own appeal to Wilson to support the new Chinese republic.

Mott’s lengthy cable to Wilson outlined seven reasons why formal recognition of the Chinese republic should happen immediately. One of those reasons stemmed from Mott’s lifelong love for students. He noted, “Students returned from America wielding predominant

⁸⁰ Several of Mott’s friends advised him to take the ambassadorship, but others discouraged him from doing so. One of the more convincing arguments against taking the China position was by YMCA National General Secretary Richard C. Morse. He noted that Mott could help China more in his current position than by taking the ambassadorship. “Your present position relates you to *all* the nations in a way so influential that to identify yourself politically with the relations between only two nations would be inconsistent with maintaining unimpaired all the other international relationships you sustain [emphasis in original].” Richard C. Morse, letter to John R. Mott, 25 March 1913. RG 45, Box 60.

influence and therefore render it peculiarly appropriate that a nation which afforded them their inspiration and training should strengthen their hands.”⁸¹ A rapid acknowledgment of China by America was also seen as helpful to both Mott and Wilson as a way of countering the embarrassment caused by the California state legislature’s passing of the Alien Land Bill which was oppressive toward Asian immigrants and rapidly drew world attention.⁸²

Wang Zhengting (described in Mott’s papers as Chengting Wang), David Z. T. Yui, and Wellington Koo were three of those students who had recently returned from studying in the United States and, in the case of Wang and Yui, were YMCA colleagues of Mott’s. Mott’s correspondence with both Wang and Yui both begin in 1910 and extend for over two decades. Clearly, Wang Zhengting was someone whom Mott trusted at an early stage. In 1910 he requested that Wang provide a critique of Commission 1 of the Edinburgh 1910 gathering, the Commission Mott himself had chaired to great effect.⁸³ Wang asked for Mott’s advice as to whether he should pursue further graduate studies at Yale and expressed considerable trust in Mott in this letter: “As you are a man of great judgment and deep sympathy I take the liberty to open my heart to you.”⁸⁴

Mott provided counsel to David Yui as well during the summer of 1915 when Yui wrote asking for advice about accepting a position as director of the Chinese Educational mission as a liaison for the Chinese government in Washington D.C. Mott’s thoughtful letter pointed to the

⁸¹ Undated Mott correspondence with Cleveland Dodge, Copy of cable sent to Wilson, RG 45, Box 23.

⁸² Mott wrote to Wilson three days after declining to serve as ambassador that the “[p]ending anti-foreign California legislation seriously regarded here by all classes including Americans. Would seriously embarrass American interests.” Letter to President Woodrow Wilson from Mott, 4 April 1913, RG 45, Box 100, Folder 1761. Henry Reynolds and Marilyn Lake, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 270-75.

⁸³ Letter from John R. Mott to C. T. Wang, RG 45, Box 96, Folder 1697.

⁸⁴ Letter from Chengting Wang to Mott, 17 March 1910, Box 96, Folder 1697.

advantages of remaining in his YMCA role as head of the Lecture Department in China. This current work, Mott argued, “more important service” to the “Kingdom of Christ.” This was an important theological argument for Mott, but he mostly emphasized to Yui how his current role assists the nation of China more than the governmental position. “It enables you to come into face to face and heart to heart touch with the present and coming leaders of China in all parts of the country. In the formative period in the life of the nation nothing can compare in strength of influence with the method of bringing a living personality to bear upon other personalities.”⁸⁵ Mott’s prior decision to turn down the ambassadorship to China two years earlier may have played a role in Yui’s decision to turn down the governmental position, but Mott did not raise this point in his letter. If Yui agreed with Mott’s line of argument, Yui’s decision to turn down the government post would have been made for nationalistic reasons as much as anything else.

At this time Yui also asked for Mott’s support to influence governmental and business leaders in the United States to improve the situation of prejudice and racism facing Chinese students in the United States. He reported that students experienced a variety of forms of discrimination in the immigration process. Yui reported that he was able to secure from President Wilson an executive order to make it easier for Chinese students to enter the United States and asked Mott’s help to ensure that the new policy is followed. Yui also asked Mott to use his influence among business leaders to make it easier for Chinese students to gain

⁸⁵ Letter to David Z. T. Yui from John R. Mott, 21 July 1915, John R. Mott papers, Box 8, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

employment after graduation.⁸⁶ The extent to which Mott followed-up with government and business leaders in response to Yui's request is not clear, although Mott did stress this point a year earlier with members of the Wilson administration.⁸⁷ Yui's confidence in making the request reveals that Mott was seen as a reliable advocate for Chinese students.

Chengting Wang expressed similar confidence in John R. Mott's ability to influence the US government (and other European leaders) a few years later when he was a Chinese delegate to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Wang wrote an impassioned letter to Mott during the conference to urge him to help sway the American delegation to restore Chinese territorial claims of the Shandong province which had been under German control since 1898. Wilson's biographer calls this decision Wilson's "most anguished choice of the whole peace conference," but Wilson ultimately voted to give Shantung to Japan.⁸⁸ Deeply disappointed by this outcome, Wang expressed his anger toward Mott but ultimately did not blame him for the outcome.⁸⁹

April 30th will go down in the history of China as a dark day. It was on this day when the adverse decision by the Council of Three was made concerning the pretensions of our neighbour [Japan]. All the fears came horribly true... It was a cruelly unjust decision. With all respect due to your great president, I cannot but feel that he unwittingly walked into a trap laid for him. All cry of race equality was, as I told you, a smoke-screen.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Letter to John R. Mott from David Z. T. Yui, 30 July 1915, John R. Mott papers, Box 8, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

⁸⁷ Letter from Mott to US Secretary of Labor William G. Wilson, 10 January 1914, Woodrow Wilson correspondence, RG 45, Box 100, Folder 1761.

⁸⁸ Jr. John Milton Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 493.

⁸⁹ Similarly, years later at Mott's Nobel Peace Prize dinner, Chinese ambassador Wellington Koo, who had served as the other member of the Chinese delegation with Wang at the Paris Peace Conference, expressed nothing but appreciation for Mott whom he met at a YMCA gathering in Northfield, Massachusetts decades earlier. Verbatim transcript of Wellington Koo's address, 19 December 1946, John R. Mott papers, Box 8, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

⁹⁰ Letter to John R. Mott from Chengting Wang, 6 May 1919, RG 45 Box 96.

