

“An Earnest and Undiscourageable Effort: Diplomatic crises of John R. Mott’s Ministry During and after World War I”

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With several notable exceptions, what historian Andrew Preston said in 2006 on the study of American diplomacy remains true. Studies of the complex influence of religion on US foreign relations between 1914 and 1945 remain few and far between – especially when compared to the burgeoning literature on this topic during the Cold War period.¹ Examinations of the role of Methodists in diplomatic efforts during that period are even rarer, and yet the period between the world wars is arguably the height of Methodism’s US political influence.² One would be hard-pressed to find a better Methodist leader than John R. Mott (1865-1955) through which to examine the influence of religious organizing amidst (especially) American diplomatic crises in the first half of the twentieth century.

The purpose of this paper is to examine both the variety of John R. Mott’s engagements in diplomatic crises and the origins of his diplomatic work to draw conclusions about what some of his guiding principles in this work – theological and otherwise – may have been. To provide an overview of the global and diverse nature of Mott’s work, I first examine his engagement in formal diplomacy as well as public diplomatic efforts in several regions of the world.³ I next focus on early events and people most

¹ Andrew Preston, "Bridging the Gap between the Sacred and the Secular in the History of American Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 30 (2006): 805. For a recent historiographical assessment with a focus on the nineteenth century see Emily Conroy-Krutz, "'What is a Missionary Good For, Anyway?': Foreign Relations, Religion, and the Nineteenth Century," *Diplomatic History* 46, no. 3 (2022). Notable exceptions to this historiographical gap include Michael G. Thompson, *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States between the Great War and the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Cara Lea Burnidge, *A Peaceful Conquest: Woodrow Wilson, Religion, and the New World Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Mark Thomas Edwards, *Faith and Foreign Affairs in the American Century* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2019).

² Examples include Kenneth M. Mackenzie, *The Robe and the Sword: The Methodist Church and the Rise of American Imperialism* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1961); David S. Foglesong, "Redeeming Russia? American Missionaries and Tsarist Russia, 1886-1917," *Religion, State, and Society* 25, no. 4 (1997).

³ Mott did this work as a key leader in multiple international Christian organizations, including the YMCA, the World’s Student Christian Federation (WSCF), European Student Relief, and the International Missionary Council

responsible for setting Mott on a trajectory of diplomatic influence in US foreign policy circles. I also briefly examine some less well-known aspects of Mott's most significant diplomatic engagement – namely, his participation on the “Root Mission” to revolutionary Russia in the summer of 1917. Mott may have visited other countries more frequently during his lifetime, but it was Russia that he most sought to understand. Mott maintained correspondence for decades with the leading US expert on Russia, Professor Samuel Harper, at the University of Chicago.⁴ I conclude with reflections on the ways Mott's public and formal diplomatic endeavors may have influenced subsequent Methodist commitments to global and ecumenical engagement.

The Scope of Mott's diplomatic engagements

Mott was involved in formal diplomacy for the US government as well as in “public diplomacy” efforts as a religious leader. Mott's first formal diplomatic role was for the Wilson administration to resolve conflict between the US and Mexico in 1916. Political instability in Mexico had preceded Wilson's term in office; during Wilson's tenure there were incursions of Mexican guerilla forces (which were themselves opposed to the Mexican government) into US territory and corresponding invasions by

(IMC). I have previously written about the European Student Relief, the relief arm of the WSCF and arguably the first truly ecumenical and international relief organization in the world. Benjamin L. Hartley, "Saving Students: European Student Relief in the Aftermath of World War I," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 42, no. 4 (2018). Mott's work with the IMC after the war is something I discuss in Benjamin L. Hartley, "The 1921 Founding of the International Missionary Council in the Life of John R. Mott," *International Review of Mission* 111, no. 2 (2022). I use the term “public diplomacy” in a broad sense to refer to efforts by state and non-state actors to influence citizens in the US and beyond to be in sympathy with US or North Atlantic diplomatic efforts. For the late nineteenth century it is often described as “missionary diplomacy.” During World War I and the 1920s it was also sometimes called “open diplomacy” or “popular diplomacy.” Edwards, *Faith and Foreign Affairs in the American Century*, 7.

⁴ Mott's colleague in Russia, Paul Anderson, similarly believed that if Mott could be considered an expert on any country it was Russia. **N.b. citation needed of Anderson papers at YMCA archive.** Harper and Mott exchanged more than seventy-five letters with one another between 1918 and 1933. Most of these were in the year after Mott's diplomatic visit to Russia. Mott's correspondence with Samuel Harper is best preserved not in Mott's own collection of papers but at the University of Chicago. See “Selective Index to correspondents in the Samuel Northrup Harper Papers, Series 1,” Samuel Northrup Harper Papers, University of Chicago.

the US military in Mexico.⁵ In 1916 a Joint High Commission was formed by Mexico and the United States to prevent further escalation of conflict.

John R. Mott served on this Commission and played an important role gaining concessions from Mexican representatives. In a calculated gesture of *realpolitik*, Mott arranged for members of the Mexican delegation to hear presidential candidate Theodore Roosevelt give a speech in Brooklyn. In consultation with Roosevelt, Mott arranged for members of the Mexican delegation to sit in Roosevelt's own reserved box to signal to him that the Mexicans were in attendance. Noting their presence, Roosevelt poured forth bellicose rhetoric, condemning Wilson's timid posture toward Mexican intervention. Mott's intent was for Mexican delegates to realize that a possible future president like Roosevelt could come to power who would be more detrimental to Mexican interests, thus making an agreement prior to the upcoming US presidential election more urgent. The Joint High Commission agreed to terms that permitted US continued occupation of Mexico. US military presence in Mexico nevertheless came to an end a few months later in February of 1917.

