



*The American and Canadian Students in Relation to the
Worldwide Expansion of Christianity*
Student Volunteer Movement (1914)

The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (abbreviated SVM) was a nondenominational Protestant organization founded in the United States in the late 1880s. The organization recruited college students in the United States and Canada to become career missionaries. At the beginning of 1914, the SVM held its seventh international convention. Over 3000 student delegates, mostly white Americans from colleges across the nation, gathered in Kansas City to hear speeches on the progress and challenges of Protestant missions in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and southern and eastern Asia; among the invited speakers were Chinese and Japanese Protestants.

Presented here are excerpts from a report delivered to the convention by the SVM's executive committee. The report was read by committee chair John Mott, a white American Methodist in the holiness tradition; in 1946, Mott would be awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for his international leadership of the SVM and a related movement, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). In these excerpts, the committee calls the SVM not only to continue supporting foreign missions but also to work for Christian domination of colleges and universities within North America, state institutions included. For both of those objectives—the worldwide expansion of Christianity and Christian dominance of higher education in North America—the SVM report uses the language of warfare and conquest. In addition to being published as part of the convention proceedings, the executive committee's report was distributed by the SVM as a stand-alone publication; it is from the stand-alone version that this text is taken.

The distinctive purpose of the Student Volunteer Movement is to secure student volunteers who will actually go forth from the United States and Canada and spend their lives in non-Christian lands in the work of establishing Christ's kingdom. [...W]ithin the lifetime of the Movement, 5,882 of its members have [...] gone out to the foreign field under the auspices of more than seventy missionary agencies [...] It is interesting to note that nearly twice as many student volunteers have gone out from the United States and Canada during the last four years as from the universities and colleges of all of the other Christian nations combined. [...]

[“Missionary giving in the colleges”]

From its earliest days, the Student Volunteer Movement has emphasized the financial responsibility of undergraduates. It has believed that it is literally true that where one's treasure is, there one's heart is also. During the last year, the colleges and seminaries secured \$220,804 for missionary objects, of which about one half was contributed by the students themselves, and the rest was secured by them from the professors and immediate friends. [...] Over one hundred institutions are each subscribing \$300 or more. Among the institutions which are giving most largely are Yale, Princeton, the University of Toronto, the University of Pennsylvania, Oberlin, the University of Michigan, and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. [...] The institutions which have had a mission station, a college, a missionary, or some other special object to support have kept up their giving steadily and, as a rule, have increased their annual gifts; but those which have not had such special objects have been more spasmodic in their giving and, in several cases, have even ceased to make missionary gifts. [...]

The chief value of missionary giving in the colleges and seminaries is seen not so much in the amount of money which is thus obtained for the missionary cause, although this now represents the equivalent of the support of possibly 150 missionaries, as in the influence which this practice exerts upon the future attitude and activities of the students. Among their number are not a few of the sons and daughters of the wealthy. These will someday inherit and administer vast sums of money, which, if related to the plans of the expanding kingdom of Christ, may accomplish untold good. Others will someday, through their own efforts, be in a position to wield large financial power and, as a result of the habit formed in student days, will use this power in furthering the missionary work of the church. [...]

[“Influence on the religious life of students”]

While concentrating all its attention and energy upon its direct propaganda, the Student Volunteer Movement has had a profound reflex influence on the religious life of the students of the universities and colleges of North America. [...] Who can estimate the influence of the Movement in maintaining and extending the influence of the Christian faith in our universities? Without doubt, it has exerted a profound apologetic influence. This it has done through acquainting men with Christianity as a present-day, vital, worldwide, triumphant force. It has done so also by showing through its [mission study classes] not only the total inadequacy of the non-Christian religions but also the absolute sufficiency of pure Christianity. It is well to remember that only a Christianity powerful enough to conquer the minds and hearts of the followers of the non-Christian religions in Asia and Africa can show itself able to meet the deepest needs in the lives of the students of North America. Moreover, the influence of the example of the volunteers, thinking enough of their own religion to go forth with conviction to propagate it in the very homes of the non-Christian religions, is in itself an apologetic of the very highest order and has been used by God to lead many an open-minded and honest unbelieving student to investigate afresh the claims of Christianity and to yield to these claims.

The student missionary uprising has been a mighty help in the direction of counteracting the perils of our modern college life. At a time when growing luxury, self-indulgence, and the tendency to softness are manifesting themselves in our colleges, it is well that we have a Movement which makes such an appeal to the heroic, which summons men to such a stern and rugged self-discipline, and which assigns to them such stupendous tasks. [...]