Chengting Wang does not mention the unrest that began to unfold two days prior to his letter to Mott, but the protests now known as the May 4th movement erupted in Beijing and then spread to many large cities across China. It became a turning point in Chinese history that eventually resulted in the rise of communism in China.⁹¹

In the months after Chengting Wang's letter Mott did not express a sense of regret over the failure of the Paris Peace Conference to fulfill the goals of his Chinese friends or members of other Asian nations who sought affirmation of race equality, although he was critical of some aspects of its outcome.⁹² Mott's influence over Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference was less than many believed at the time. He never met with Wilson in France. Mott himself enjoyed telling others of his influence with Wilson (and other US presidents), although in at least one instance the over-emphasizing of his relationship with Wilson caused misunderstanding. Ruth Rouse explained to Mott shortly after their May 1920 meeting in Berlin that German leaders had the impression that he was Wilson's "spiritual director." Rouse wrote that there was even a small book circulating in Germany entitled "Jesus at Versailles" portraying Mott's "supposed intimate friendship with Wilson" in this way.⁹³

A year after the end of the Paris Peace Conference the WSCF held a large meeting in Beatenberg, Switzerland where nationalist fervor and internationalist ideals were never far below the surface. Nationalist leaders Chengting Wang (China), S. K. Datta (India), and Michi

⁹¹ For a detailed account of Asian reactions to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 see Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*.

⁹² In 1923 Mott said that he agreed with Jan Smuts's critique made in the closing session of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. In response to former German Chancellor Georg Michaelis's criticisms, Mott noted that Smuts's belief that the treaty had been too harsh toward Germany "voiced some of my own deeper convictions." Letter to Georg Michaelis, 24 January 1923, RG 45 Box 58, Folder 1082.

⁹³ Ruth Rouse, letter to John R. Mott, "Aftermath of Conversations in Berlin, May 25-31," n.d. RG 45, Box 153, Folder 2549.

Kawai (Japan) all served on the new ten-member executive committee that Mott himself chaired and Wang and Kawai co-chaired. Unsurprisingly, much of the conversation at Beatenberg revolved around the post-war context, and it was here that European Student Relief (ESR) began. The ESR was the first truly international and ecumenical relief organization in the world, and it would consume a great deal of the WSCF's energy in the coming years.⁹⁴ The WSCF gathering in Beatenberg comprising representatives from thirty-five countries also affirmed for the first time a very explicit Christian internationalism: The mission of the WSCF was "to bring students of all countries into mutual understanding and sympathy, to lead them to realise that the principles of Jesus Christ should rule in international relationships, and to endeavour by so doing to draw the nations together."⁹⁵

The next WSCF conference was held in Beijing in April of 1922, and the issues of the *Student World* preceding this gathering illustrate the important role the Chinese were increasingly playing in the WSCF. Mott noted in his editorial in January that the entire issue was designed and authored by Chinese representatives. He also acknowledged that WSCF was "too largely occidental," a striking contrast to his 1908 remark that claimed it was as western as it was eastern.⁹⁶

It was not until 1935 that Mott expressed feelings of regret over how China's nationalism had not been appropriately affirmed by western powers at the Paris Peace Conference or earlier. Mott's sense of regret, however, was not specifically focused on his own

⁹⁴ Hartley, "Saving Students: European Student Relief in the Aftermath of World War I."

⁹⁵ Galen Fisher, "The Meeting of the General Committee at St. Beatenberg, July 30-August 7, 1920" *The Student World*, 52, October 1920, 134-35.

⁹⁶ John R. Mott, "Editorial" *The Student World*, vol. 15 no. 1, January 1922; Hans Ruedi Weber, *Asia and the Ecumenical Movement* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 81-90.

actions or lack of diplomatic influence. "Would to God we in America and in Britain, not to mention other countries, had recognized earlier her [China's] complaint and acted upon it as we did upon the similar complaint of Japan in the early years of my traveling life, and righted these unequal treaties."⁹⁷

Mott excelled in encouraging the nationalism among Indian and Chinese leaders through his direct and supportive relationships with them, by facilitating their inclusion on a new Executive Committee at Beatenberg, and by having them write articles for *The Student World*. At the level of policy at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, however, Mott ultimately exerted little political pressure on his friend President Wilson. In a report back to the Foreign Missions Conference of North America about his trip to the Paris Peace Conference, Mott made no mention of his failure (or effort) to influence Wilson on this matter, although he did regret not being able to get language in the League Covenant itself to support religious and missionary liberty in regions where missionaries served.⁹⁸

3. Countering Racism

In Mott's collected papers during his college years are two striking examples of his views on race relations. In April of 1887 Mott was enrolled in a social science class about "Prisons, Reformatories, Pauperism, Insanity, Crime and Vice" which involved field trips to various

⁹⁷ Paul Anderson, "An Interpretation of John Raleigh Mott: An American Christian with World Horizons," unpublished manuscript, 11. Box 42.0057, WCC General Secretariat: General Correspondence, Folder 3, World Council of Churches archives, Geneva, Switzerland.

⁹⁸ "Report to Committee of Reference and Counsel on visit of Drs. J. R. Mott and C. R. Watson to the Paris Peace Conference, March 14 to May 18, 1919." RG 45, Box 97, Folder 1721.

institutions to illustrate these social problems. Mott reported in a letter home that in touring one facility, “I soon classed the men from their appearance into two groups: 1st short, tricky, devilish looking fellows – 2nd dull, course, stupid, brutal appearing beings.”⁹⁹ Mott, like so many of his contemporaries, was expressing a variation of racist phrenological theory popular at the time which made claims about behavior, intelligence, and deviance based on certain physical characteristics.

A year later, Mott gave an address the Easter Sunday prior to his graduation from Cornell where he spoke on the “reflex influence” of foreign missions. He began his Easter address condemning growing materialism in the United States as well as the “indolent, vicious, socialistic classes” of immigrants in large cities and the “Negro within our gates.” In this part of his speech, Mott made a similar racist argument to that found in social gospeler Josiah Strong’s *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Present Crisis* (1885), although Mott does not reference this book specifically.¹⁰⁰

Mott’s racist opinions expressed here were by no means equally applicable for all ethnicities. He was not, for example, critical of Indian Christian leader Pandita Ramabai whom he met in college while Ramabai was on a speaking tour. Nor was he negative in his assessment of the twenty-five Japanese students who joined him at the 1889 Northfield summer student conference.¹⁰¹ Like many of his contemporaries in the late nineteenth century, Mott held to a

⁹⁹ John R. Mott letter to parents, 17 April 1887, RG 45 Box 103 Folder 1805.

