

was over, and with the leadership of Norman Grubb the mission got a fresh start—though never to forget the tireless dedication of the mission’s founder, C. T. Studd.

What went wrong? How could one of Britain’s most prestigious young missionaries come to such an end? Certainly the intensity of his dedication contributed to his downfall—an intensity that was characteristic of the student volunteers. “We do need to be intense,” wrote Studd, “and our intensity must ever increase.”¹⁵ But it was that intensity, viewed by many as “fanaticism” or “extremism,” that brought him down. C. T. often referred to himself as a “Gambler for God.” But it could be said that he gambled and lost.

Following C. T. Studd’s death in 1931, Norman Grubb became the director of the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade. Four years later he went through his dark night of the soul.

I HAD begun to have a thirst for enlarged understanding and deeper reading, the kind of student mentality I should have had fifteen years before. I could only be a dabbler in my busy life, but one book I picked up was William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience*. It hit me like a boxer’s knock-out blow. That itself is an evidence of my immaturity in thinking things through; for as I read the psychological explanation of Paul’s conversion on the road at Damascus, it suddenly struck me that perhaps this was only some inner change in Paul’s psychological make-up, and that there is no reason to postulate a divine revelation; and that perhaps there really is no God—just the human race. I don’t think James himself meant this if I had gone on to finish the book; but here was I, a missionary of fifteen years’ standing, and a secretary of a missionary society, and I was questioning the existence of God.... Life blanked out on me.... I did try once to speak at a meeting for which I was booked, and it was simply hell—to speak of one whose existence I was doubting.... By the end of a year the mist had cleared. I can’t exactly say how except that it was while I was reading John of the Cross’s *Assent of Mount Carmel*, and the result has been worth all the agony of that year.”

(Norman Grubb, *Once Caught, No Escape: My Life Story*)

In the years after Studd’s death, the World Evangelization Crusade grew steadily, and by the 1970s it was reaching all over the globe with more than five hundred missionaries—among them the noted doctor Helen Roseveare, who began her service in Ibambi where Studd himself served. In analyzing the phenomenal comeback of the WEC, it would be difficult to overestimate the leadership of Norman Grubb, a man possessed of a rare honesty in admitting his own shortcomings and who, though a relentless defender of his father-in-law, was wise enough to recognize his flaws and to learn from them.

[John R. Mott](#)

While C. T. Studd and his fellow classmates of the “Cambridge Seven” captured world attention as student missionary volunteers, John R. Mott, perhaps more than any other individual, influenced the surge of students into overseas missions in the decades that followed. Though a layman and never an actual missionary in the strictest sense of the word, his influence was enormous. His role model was David Livingstone, “whose heroic, Christlike achievements,” in the words of Mott, “furnished the governing missionary

motive of my life.”¹⁶ Like so many of the student volunteers, Mott passed over opportunities of wealth and prestige in his commitment to world evangelism. He declined diplomatic posts and opportunities for financial gain, but he could not elude fame. He was a friend and counselor of presidents, a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, and one of the most influential world religious leaders of the twentieth century.

Mott was born and raised in Iowa, the son of a prosperous lumber merchant. He was converted as a youth and became active in the local Methodist church. In 1881, at the age of sixteen, he left home to attend Upper Iowa University, where he became a charter member of the YMCA, an international organization then committed to Christian evangelism. He then transferred to Cornell, where he studied political science and history. There, under the preaching of J. E. K. Studd, he underwent a life-changing experience, committing himself to evangelism. J. E. K. Studd, the brother of C. T., had come to the United States to tour university campuses at the invitation of D. L. Moody and YMCA leaders. According to Mott’s biographer, it was hoped that Studd “would attract students to hear his missionary message and description of the ‘Cambridge Seven’ who had rejected status and wealth to volunteer for foreign missions.”¹⁷

Although Studd emphasized missions, Mott did not personally commit himself to the cause until the following summer, when he attended the first Christian Student Conference at Mount Hermon, Massachusetts (sponsored by D. L. Moody and later held at the nearby Northfield conference grounds). As a delegate from Cornell, along with some two hundred and fifty other students from nearly one hundred colleges and universities, he spent a month under the tutelage of Moody and other Bible teachers. On the last day of the conference, Robert Wilder, a missions enthusiast from Princeton, presented a missionary challenge that turned into an aggressive appeal for personal commitment. As a result, one hundred students, later dubbed the “Mount Hermon Hundred,” signed the “Princeton Pledge” (“I purpose, God willing, to become a foreign missionary”) that would soon become the initiation oath into the Student Volunteer Movement. Mott was among the one hundred who signed, and that meeting was the beginning of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (officially organized in 1888), an organization that he would lead for more than thirty years.

