# John R. Mott Biography

## John R. Mott

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# Biography

John R. Mott (1865-1955), American ecumenical pioneer and official of the Young Men's Christian Association, was the foremost Protestant layman of his time.

John R. Mott grew up in Iowa in a home warmed by Methodist evangelical piety. He went to Cornell University, where he was caught up in the foreign-missionary enthusiasm among students. Elected president of the Cornell Christian Union, he developed it into the largest and best-organized student religious society in the world.

Mott graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1888 and accepted a traveling secretary's position with the national student Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Welding the associations of the United States and Canada into a strong movement, he emerged as an outstanding organizer and leader. During his chairmanship of the Student Volunteer Movement (until 1920) over 8,000 volunteers were sent abroad.

Mott's most creative achievement was his founding of the World's Student Christian Federation (1895), on whose behalf he journeyed to the Orient and Australasia; in 21 months he organized 70 associations and 5 indigenous national movements. Federation fellowship and conferences realized Mott's dreams of a universal Christian student brotherhood.

The chairmanship of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910 earned Mott universal recognition as the Protestant world's leading missionary statesman. In 1912-1913 he traveled around the world in behalf of missionary cooperation. From 1915 to 1928 he was general secretary of the American YMCA. During World War I he traveled behind the lines on both sides in the interest of YMCA and church-sponsored work. He was personally responsible for the successful postarmistice campaign that raised the largest sum ever subscribed for war relief.

In the 1920s Mott began to turn his attention more to the worldwide concerns of the International Missionary Council, the World's Alliance of the YMCAs, and the effort to bring Orthodox churches into ecumenical fellowship. His chairmanship of the American committee for a world council of churches was highly influential. In pursuit of a unified Christian world Mott rejected appointments as ambassador or university president to raise millions of dollars and travel almost 2 million miles. He was awarded seven honorary degrees, the Nobel Peace Prize, the Distinguished Service Medal, and numerous other decorations. In 1948 he was elected the first honorary president of the new World Council of Churches.