¹⁰⁰ Speech notes on reflex influence of foreign missions given in Ithaca, New York, Easter Sunday, 1 April 1888, John R. Mott papers, Box 4, Kautz YMCA, University of Minnesota. Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and its Present Crisis* (New York: The Baker & Taylor Co., 1885).

¹⁰¹ Hopkins, 69.

kind of “hierarchy of races” viewpoint that saw Asians as representative of the more “civilized” of non-white races. In this framework, Africans and African Americans were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy.¹⁰² In order to best gauge Mott’s changing understanding of race relations, I focus mostly on the ways Mott came to recognize the problem of racism toward Africans and African Americans and how his changing views were, at least in part, related to his work in promoting Christian internationalism.

The first African American person with whom Mott related as a peer in his life’s work was William Alphaeus Hunton (1863-1916), the first paid African American YMCA secretary. Originally from Ontario, Canada, Hunton began serving as a YMCA secretary in Norfolk, Virginia in 1888, the same year Mott began also to work full-time for the YMCA.¹⁰³ Hunton joined Mott as a secretary on the YMCA’s International Committee in 1891.

Although opposed to segregation, Hunton shared the gradualist and accommodationist assumptions of African American leaders like Booker T. Washington who believed that segregation would only come to an end as African Americans demonstrated their competence through hard work and practical education at places like the Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes. Mott’s views on race throughout his life were far more in line with Washington’s perspective than those of his rival, W. E. B. Du Bois, who was more critical of white racism and less trusting

¹⁰² Such views were pervasive in several academic fields of study including anthropology (before Boas) and the nascent field of international relations. For a review of how racist constructs informed the new field of international relations before and after World War see Henderson, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism in international relations theory."

¹⁰³ Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955: A Biography*, 625. Johanna Selles, *The Hunton Family: A Narrative of Faith through Generations*, n.d., Emmanuel College, University of Toronto.

of whites' good intentions.¹⁰⁴ Gradualist assumptions with regard to race relations predominated in the YMCA in the early 1900s, and the practice of segregation in the organization persisted until the late 1940s.¹⁰⁵

In spite of YMCA segregationist policies, Mott and Hunton still had the opportunity to get to know one another during International Committee meetings and in gatherings with D. L. Moody and others at Northfield YMCA conferences.¹⁰⁶ Hunton provided remarkable leadership in YMCA work among African Americans, primarily in the American South. In spite of being under-resourced, something Hunton drew to Mott's attention during the 1901-02 school year, African American student involvement in the YMCA more than doubled between 1899 and 1904 to include 5,000 students.¹⁰⁷ Hunton's stature in the Y and in the eyes of Mott also grew. Hunton's successful speech before seven hundred young men at the Tuskegee Institute in 1905, sixty of whom reported converting to Christianity, bolstered his reputation. Mott invited him to

¹⁰⁴ John R. Mott's views on race probably were closest to those of Willis Weatherford, a white, southern, Methodist YMCA leader with whom Mott had a decades-long friendship. Mott asked for Weatherford's thoughts on race in letters and in-person meetings late into his life. Weatherford's tribute to Mott in 1965 conveys the substance of their relationship well. Willis Weatherford, "As I remember him." Unpublished manuscript, John R. Mott papers, Box 1, Kautz Family YMCA Archives; For an excellent recent biography of Weatherford see Andrew McNeill Canady, *Willis Duke Weatherford: Race, Religion, and Reform in the American South* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016).

¹⁰⁵ Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 128. There were, however, important instances of somewhat integrated YMCA meetings in the American South decades earlier. For example, at otherwise-segregated North Carolina YMCA retreat centers in 1912, white and African American representatives spoke at meetings mostly attended by persons of the other race. Ronald C. White, *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 195.

¹⁰⁶ Mjagkij, 38. Addie W. Hunton, *William Alphaeus Hunton: A Pioneer Prophet of Young Men* (New York: Association Press, 1938), 53. Hunton wrote Mott in 1897 requesting financial assistance to enable three to five African American students to attend summer conferences at Northfield and Lake Geneva annually. Letter from Hunton to John R. Mott, 21 December 1897.

¹⁰⁷ David P. Setran, *The College "Y": Student Religion in the Era of Secularization*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 78-79.

address the 1907 WSCF international gathering in Tokyo, Japan.¹⁰⁸ Hunton reported that Mott helped him with this address.¹⁰⁹ Hunton was well-received in Tokyo, which itself was the first truly international conference ever held in an Asian country with a majority of Asian delegates.¹¹⁰

One can only imagine what may have been going through Hunton's mind as he addressed an international audience of over six hundred delegates in Japan. Six months prior to the WSCF gathering in Tokyo, a violent attack of whites against blacks in Atlanta, Georgia occurred that resulted in the deaths of dozens of African Americans. This event prompted southern white YMCA secretary Willis Weatherford to commit himself more seriously to improving race relations. Hunton and Weatherford soon began working together. In April of 1908 the two men gathered with other YMCA secretaries, clergy, and educators to strategize about ways of countering racism in the American South.¹¹¹

Out of this meeting Weatherford agreed to write a book for use by YMCA study groups to promote conversation among students across the country. *Negro Life in the South* was published in 1910.¹¹² Although Weatherford's work was filled with the patronizing assumptions

¹⁰⁸ It is possible that Mott invited Hunton to address the WSCF gathering in Tokyo in 1907 shortly after his return from his first trip to South Africa and South America in August of 1906. This also may have been around the same time as the Atlanta Race Riot in September of 1906. Hunton wrote Mott a letter in October of 1906 noting that his request for a leave of absence from the Colored Men's Department of the YMCA had been approved to enable him to attend the WSCF meeting in Tokyo in 1907. The race riot in Atlanta combined with Mott's visit to South Africa may have influenced Mott's growing conviction that African and African American leadership should be encouraged. Hunton, *William Alphaeus Hunton: A Pioneer Prophet of Young Men*, 53-62. Letter from William Hunton to John R. Mott, 22 October 1906, RG 45, Box 42, Folder 789. For the timeline of Mott's travel schedule see Hopkins, 303.

¹⁰⁹ Hunton, *William Alphaeus Hunton: A Pioneer Prophet of Young Men*, 104.

¹¹⁰ William Alphaeus Hunton, Letter to John R. Mott, 15 April 1907. RG 45, Box 42, Folder 789.