Following this meeting, Wilder, at the encouragement of Moody and others, began a tour of college campuses to make his challenge nationwide. With his emotional appeal, his urgent slogan (“The Evangelization of the World in This Generation”), and his “Princeton Pledge,” he provided the impetus for the movement. Wilder had grown up in India with his missionary parents. His concern to motivate students was inspired in part by his father, who had been a member of the “Society of the Brethren” at Andover, a missions-oriented club that had originated in 1806 with Samuel Mills and the Haystack Group (an informal mission fraternity formed while waiting out a thunderstorm). Following his tour, Wilder returned to India to work with students, while Mott and others took over the leadership on the home front.

As a leader and organizer of the SVM, Mott confronted an enormous task, especially if the movement’s slogan was to be taken seriously. He was determined to mobilize thousands of students to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. He was convinced that the SVM was uniquely suited to carry out this task because the movement encompassed young adults from a wide spectrum of religious backgrounds.

Closely associated with Mott’s activities with the SVM were his activities with the YMCA, an organization he served for more than forty years, sixteen of them as general secretary. In these capacities travel became a way of life, and as soon as one world tour was over, he was already planning for another. As he traveled, he worked with resident missionaries as well as international students and sought to develop a worldwide network of unified missionary activity. In realizing this goal, he helped to organize the World

Student Christian Federation, a loose international organization of Christian students that under his leadership grew to include societies in some three thousand schools.

One of the most receptive areas for Mott's appeal to students was China, among the literati, "the scholars of that great land of scholars." During his first tour of that country in 1896, the prospects for reaching that class seemed dim, but according to Mott, the atmosphere soon changed:

Five years later the walls of Jericho were beginning to crumble.... The ancient literati were beginning to give way to the modern literati.... When I reached Canton, I found to my surprise that they had hired the largest theater in China, a building that holds thirty-five hundred people. On the night of the first meeting as we neared the theater, I saw crowds in the streets and asked, "Why do they not open the doors?" Someone came to tell us that the doors had been opened for an hour and that every seat was taken.... On the platform were about fifty of the leading educated Chinese of Canton, many of them young men who had studied in Tokyo and in American universities.¹⁸

By the time the series of meetings was over, more than eight hundred had become "inquirers," and within a month nearly one hundred and fifty of those "had been baptized or were preparing for baptism." In two other Chinese cities where Mott conducted meetings, he received a similar response.¹⁹

The highlight of Mott's career as a missionary statesman was the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, which he organized and chaired. This ten-day conference, composed of 1,355 delegates, was the first interdenominational missionary conference of its kind and became the impetus for the ecumenical movement that took shape in the decades that followed. The conference was a high point of missionary enthusiasm; and the call to evangelize the world "in this generation" was still in the air. With some forty-five thousand missionaries on the field and the prediction that the number might be tripled in the next thirty years, delegates were optimistic about the prospects for world evangelization.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

	1900	1910	1920	1930
BLACK AFRICA		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1910) C. T. Studd arrives in Africa • (1915) Death of Mary Slesor • (1913) Schweitzer arrives in Africa 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1928) Carl Becker sails for the Congo • (1931) Death of C. T. Studd
THE FAR EAST AND PACIFIC ISLANDS		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1905) Martyrdom of Eleanor Chestnut • (1907) Goforth begins revival ministry in Korea and Manchuria 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1930) Gladys Aylward • (1932) Martyrdom • (1934) Martyrdom of the Stans
LATIN AMERICA			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1917) W. C. Townsend arrives in Guatemala • (1929) Townsend completed Cakchiquel NT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1931) HCJB begins broadcast from Quito • (1936)
THE NEAR EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND CENTRAL ASIA		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1900) Ida Scudder begins medical work in India • (1901) Maude Cary sails to Morocco • (1907) E. Stanley Jones arrives in India 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1912) Zwemer begins work in Cairo • (1918) Ida Scudder founds Vellore Medical College 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1928) Jerusalem World • (1933) Death • (1938)
EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1908) Grenfell rescued from drifting ice • (1910) Edinburgh Missionary Conference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1920) SVM Des Moines Convention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1932) <i>Rethinking</i> • (1934) • (1939)