[“We should augment the number in study classes”]

We have not yet begun to realize the missionary possibilities of the institutions of higher learning in North America. [...] The state universities and other higher educational institutions under government control should be made, far more largely than at present, missionary strongholds and propagating centers. This class of institutions includes a majority of the largest universities. The number of students in them is increasing much more rapidly than in the denominational colleges. [...] Most of the state institutions are still in a plastic condition, owing to their comparative youth and rapid growth. It is not difficult, therefore, to influence them profoundly with the missionary ideal. [...] As these are government universities and not under the supervision and control of the churches, the Student Volunteer Movement and the related association movements^a are under

^a That is, YMCAs and YWCAs, Christian organizations which were already operating at US and Canadian

special obligation to give them the missionary outlook, to cultivate in them the missionary spirit, and to call forth from them missionary recruits. [...]

For every reason, [we should now initiate] the greatest advance in mission study ever made in the institutions of North America. We should augment the number in study classes, literally by the tens of thousands. What reasons were there which influenced the 40,000 who engaged in such study last year that do not apply, with equal force, to the over 100,000 other Christian students who are not now identified with these classes? [...] The statistics show that of the total number enlisted in mission study in the colleges, three-fifths are women students. As the number of men students in both the United States and Canada exceeds the number of women students, it suggests that far greater emphasis than heretofore must be placed on pressing this propaganda among the men students. [...]

[“Students from non-Christian countries”]

[...W]e would call attention to the presence, in our North American institutions of higher learning, of the large and increasing number of students from Oriental and other non-Christian countries. These student migrations bid fair to increase in volume. The students who have thus come among us will, on their return to their native lands, wield an unusually large influence. This is particularly true of those coming from lands like China, which are in such a plastic condition and which are now adopting the Western civilization. The members of the Student Volunteer Movement [...] should interest themselves, in the most genuine and wholehearted manner, in these students, who are to become the leaders of tomorrow in their important nations. We should befriend them in every way in our power, seeking to facilitate their plans and to render them practical service. We should see that they are exposed fully to the best side of our civilization and are led to understand clearly that what they most admire, and we most value, in our national and social life is traceable to the principles and spirit of pure Christianity, and that the things about our civilization which most displease them, as well as ourselves, are due not to Jesus Christ but to the lack of Jesus Christ. We should lead them to investigate thoroughly the teachings of our religion and especially the life and work of Christ himself. We should seek to guide them into a reasonable and vital faith in the living Christ and should pray that an increasing number of them may devote their lives to the service of Christ in their native lands, some as Christian ministers and others as lay leaders. These men and women, who in so many cases represent the flower of the lands from which they come, were they to consecrate their lives to Christ’s cause, could do far more to advance his kingdom among their people than an equal number of foreign missionaries. [...]

[“The most critical battlefield”]

The most critical battlefield, from the point of view of the Student Volunteer Movement, is not the Moslem world, not the educated classes of Japan, not the literati of China, not the citadels of Hinduism, not the areas of neglect in Latin America, but our own American and Canadian universities and colleges. If the churches of North America are to wage triumphant warfare in

colleges before the founding of the SVM; the SVM worked closely with these organizations from early in its own history.

these distant, difficult fields which call today so loudly for our help, the missionary facts and spirit must first dominate our own seats of learning. If we are to go forth to attempt world conquest, we must have no untaken forts in our rear. This attaches the greatest possible importance to all well-considered efforts to promote the moral and religious welfare of the North American student field. The moral evils, the prevailing student temptations, the unfavorable college traditions and customs, and everything else in modern college life which is contrary to the teachings and spirit of Christ must be overthrown if there is to be more^b largely developed among us truly world-conquering power. If we are to go forth with unshakable confidence to preach Christ as a world Savior, we must know, beyond peradventure, his saving power in our own lives and in the lives of our fellow students.

^b As first published in the SVM convention proceedings, the text reads “**most** largely developed.”

Source: Student Volunteer Movement, *The American and Canadian Students in Relation to the World-wide Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement, [1914]), 2-3, 8-10, 17-19, 21, 24-25. Public domain in the United States because published in the United States before 1923.

The source text is digitally available, with minor editorial variants, as part of the published proceedings of the SVM's 7th international convention: Fennell P. Turner, ed., *Students and the World-wide Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1914), 17-47 (excerpts at 18, 23-25, 32-34, 36-37, 39-41), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/ia.ark:/13960/t6vx0n30q>.

Excerpts edited and annotated by John-Charles Duffy. Italicized section headings added by Duffy. References in the source publication to the *Volunteer Movement* emended here to the *Student Volunteer Movement* to avoid the possibility of confusion to readers and for a more internally consistent style. The spelling *Saviour* Americanized. *Some day* modernized to *someday*. Punctuation emended in line with modern conventions for readability, including omitting hyphens from some phrases or compound words. Some spelled-out numbers converted to numerals. For the sake of modernization, several terms capitalized in the source publication have been converted here to lowercase: *association movements*, *kingdom*, *church(es)*, *state*, and divine pronouns or attributes. Conversely, *movement* is capitalized here to clarify when it serves as a short reference to the SVM.

These edited excerpts from an SVM report are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite one of the source publications listed above.



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