¹¹¹ White, *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel*, 191.

¹¹² Canady, *Willis Duke Weatherford: Race, Religion, and Reform in the American South*, 52.

common among white southerners of his day, the book was instrumental in getting (mostly white) YMCA students talking about race. By 1916 thirty thousand copies had been sold, studied, and discussed by students. The book also was able to garner the significant financial support of Cleveland H. Dodge who was chairperson of the student subcommittee of the YMCA's International Committee.¹¹³ Dodge helped to establish the Race Relationship Fund to sponsor a number of activities and more paid personnel in the YMCA – including African American secretaries – to work on race relations in the American South.

As part of this growing student interest in race relations, Hunton was once again called upon to address the WSCF world gathering in June of 1913 at Lake Mohonk, New York. But this time he was not the lone African American representative; now there were thirteen Black students who joined him at Lake Mohonk.¹¹⁴ Ruth Rouse praised Mott for ensuring the U.S. delegation included African Americans and for endorsing seating arrangements over meals so that “no race or nation could avoid sitting next to its own special stumbling block and the Southern Negro at times found himself next to the Southern white.”¹¹⁵ This move toward racial integration at the Lake Mohonk conference in June of 1913 was a striking contrast to the new segregation policies President Woodrow Wilson approved in the federal government shortly

¹¹³ Canady, *Willis Duke Weatherford: Race, Religion, and Reform in the American South*, 56-58.

¹¹⁴ The choice of Lake Mohonk is significant as well as the conference center was a frequent site for internationalist gatherings as well as conferences to promote better race relations. Jr. Leslie H. Fishel, "The "Negro Question" at Mohonk: Microcosm, Mirage, and Message," *New York History* 74, no. 3 (1993).

¹¹⁵ Ruth Rouse, *John R. Mott: An Appreciation* (Geneva: World's Student Christian Federation, 1929), 11-12. On several occasions Ruth Rouse flagged for Mott the racist problems she saw in their movement. See, for example, criticism of German mission leader Richter's paper for Commission three in Edinburgh 1910 in 2 March 1910 letter to Mott. Rouse on more than one occasion also noted in correspondence with Mott the growing anti-Semitism she witnessed in 1920s Europe.

after his inauguration a few months earlier.¹¹⁶ Mott and Wilson were friends, but on segregation they disagreed.

Hunton's address at Lake Mohonk stressed the importance of interracial relationships for the organization, noting that the year they gathered was the fiftieth anniversary of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (and the centennial of David Livingstone's birth) which had called for the freeing of slaves. According to Addie Hunton, it was at this conference where African Americans in the WSCF first believed they had made a true "step forward" in the organization.¹¹⁷

The African American Christian student movement took another step forward a year later at the Negro Christian Student Conference in Atlanta, one of the first and largest interracial gatherings in the American South.¹¹⁸ Disappointed at the poor turn-out of African Americans at the Student Volunteer Movement meeting in Kansas City in 1913, Mott, Weatherford, and African American leaders gathered to discuss whether a large gathering of black students to promote the cause of foreign missions and improved race relations would be a fruitful venture. Hunton worked with Willis Weatherford in planning this meeting, although

¹¹⁶ Mott also used his influence to ensure that the racist film, "The Birth of a Nation," not be shown in YMCA buildings. Basil Joseph Mathews, *John R. Mott, World Citizen*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1934), 305.

¹¹⁷ Hunton, *William Alpheus Hunton: A Pioneer Prophet of Young Men*, 114-20.

¹¹⁸ Johanna M. Selles, *The World Student Christian Federation, 1895-1925* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 100; Hunton, *William Alpheus Hunton: A Pioneer Prophet of Young Men*, 114-20. Mathews, *John R. Mott, World Citizen*, 304. 595 African Americans and 70 whites were present at this gathering representing 81 different schools.

neither one of them were formally identified in the ten-person planning committee chaired by Mott.¹¹⁹

Early in the organizing process a dispute arose as to the best location for the conference. Mott sided with two white southerners on the committee in the choice of either Tuskegee or Hampton institutes, centers of industrial and agricultural education for African Americans and associated with the work of African American educators Booker T. Washington and Robert R. Moton. Hunton, President John Hope of Morehouse College, and other African American members of the organizing committee thought that this would cause the conference to be too strongly oriented toward only industrial education for African Americans. It was decided that the conference would be held at Clark University in Atlanta, a school where W. E. B. Du Bois had recently taught.¹²⁰

The tone of the 1914 Negro Christian Student Conference in Atlanta was still largely of a conservative nature and thus consistent with the gradualist and accommodationist approach to white racism advocated by Booker T. Washington, Willis Weatherford, William Hunton, and

¹¹⁹A. M. Trawick, ed., *The New Voice in Race Adjustments: Addresses and Reports Presented at the Negro Christian Student Conference, Atlanta, May 14-18 1914* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement, 1914). Weatherford describes the early planning for this conference in Willis Weatherford, "The Colored Young Men's Christian Association, the Interracial Committee and Related Subjects," Unpublished manuscript, National Council of the Young Men's Christian Associations of the United States of America. Colored Work Department. 1919 - 1927. "Subject Files. Commission on Interracial Cooperation: Reports and Background Information, 1919-1927, 1949. (Box 9, Folder 6)." University of Minnesota Libraries, Kautz Family YMCA Archives., Accessed July 23, 2020. <https://umedia.lib.umn.edu/item/p16022coll353:5733>, 28. Ruth Franzen has noted this tendency for Mott to receive credit for things others had done as well. See Ruth Franzen, *Ruth Rouse among Students: Global, Missiological and Ecumenical Perspectives* (Uppsala: Studia Missionalia Svecana CV, 2008), 169.

¹²⁰ Willis Weatherford, "The Colored Young Men's Christian Association, the Interracial Committee and Related Subjects," Unpublished manuscript.

John R. Mott (all four of whom delivered addresses). In an editorial in W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Crisis* magazine, Du Bois criticized this aspect of the Atlanta conference and condemned Mott.