1940	1950	1960	1970	1980
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1953) Helen Roseveare arrives in the Congo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1960) Congo independence (1964) Simba rebellion (1964) Death of Paul Carlson (1964) Attack on Kilometer Eight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1977) Festo Kivengere escapes Uganda
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> goes to China of eleven TEAM missionaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1948) FEBC begins broadcasting in Manila (1945) Death of R. A. Jaffray in Japanese prison camp (1945) Death of Eric Liddell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1954) Myron Bromley enters Balim Valley (1958) Cho begins tent ministry in Korea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1962) Don Richardson arrives in Irian Jaya (1962) Capture of Mitchell, Gerber, and Vietti (1968) Death of Betty Olsen 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1941) Walter Herron begins aviation ministry (1943) Martyrdom of five New Tribes missionaries in Bolivia Ken Pike begins work in Mexico 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1948) Nate Saint arrives in Ecuador 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1956) Auca massacre (1956) Marianna Slocum completes Tzeltal NT (1957) Rachel Saint and Dayuma tour U.S. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1964) TWR broadcasts from Bonaire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1981) Martyrdom of Chet Bitterman
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Missionary Conference of Johanna Veenstra Madras World Missionary Conference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1951) Death of Amy Carmichael 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1962) Viggo Olsen arrives in East Pakistan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1967) Morocco closed to missionaries (1972) JAARS crash in New Guinea (1973) Death of E. Stanley Jones 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1942) Founding of New Tribes Mission (1945) Founding of MAF Missions published Founding of Summer Institute of Linguistics Joy Ridderhof founds Gospel Recordings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1946) First triennial "Urbana" Missionary Convention held by IVCF in Toronto (1950) Founding of World Vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1954) Founding of Trans World Radio (1955) Death of Mott 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1974) Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization (1976) Founding of the U.S. Center for World Mission 	

But in the years following Edinburgh, interest in missions waned in most mainline denominations. The 1920 annual meeting of the SVM in Des Moines was tension-filled. Here, according to C. Howard Hopkins, it began the process of “correcting that fateful fascination with ... the Orient that had hypnotized their forebears and sent them off to China” far away from “the slums of Chicago or the injustices of sweated labor.” The focus for the future would be “the visible pressing social maladjustments at hand rather than ‘traditional questions of missionary work.’”²⁰

Mott had all along stressed the social dimensions of world evangelism, but never to the extent of making it a primary focus. Yet he was forced to come to terms with the “social gospel shift” that was emerging in missions. Social service, he insisted, is “one of the most distinctive calls of our generation,” and one intrinsically tied to personal evangelism: “There are not two gospels, one social and one individual. There is but one Christ who lived, died, and rose again, and relates himself to the lives of men. He is the Savior of the individual and the one sufficient Power to transform his environment and relationships.”²¹

It was Mott’s more traditional stance that led to his declining influence during the last years of the SVM. The younger generation was more concerned with social problems on the home front. There were others who criticized Mott as well. His name was associated with the Laymen’s Foreign Missions Inquiry and its report, *Rethinking Missions*, and for that reason he was viewed by some as having become too open and progressive in his mission outlook. That report sought to redefine the aim of missions: “To see the best in other religions, to help the adherents of those religions to discover, or to rediscover, all the

best in their own traditions, to cooperate with the most active and vigorous elements in the other traditions in social reform and in the purification of religious expression. The aim should not be conversion.”²² Although Mott acknowledged the value of the inquiry and subsequent report, it clearly did not reflect his own position. Throughout his life he viewed conversion of non-Christians to be the most important aim of missions.

The last years of Mott’s life were filled with activities at home and abroad. He took part in the formation of the World Council of Churches, an organization he believed could strengthen the influence of Christianity in the world. Though he sought to remain above the bitter fundamentalist-modernist debate, he, along with Robert Speer, became a target for criticism among fundamentalists.



John R. Mott at the Whitby World Conference meeting in 1947.

Throughout his life, despite all his travels, Mott remained a strong family man. Leila, his wife of sixty-two years, traveled and worked with him, often speaking to groups of college women and ministering to women missionaries all over the world. Her death in 1952, at the age of eighty-six, came as a heavy blow to Mott, but he continued his travel in behalf of world evangelism without her. In 1953, at the age of eighty-eight, he remarried, and in 1954 he made his final public appearance at the World Council of Churches assembly in Evanston, Illinois. But his traveling days were not over. “Death,” he told a reporter, “is a place where I change trains.” He made that transfer on January 31, 1955.

Robert E. Speer

A close associate and lifelong friend of Mott and a man described as “the incarnation of the spirit of the Student Volunteer Movement” was Robert E. Speer, who, like Mott, served the foreign missionary cause as a layman. Unlike Mott, his ministry was dedicated largely to a single denomination—the Presbyterian Church—serving for forty-six years as the Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions. The Presbyterian Church was one of the most fervent of the mainline denominations in its missionary zeal, and Speer’s own enthusiasm for foreign missions only enhanced the church’s stand. Though Speer was a highly respected and popular figure within his own denomination and in ecumenical circles, his ministry spanned a stormy period of his denomination’s history; and despite his