



*The Evangelization of the World in This Generation*  
John R. Mott (1900)

*John Mott was a white American and a Methodist in the holiness tradition. He became a leader in international Christian ecumenical movements of the early 20th century, for which work he received a Nobel Peace Prize. He wrote this book early in his career, while he was associated with the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (abbreviated SVM), a nondenominational organization connected to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The SVM recruited college students in the United States and Canada to become career missionaries. In 1895-97, Mott toured Europe, the Ottoman empire, British-ruled India and Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, and the Republic of Hawaii; as he traveled, he formed a global network of SVM-like organizations, the World Student Christian Federation. The following selections show Mott's bullishness on missionaries' prospects for "enthroning Jesus Christ as King among all nations and races."*

*[“An unprecedented development of missionary activity”]*

The closing years of the nineteenth century have witnessed in all parts of Protestant Christendom an unprecedented development of missionary life and activity among young men and young women. A remarkable manifestation of this interest in the extension of the kingdom of Christ has been among students. The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, taking its rise at a conference of American and Canadian students in 1886, has spread from land to land until it has now assumed an organized form in all Protestant countries. It has been transplanted even to the colleges of mission lands, so that today the Christian students of the Occident and the Orient, of the northern and the southern hemispheres, are united in the sublime purpose of enthroning Jesus Christ as King among all nations and races of men. The reality of their consecration is proved by the fact that during the past decade over two thousand of them, after completing a thorough college or university preparation, have gone out from North America and Europe under the regular missionary societies of the church to work in non-Christian lands. A still larger number are equipping themselves for similar service abroad.

In several countries—notably in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Ireland—the members of this movement have adopted as their watchword: “The evangelization of the world in this generation.” [...] This idea is taking strong hold, also, on a multitude of other men and women. Eminent leaders of the various branches of the church of Christ, both in Christian lands and on the mission field, have endorsed the watchword and have urged the desirability of its adoption by all Christians as expressive of an inspiring ideal as well as of a primary and urgent duty.

[...] It is important that we clearly understand at the outset what is meant by “the evangelization of the world in this generation.” It means to give all men an adequate opportunity to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and to become his real disciples. This involves such a distribution of missionary agencies as will make the knowledge of the gospel accessible to all men. [...] It does not mean the conversion of the world within the generation. [...] We have no warrant for believing that all who have the gospel preached unto them will accept it. [...] It [also] does not

signify the Christianization of the world, if by that is meant the permeating of the world with Christian ideas and the dominance of the principles of Christian civilization in all parts of the world. If we may judge by history, that would require centuries. Of what country today can it be said that it is governed by the principles of Jesus Christ? [...]

[*“The principal methods of missionary work”*]

A clearer understanding of the subject will be gained by considering the relation of the principal methods of missionary work to the enterprise of worldwide evangelization. These are educational, literary, medical, and evangelistic. These methods must not be regarded as antagonistic to one another. On the contrary, where their true relationship is recognized and maintained, they support and strengthen each other. Each is indispensable to the common object of world evangelization. [...]

Educational work sustains a vital relation to [the work] of evangelization. In some parts of the world, more people have been led to accept Christ through educational missionary effort than through any other agency. George Bowen<sup>a</sup> maintained that a majority of all converts in western India were the result of educational work. Mission schools have been the most successful agency in reaching certain classes—for example, the higher castes in India. One of the few ways of bringing a knowledge of Christ to Mohammedans, as in Egypt and India, has been through education. This also has been one of the chief forces in opening the zenanas to women missionaries. In Japan, mission schools proved to be as much an entering wedge as did medical work in China. Education has done more than any other agency to undermine heathen superstitions and false systems of belief, thus facilitating the work of preaching the gospel by removing false ideas which already had possession of the mind. [...]

Literary missionary work is of very great value in promoting evangelization [...] Without the translation of the Bible into the various vernaculars and without the development of Christian literature in them, it would be impossible to diffuse the knowledge of the gospel throughout the world in a generation. Vernacular Christian literature—especially of a practical, spiritual, and energizing kind—is also of great service, both in spreading the knowledge of the gospel and in building up Christian character.

Medical work also constitutes a necessary factor in the great work of evangelizing the world. It affords access to all classes of people, the highest as well as the lowest. It disarms hostility and breaks down prejudices and barriers, thus making possible the preaching of the gospel in communities otherwise inaccessible. Mrs. Isabella Bird Bishop<sup>b</sup> reports that in Central Asia she found fanatical Mohammedan tribes who, when asked whether they would receive a resident missionary, invariably replied that they would do so if he were a doctor. Medical missionary work is an incontrovertible evidence of Christianity and of the power of the gospel. The ministry

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<sup>a</sup> A white American Protestant who, during the 1850s-1880s, worked as a missionary in British-ruled Bombay (present-day Mumbai).