Recently in Atlanta five hundred colored college students met to consider the student volunteer movement. They had been invited, after several years' hesitation, by Mr. John R. Mott, who has been making a desperate attempt for twenty-five years to avoid the "Negro Problem" in his missionary enterprises.¹²¹

Du Bois went on to criticize an unnamed white speaker who counseled African Americans from the platform to "not be bitter" about the state of race relations in America and praised an African American man, William Pickens, who retorted that "Christianity for black men started with the right to vote and nothing less."¹²²

Du Bois's criticisms notwithstanding, the 1913-1914 conferences in Lake Mohonk and Atlanta represented a shift taking place in Mott's life on race relations that began around 1906. He increasingly saw racial conflict as a problem to be taken seriously and healed throughout the world. In Mott's own address at the 1914 Atlanta conference he mostly spoke about the opportunities for Christianity around the world in this time of "rising national and racial aspirations." He only commented on the problem of segregation by dismissing it for pragmatic reasons. The "countless international contacts" throughout the world had made segregation impossible.¹²³ He did not condemn it as morally wrong, however. Mott had made a similar

¹²¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Editorial: Don't be Bitter," *The Crisis*, vol 8 no. 4, August 1914, 180. It was in 1914 that social gospel leader Walter Rauschenbusch also first spoke out against racism, but Du Bois was not critical of him for it. *White, Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel*, 185.

¹²² W. E. B. Du Bois, "Editorial: Don't be Bitter," *The Crisis*, vol 8 no. 4, August 1914, 180. The quotation above is from Du Bois's description of Pickens's remarks and is not a direct quote in Du Bois's editorial. The published proceedings of the Atlanta 1914 conference do not include this quotation by Pickens although the substance of his address is consistent with Du Bois's characterization.

¹²³ Trawick, *The New Voice in Race Adjustments: Addresses and Reports Presented at the Negro Christian Student Conference, Atlanta, May 14-18 1914*, 23.

argument against segregation as early as 1908.¹²⁴ Mott would not consistently oppose such policies even decades later.¹²⁵ And yet, in a letter he sent after the Atlanta conference to Mrs. Emmons Blaine who was providing the funds for Weatherford's salary, Mott confessed that he felt humiliated that he had not been more involved in improving race relations to date and resolved "to make up for lost time."¹²⁶

Other events and relationships in Mott's life in the years leading up to 1914 also influenced his views on improving race relations as integral to the progress of the world Christian movement.¹²⁷ Most important among these events was his visit, together with his wife Leila and Ruth Rouse, to South Africa in the middle of 1906.¹²⁸ It was his first trip to sub-Saharan Africa, and South Africa. In one of his first report letters back to supporters he noted that with the exception of one or two situations in Asia, he had "never encountered a more bafflingly complex situation."¹²⁹ He then recounted the numerous sources of "divisions and rivalries" in the land between Dutch and English, gold and diamond miners, and others. In his first letter he used very negative language to describe indigenous Africans as an "ominous black

¹²⁴ Mott, *Addresses and Papers of John R. Mott: Volume Six: Selected Papers and Addresses on Evangelistic, Spiritual, and Ecumenical Subjects and the Outreach of Life and Influence*, 254.

¹²⁵ I discuss some of these later occurrences in Benjamin L. Hartley, "'That they All May be One': John R. Mott's Contribution to Methodism, Inter-religious Dialogue, and Racial Reconciliation," *Methodist Review* 4 (2012). It is worth noting that according to Weatherford's biographer, he too did not condemn segregationist policies in all circumstances until the 1950s. Canady, *Willis Duke Weatherford: Race, Religion, and Reform in the American South*, 5.

¹²⁶ Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955: A Biography*, 420.

¹²⁷ The scope of this paper does not allow for further discussion of Mott's discussion of race in his *Present World Situation* (1914), or apparent appreciation of the discipline of anthropology. T. Z. Koo also confided in a letter to Mott how his experience of racism in the American west has been so bad as to cause him to doubt the veracity of the Christian faith.

¹²⁸ Rouse even suggests that this trip was a kind of turning point in Mott's work to overcome racism in the movements he led.

¹²⁹ Letter from John R. Mott to supporters (unnamed), 6 June 1906. WSCF Records, RG 46, Box 43, Folder 347.

cloud” comprised of “virile and warlike African tribes.” But his visit to three African schools changed his outlook. He described Lovedale as “the leading native educational center of all Africa” and “one of the most fruitful mission colleges in the non-Christian world. In methods, spirit and reputation, it corresponds in several respects to Tuskegee in America.”

In these report letters it was only with indigenous African educational institutions that he drew positive comparisons between his South African experiences and previous visits to Chinese, Japanese, and Indian contexts.¹³⁰ With regard to the Dutch and English student work, Mott was more focused on the discord present in them and strongly discouraged the movement from segregating along European national identity. Unlike his speech at the Negro Christian Students’ Conference in Atlanta, with South African whites he made an argument against segregation on theological as well as pragmatic grounds.¹³¹

The comparison Mott made between Lovedale in South Africa and the Tuskegee Institute in the United States was not simply for the purposes of relating to the American supporters he was writing. Mott as well as his friend Joseph Oldham both believed that the African American educational centers of Tuskegee and Hampton were models of education which could be used for the furtherance of the Christian movement worldwide. Mott urged that Cambridge University YMCA recruit Oswin Bull visit America to see these schools and speak to African American leaders (including William Hunton) before beginning his work in South

¹³⁰ Letter from John R. Mott to supporters (unnamed), 7 June 1906, WSCF Records, RG 46, Box 43, Folder 347.

¹³¹ John R. Mott, letter to Mr. Naude, June 1906. Ruth Rouse correspondence files, RG 45, Box 77, Folder 1396. The letter to Naude is accompanied by a handwritten note of March 1945 from Rouse noting its importance for Mott’s records on the matter of race relations.

Africa.¹³² Oldham was effusive in his praise of Hampton Institute when he visited it in 1912. Oldham wrote to Mott that “[p]erhaps the greatest experience I have ever had was the two days I spent at Hampton.”¹³³ For years thereafter Oldham believed that these African American educational centers could be the model for similar institutions in Africa, the Near East, and India and even counseled his friend S. K. Datta to visit them.¹³⁴

It is not clear to what extent the events which unfolded in South Africa a few years after Mott’s visit influenced his views on racial conflict as a barrier to Christian internationalism. Dutch and British student discord became worse in the wake of the 1914 Boer rebellion, and racial policies against black South Africans also became more restrictive.¹³⁵ Mott’s extensive correspondence with Oswin Bull before and after World War I is filled with words of encouragement in the face of the conflict Bull experienced in the South African movement between Dutch and English and white and indigenous South Africans.¹³⁶ Bull’s work in South

¹³² Oswin Bull and Mott carried out an extensive correspondence. For a recent analysis of Bull’s work in South Africa see David Anthony, "Oswin Boys Bull and the Emergence of Southern African 'Nonwhite' YMCA Work," *Journal of Anglican Studies* 10, no. 2 (2012).

¹³³ This remark is especially significant since Oldham was far less likely than Mott to exaggerate like this. J. H. Oldham, letter to John R. Mott, 31 October 1912, J. H. Oldham papers, Box 1, Folder 7, New College Edinburgh.

¹³⁴ J. H. Oldham, letter to S. K. Datta, 10 February 1921, J. H. Oldham papers, Box 2, Folder 3, New College Edinburgh. "I can think of no community in west or east among whom the missionary spirit in the best sense is more widespread and intense than among the coloured community in the southern states... The spirit, when one has once felt its power, is something never to be forgotten." Oldham’s views on these schools being well-suited for the Near East is in J. H. Oldham, letter to John R. Mott, 16 August 1913.

¹³⁵ For a brief review of some of these events as they relate to South African student movements of the day see Allen James Goddard, "Invitations to Prophetic Integrity in the Evangelical Spirituality of the Students' Christian Association Discipleship Tradition: 1965-1979" (Ph.D. University of Kwazulu-Natal, 2016), 63-65.

¹³⁶ Anthony, "Oswin Boys Bull and the Emergence of Southern African 'Nonwhite' YMCA Work." Mott’s correspondence with Bull is in the WSCF archives, RG 46, Box 253, Folder 2119.

Africa was clearly important for Mott's future efforts in securing positions for African American YMCA leaders like Max Yergan in South Africa.¹³⁷

Doubtless Mott's correspondence with Bull, Mott's work on race relations in the United States, race riots in the United States in 1919, and expressions of disappointment with the failure of "race equality" from Chinese colleagues during the Paris Peace Conference was all influencing how Mott thought about race. A January 1920 editorial (presumably written by Mott as editor) in the *Student World* expressed Mott's strongest articulation to date of the problem of racism.

Turn our eyes where we may throughout the world, we see friction between different races. Even where Christian influences have been longest at work, the demon of racial antipathy has not been exorcised. Many other evil spirits – religious persecution, slavery, infanticide – have been overcome by the spirit of Christ, but this one still remains unsubdued.¹³⁸

Noting the race riots and violent political upheavals in recent years, Mott in 1920 expressed a measure of sympathy:

As Christians we must recognize all this rude self-assertion and violent striving as the abortive issue of Christian principles. If we and our successors but practice more fully the clear teachings of our Master, there will be no oppressed and exploited races... Those who have long had the full light of Christ, and yet have tolerated racial injustice, are without excuse.¹³⁹

In spite of Mott's admonishments to his readers in *The Student World*, racial injustice remained a persistent "demon" with which Mott battled for years to come. He devoted an

¹³⁷ David Henry Anthony III, "Max Yergan, Marxism, and Mission during the Inter-War Era," *Social Sciences and Missions* 22 (2009 2010); David Henry Anthony III, "Max Yergan Encounters South Africa: Theological Perspectives on Race," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34, no. 3 (2004).

¹³⁸ John R. Mott, "Editorial," *Student World* vol. 13 no. 1, January 1920, 32-33

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

entire issue of *The Student World* to the topic of promoting interracial harmony in July of 1921.¹⁴⁰ In his editorial Mott strongly critiqued recent actions of western countries, noting that “despite the lofty pronouncements made during the World War” the western powers continue to “exploit and oppress conquered or dependent races. The selfish exploitation of the natural resources, the toleration of indentured labour, the denial of liberty of speech and religion are among the offences still being committed by the dominant nations... under the guise of spreading the blessings of a higher civilization.”¹⁴¹

By including authors who work with international students in western countries in the July 1921 issue of *The Student World* Mott implicitly acknowledged a problem that was also in his own student movement. A few years later Mott received a heart-wrenching letter from WSCF colleague T. Z. Koo where he explained how devastating racist actions were for him. Koo shared that his “faith in God and His Goodness” was even in jeopardy because of his experience of racism from Christians outside of China. He even asked to be relieved of his responsibility to serve the WSCF. “If I stay in my own country the risk is not so great. Our people do not profess to be anything but heathen and one’s faith can be kept strong and bright amid these surroundings more easily than otherwise.”¹⁴² Upon receiving this letter Mott immediately wrote back to his friend to encourage him.

¹⁴⁰ John R. Mott, “Interracial Problems and Christian Duty: An Editorial,” *The Student World*, vol 14 no. 3, July 1921, 109. Authors of articles on race relations in this issue included Inazo Nitobe of Japan working for the League of Nations, R. R. Moton of the Tuskegee Institute, Y. Y. Tsu of China (working with Chinese students in America), M. N. Chatterjee of India (working among Indian students in London), K. Kato of Japan (working among Japanese students in America), and W. H. T. Gairdner of Britain and a missionary scholar of Islam working in Egypt.

¹⁴¹ John R. Mott, “Interracial Problems and Christian Duty: An Editorial,” *The Student World*, vol 14 no. 3, July 1921, 110. Mott also mentions in this editorial the findings of anthropologists that “assertions as to racial superiorities are based more on assumption than on science. It is certain that no race is pure: all races have been inextricably mixed in past ages and the process is still going on.”

¹⁴² T. Z. Koo, letter to John R. Mott, 18 April 1923, WSCF archive, RG 46, Box 23, Folder 170.

These examples of Mott's experience with racism in the world Christian movement illustrate that both his exposure to the problem of racism and his hope for its resolution was framed by Mott's internationalist outlook. Like his colleague Willis Weatherford, Mott remained calculating and even compromising on racism more than he was a radical and consistent critic, but the change of perspective between his college years and what he espoused in *The Student World* editorials in the early 1920s is nonetheless remarkable. Mott remained confident, however, that this problem, like so many others, could be solved if people were brought together to talk to one another, learn from one another, and pray together.

4. Conferencing to Promote Internationalism

In describing President Woodrow Wilson's vision for world peace, David Steigerwald argues that Wilson was not a naïve supporter of a "one world" government but remained a nineteenth century nationalist with a confident dream of human progress, of a "cosmopolitan state, which inherently fused people in political union... through a mysterious process of organic development."¹⁴³ This comes close to expressing John R. Mott's internationalist dream as well, with one important exception. In place of a Wilsonian trust in "a mysterious process of organic development," Mott held to an unwavering belief that the act of bringing Christians together through conferences was a way to invite the Holy Spirit to work to bring about powerful experiences of Christian internationalist fellowship.