<sup>b</sup> A widely traveled English explorer and one of the first women to be inducted as fellows of Britain's Royal Geographical Society. Mott is alluding here to a trip that Bird made in 1890 through Kurdistan.

of healing also wins the heart and thus gives acceptance and added meaning and power to the message of salvation. [...T]he pervading and controlling aim in all the work [...] should be evangelistic. Where this is not the case, it is a misnomer to speak of the physician as a medical missionary. The true medical missionary will constantly commend the gospel to his patients, by word as well as by deed, and will be satisfied with no lower aim than that of winning them to Christ. [...]

While the missionary enterprise should not be diverted from the immediate and controlling aim of preaching the gospel where Christ has not been named, and while this work should have the right of way as the most urgent part of our task, it must ever be looked upon as but a means to the mighty and inspiring object of enthroning Christ in individual life, in family life, in social life, in national life, in international relations, in every relationship of mankind; and, to this end, of planting and developing in all non-Christian lands self-supporting, self-directing, and self-propagating churches which shall become so thoroughly rooted in the convictions and hearts of the people that if Christianity were to die out in Europe and America, it would abide in purity and as a missionary power in its new homes and would live on through the centuries.

*[“All this adds to our responsibility”]*

[...] The need of the non-Christian world is indescribably great. Hundreds of millions are today living in ignorance and darkness, steeped in idolatry, superstition, degradation, and corruption. Reflect on the desolating and cruel evils which are making such fearful ravages among them. See under what a burden of sin and sorrow and suffering they live. [...] No one who has seen the actual conditions can question that they who are without God are also without hope. The non-Christian religions may be judged by their fruits. While they furnish some moral principles and precepts of value, they do not afford adequate standards and motives by which rightly to guide the life, nor power to enable one to take the step between knowing duty and doing it. [...] All other religions have failed to do what Christianity has done and is doing as a regenerating power in the individual and as a transforming force in society. [...]

Our generation is [...] one of marvelous opportunity. The world is better known and more accessible, its needs more articulate and intelligible, and our ability to go into all the world with the gospel is much greater than in any preceding generation. All this adds to our responsibility.

The forces of evil are not deferring their operations to the next generation. With worldwide enterprise and with ceaseless vigor, they are seeking to accomplish their deadly work in this generation. This is true not only of the dire influences which have been at work in the unevangelized nations for centuries, but also of those [influences] which have come from so-called Christian lands. By the liquor traffic, by the opium trade, and by the licentious lives and gambling habits of some of our countrymen, we have greatly increased the misery and woe of the heathen. All non-Christian nations are being brought under the influences of the material civilization of the West, and these may easily work their injury unless controlled by the power of pure religion. The evangelization of the world in this generation is not, therefore, merely a matter of buying up the opportunity, but of helping to neutralize and supplant the effects of the sins of our own peoples.

Because of the infinite need of men without Christ; because of the possibilities of men of every race and condition who take Christ as the Lord of their lives; because of the command of our Lord, which has acquired added force as a result of nineteen centuries of discovery, of opening of doors, [and] of experience of the Christian church; because of the shameful neglect of the past; because of the impending crisis and the urgency of the situation in all parts of the non-Christian world; because of the opportunity for a greatly accelerated movement in the present; because of the danger of neglecting to enter upon a great onward movement; because of the constraining memories of the cross of Christ and the love wherewith he loved us, it is the solemn duty of the Christians of this generation to do their utmost to evangelize the world.

**Source:** John R. Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1900), chaps. 1-2, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/cool.ark:/13960/t53f5bd1g>. Public domain.

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The SVM watchword, which appears in title case in the source publication, has been downcased here and enclosed in quotation marks. The word *watchword*, inconsistently capitalized in the source, and the word *movement*, capitalized in the source as a shortened reference to the SVM, have also been downcased here, along with several religious or geographical terms that were capitalized in the source: divine pronouns, *kingdom*, *church*, *gospel*, *cross*, *northern and southern hemispheres*, and *western India*. However, the title *King* (applied to Jesus) and the regional names *the Occident*, *the Orient*, and *the West* are capitalized here as in the source publication. *Zenana* is left unitalicized here as in the source. The expression “*on* the mission field” (instead of “*in* the mission field”) replicates the source.

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