As a life-long Methodist it is not surprising that some of Mott's most profound spiritual experiences took place during the many conferences he led and in experiences of worship that

¹⁴³ David Steigerwald, "The Reclamation of Woodrow Wilson?," *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 1 (1999): 96.

emphasized the presence of the Holy Spirit in the midst of a gathered body of Christians. The Methodist tradition of camp meetings and the experience of “entire sanctification” that often happened at these meetings was important to Mott.¹⁴⁴ Two of the more important conferences to Mott for many years of his life were the Northfield, Massachusetts gatherings of the YMCA and his annual “Quiet Days” that he would spend with trusted friends. Mott rarely missed these gatherings.

Mott’s love for ecumenical engagement also stems in large part from his love for conferencing. His participation in a Quaker meeting as a twenty-five-year-old YMCA secretary also illustrates how he was drawn to what Methodists call “conferencing.” In a letter home to parents Mott wrote, “Never have I been more conscious of [the Holy Spirit’s] presence than in that meeting.”¹⁴⁵ On the other side of the ecumenical spectrum, the aspect of Eastern Orthodox theology that seems to have been especially important to Mott was what he described as their belief in the communion of saints which included “those joining them in their places of worship and those living all over the world with whom they have fellowship; that is the small part of it. They hold communion with the heavenly host of every age whom no man can number.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Elsewhere I have expanded on the importance of Methodism for John R. Mott. See Hartley, “‘That they All May be One’: John R. Mott’s Contribution to Methodism, Inter-religious Dialogue, and Racial Reconciliation.”

¹⁴⁵ Letter of John R. Mott to parents, 14 March 1890.

¹⁴⁶ John R. Mott address at the memorial service for Fletcher Sims Brockman, November 1944, Fletcher Brockman biographical files, Box 22, Folder 1. Kautz Family YMCA Archives. Another theological theme that emerges in Mott’s writings from at least 1911 through 1944 was that of the “larger Christ.” The concept was perhaps first expressed by George D. Herron in his 1892 book by that title. It became somewhat of a refrain in Mott’s life to express the idea that Christians’ understanding of Christ is growing as Christian fellowship around the world also grows. Mott’s last published book was a variation on this theme, entitled *The Larger Evangelism*.

Another theological idea that served as a kind of refrain extolling the importance of conferencing was what Mott described as “the larger Christ.” First used as the title of George D. Herron’s book in 1892, Mott probably first used the phrase in an address at the WSCF Constantinople conference in 1911.

Some of us may have had a small Christ, assuming, as we may have done, that He has revealed Himself fully to our particular nation or communion. This Conference will show convincingly that our Christ is so great that he requires all of the nations and races of the world through which adequately to reveal His excellencies and communicate His power.¹⁴⁷

Mott continues to make reference to the importance of “the larger Christ” in a similar way as late as the 1940s and at a number of gatherings including the WSCF meeting at Lake Mohonk in 1913 and at a gathering in Scotland in 1930.¹⁴⁸

A belief in the power of conferencing was also something that he shared with trusted colleagues. No one expressed this in a more poignant way than Ruth Rouse in her reflection on the first European Student Relief conference that she helped to organize in 1922 in Turnov, Czechoslovakia.¹⁴⁹ She described the jovial atmosphere of students playing together and the power of fellowship expressed in students’ singing of one another’s folk songs. A Jewish student present at Turnov, Harold Abrahams, expressed the atmosphere best:

I do not believe we ever really understood the meaning of international until we came to Turnov in Czechslovakia [sic]... When one has conversed with a Jugo-Slav in a mixture of English, bad French and worse German, played American volley-ball with students from about ten different nations, combined in an American yell with eighty different countries, and watched a delegate from Great Britain careering [sic] round with an

¹⁴⁷ John R. Mott, “Remarks of the General Secretary at the Opening of the Conference of the Federation at Constantinople, Turkey, 1911,” in *Addresses and Papers of John R. Mott, Vol. 2* (1946), 125.

¹⁴⁸ John R. Mott, “Our Best Days lie in front of us,” Address Delivered at Lake Mohonk, New York, 1913. *Addresses and Papers of John R. Mott, Vol. 2*. (1946); “The Present World Situation,” Address at the Meeting of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1930, *Addresses and Papers of John R. Mott, Vol. 6* (1947), 242.

¹⁴⁹ Mott was not present at this meeting but rather the WSCF gathering in Peking, China at roughly the same time.

excited Japanese on his shoulder – then, and not till then, does the word “international” assume something of its real meaning.¹⁵⁰

These times of joy and laughter were matched at Turnov by moments of profound realization where the WSCF motto, “that they all may be one,” became more than a motto but “a truth, for which life must be laid down.”¹⁵¹

Mott experienced something similar a few years later at the Jerusalem IMC meeting in 1928. As one conference participant recalls the event, the conference was “at loggerheads” over issues of race and secularization. “Dr. Mott asked all the members of the conference to bring a warm rug and a Bible, the next morning, and go up to the Mount of Olives and scatter along the mountain and spend an hour in quiet meditation and prayer. The hour of meditation changed everything, but it took Mott’s wise spiritual leadership to pilot us through.”¹⁵²

Not all of Mott’s colleagues, however, were equally convinced about the value of large conferences for accomplishing the tasks of world mission and ecumenism. In the few years preceding the 1928 Jerusalem Conference, for example, Mott was repeatedly discouraged from continuing to hold large international conferences by J. H. Oldham.¹⁵³ Oldham believed that smaller conferences of experts were more valuable than large gatherings. This conviction led to precisely such a small conference of the “Life and Work” movement at Oxford in 1937 which

¹⁵⁰ Harold M. Abrahams, “Various Impressions of Turnov, April 8th-16th, 1922,” WSCF papers, RG 46, Box 269, Folder 2273. Abrahams went on to become an Olympic medalist in track who was later memorialized in the award-winning film, *Chariots of Fire*.

¹⁵¹ Ruth Rouse, *Rebuilding Europe: The Student Chapter in Post-war Reconstruction* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1925), 194.

¹⁵² Unnamed author, biographical sketches from 1965, John R. Mott papers, Box 1. Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota.

¹⁵³ Letter of J. H. Oldham to John R. Mott, 1 April 1925, RG 45, Box 43, Folder 806. Oldham raises this concern again in a twenty-page letter to Mott where he urges him articulate a fresh vision for the world missionary enterprise if he takes up the invitation to lead the IMC as a matter of more focused concern. Letter of J. H. Oldham to John R. Mott, 5 January 1926, J. H. Oldham papers, Box 3, Folder 7, New College Edinburgh.

Mott helped to organize. Although clearly a successful gathering, the meeting in Oxford in 1937 did not dissuade Mott from continuing to organize large mission gatherings through the IMC.

Mott spent a great deal of time raising funds to ensure the participation of delegates from around the world at the many conferences he organized. Fundraising letters to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and others do not reveal that these financial sponsors shared the skepticism of J. H. Oldham concerning the value of large ecumenical gatherings. The international make-up of the conferences was very gratifying to him because it was at these gatherings where Mott's dream of Christian internationalism came closest to being a tangible reality. In Mott's papers he only expresses a sense of regret over delegate representation at one international gathering, that of Edinburgh 1910.¹⁵⁴

Conclusion

At a centennial celebration of John R. Mott's birth in 1965, World Council of Churches General Secretary W. A. Visser 't Hooft gave a lengthy address in which he reflected on Mott's internationalist contributions.¹⁵⁵

[H]e gave us the vision of the universal dimension and the sense of urgency of our common Christian calling. You see, at that time when he did these things, in 1895 and 1910, there were not many who had any truly universal sense of the Christian task... [I]n a time when especially the West had still that feeling that it was the one really important Christian place and would just pass on its treasures to the rest of the world,

¹⁵⁴ Mott expresses regret at the lack of Asian representation at Edinburgh 1910 prior to the conference in a letter to J. H. Oldham on 16 February 1910. RG 45, Box 63. In a letter to E. T. Colton on 9 April 1928 Mott contrasts the Jerusalem 1928 meeting of the IMC, the "most courageous religious assembly which I have ever attended," with the Edinburgh 1910 gathering where "there were only about a score of Nationals representing these indigenous Churches..." RG 45, Box 16, Folder 295.

¹⁵⁵ Visser 't Hooft's first experience in leading an international Christian gathering was in Turnov, Czechoslovakia, in 1922 at a WSCF conference.

Mott was one of the first to see that it was not like that, that there ought to come a give and take from the Christians of all parts of the world.¹⁵⁶

One aspect of what 't Hooft described as the “give and take” of the world’s Christians involved a careful negotiating of nationalist and internationalist feelings and goals. Mott’s personal style of intense relationality, whether that was through conferencing or in his own conversations with others, was one way this “give and take” happened.

Mott’s varied experience with international conflict, nationalist violence, diplomacy, and racism made it difficult for him to hold to a unified theory on the relationship of nationalism and internationalism. The frequency in which Mott praised nationalist expressions that he witnessed – whether that was in Russia, Poland, India, China, or Japan – suggests that he often saw nationalism as a prerequisite for his internationalist aspirations. But Mott had no theory that guided him in assessing when nationalism became excessive as he most clearly believed it to be in the case of Japan in 1895 or Germany in 1917. He may have even slowly realized that his own nationalistic feelings and actions during the First World War had gone too far. But even if he was self-critical about his own excessive nationalism, he may have seen it as inevitable, or, as Douglas Mackenzie reminded him, as simply his “share in the cross.”

Like Wilson, Mott was a pragmatist in his international organizing, often preferring to keep things unsaid and even ambiguous to avoid conflict and keep organizations together. Mott’s caution in addressing racism discussed in this paper can also be seen in his slowness to correct the ways women were marginalized in student Christian movements because he feared

¹⁵⁶ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, “Transcript (from tape-recording) of Dr. Visser 't Hooft’s speech on the occasion of the John Mott Celebrations, 25 May 1965,” John R. Mott papers, Box 1, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

moving faster would cause division. Ruth Rouse and Leila Mott kept this matter before him, however, and eventually the WSCF began holding joint gatherings of women and men in 1905.¹⁵⁷ When conflict was unavoidable, as in the case with German mission leaders during and after World War I, Mott demonstrated careful diplomacy which was ultimately sufficient to not ostracize the strong German student Christian movement's role in the WSCF or other organizations.

It is striking that so many Christian leaders who were also nationalist leaders in India, China, Japan, and elsewhere never criticized Mott – at least not in the correspondence that has been preserved. This suggests that Mott valued their nationalist strivings even when it made a wider Christian internationalism more difficult. The flags of the great Protestant powers that he saw and commented on at the WSCF's founding in 1895 inspired his internationalism, and he was able to empathize with other student leaders' nationalism believing that it too could be harnessed for internationalist goals. This was most obviously on display at student conferences when nationalist leaders representing countries (like Japan and China) who were recently at war with one another still came together in common cause around the world Christian student movement.

¹⁵⁷ In correspondence with Karl Fries in 1900, Mott was mostly interested in avoiding the question of women's involvement in the WSCF. "I think that under the circumstances it may be best for us this year not to have present any women delegates. As we are to report on the women question and decide on the policy for the Federation this year, no one can seriously object to this position." Letter from Mott to Karl Fries, 2 March 1900, RG 46, Box 20, Folder 153. See also Franzen, *Ruth Rouse among Students: Global, Missiological and Ecumenical Perspectives*, 153, 67. For years after this, however, Rouse continued to work tirelessly in the world student movement and was frequently under-appreciated. Her leadership in the European Student Relief organization is perhaps most noteworthy in this regard.

Mott's evolution from a college student who made racist remarks to an advocate for improving race relations is the most dramatic example of how Mott changed as a Christian internationalist. Later in his life Mott was much more willing to criticize both Western political leaders and acknowledge the ways the organizations he led were not yet living up to their ideals. In 1908 Mott proclaimed that the WSCF was as much of an eastern student organization as it was a western one, but by the 1920s Mott could not and did not say that. Conflict in the YMCA and WSCF over racism in Indian, Chinese, South African, and American contexts revealed for Mott how much further Christian internationalist organizations had to go before racism and excessive nationalisms were defeated.

The extent to which Mott believed in the power of conferences to promote Christian internationalism illustrates both the strength and the weakness of his vision for Christian internationalism. Large conferences drawing together hundreds or even thousands of Christian students from dozens of countries was inspiring to him and many others. Their episodic nature, however, and the challenge of keeping nationalism and racism in check after the conference attendees disbursed illustrated the limitations of Mott's vision as well.