A YMCA colleague of Mott's, E. T. Colton, knew of Mott's scheme with Roosevelt, and the morning after asked Mott what effect it might have had. Colton described Mott's response, "In high glee he said, 'Oh, it will do good. They will have to take into account that a successor may come to power minded to shift from negotiations to military action.'" ⁶ Mott's involvement as a formal diplomatic envoy for the US government in this conflict with Mexico was disturbing to German ecumenical leaders who believed his political neutrality as a world ecumenical leader should be adhered to more

⁵ For further background on Mexican – US conflict during (and before) the Wilson administration see Lucas N. Frank, "Playing with Fire: Woodrow Wilson, Self-Determination, Democracy, and Revolution in Mexico," *Historian* 76, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1111/hisn.12028>, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=94758913&scope=site>; Lloyd C. Gardner, *Safe for Democracy The Anglo-American Response to Revolution, 1913-1923* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1987), 45-69; Mark Benbow, *Leading Them to the Promised Land: Woodrow Wilson, Covenant Theology, and the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1915* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2010). Chapter Two of Gardner is especially valuable.

⁶ E. T. Colton manuscript, John R. Mott papers, 45: 235: 3528.

stringently.⁷ Even Mott's friends agreed that Mott was wrong in regard to a number of his war time actions.⁸ There is nothing, however, in Mott's writings to suggest that he found these political and diplomatic engagements to be the least bit inconsistent with his stature as a Christian internationalist and world missionary leader.⁹

Mott's first formal diplomatic work for the US government was limited to Mexican relations, but his public diplomacy around the same time was expansive.¹⁰ Prior to the entry of the US in World War I in April of 1917, YMCA staff Archibald Harte and Carlisle Hibbard – in consultation with Mott as head of the YMCA International Committee – negotiated agreements with several European nations to enable the YMCA to provide prisoner of war relief for soldiers on both sides of the conflict.¹¹ After US entry into WWI in April of 1917, Mott together with other YMCA personnel enlisted the YMCA in supporting allied soldiers on the front lines and in training facilities in France, Britain, and elsewhere.

The YMCA's work in supporting the Russian Provisional Government's continued engagement in the war is especially striking. In consultations with Woodrow Wilson, Mott and former Secretary of State

⁷ Mott's papers contain a thick folder of his notes from correspondence with German mission leaders prior to the entry of the US into World War I. German leaders believed Mott's participation in the Joint High Commission with Mexico in 1916 violated earlier pledges Mott had given to be neutral. Mott's subsequent agreement to join the Root Mission to Russia was difficult for German religious leaders to understand in any way other than a broken promise. Indeed, White House records are clear that Mott was providing counsel to the Wilson Administration about the war in Europe long before his participation in the Joint High Commission with Mexico or the Root Mission. Mott's notes about correspondence with German mission leaders about neutrality are in 45: 153: 2549.

⁸ For an excellent discussion of the German response to Mott's partisanship during the war 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).

⁹ After the war, Mott makes some remarks that come close to acknowledging that his actions may have been problematic. **N.b. I could expand on this. See chapter draft on ?.**

¹⁰ Mott occasionally provided information to members of the Wilson administration (especially "Colonel" Edward House) after trips to Europe which House found helpful.

¹¹ YMCA workers in prisoner of war camps increased from 19 in 1916 to 73 by 1918. Kenneth Steuer, "The American YMCA and War Work Service in Russia in World War I and the Russian Civil War," in *The YMCA at War: Collaboration and Conflict during the World Wars*, ed. Jeffrey C. Copeland and Yan Xu (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), 73-83. Awards and citations Mott received from foreign governments immediately after World War I for his war work include the Order of Christ of Portugal (1919), Order of the Savior (Greece, 1924), National Order of the Legion of Honor (France, 1919), and The Hungarian Red Cross (1923). "Collection of Decorations and Citations Conferred on John R. Mott," John R. Mott papers, Y USA 13, Box 1, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.

Elihu Root encouraged greater YMCA involvement in a campaign to counter German propaganda.¹² Even after the November 1917 Bolshevik revolution, YMCA officials working in Russia helped to spread US propaganda among German soldiers and prisoners to discourage them further.¹³ After the war, YMCA workers in Russia were instrumental in providing famine relief as well; Mott was even briefly considered to head up the US government's relief organization under the Wilson administration. Mott never became as intricately involved in a country's affairs – politically, religiously, and even militarily – as he was in Russia.

At the end of World War I, Mott's primary diplomatic effort concerning Asian countries was the least successful of the diplomatic engagements discussed in this section. Chinese delegates at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 who knew Mott from their student days believed that he could pressure Woodrow Wilson in deciding in China's favor concerning the return of the Shandong province that had previously been controlled by Germany. Wilson bowed to Japanese pressure and Shandong became Japanese territory.¹⁴

¹² Jennifer Ann Polk, "Constructive Efforts: The American Red Cross and YMCA in Revolutionary and Civil War Russia, 1917-24" (PhD University of Toronto, 2012), 59-61.

¹³ YMCA worker in Russia Jerome Davis was most involved in this propaganda work even if the YMCA *as an organization* was officially not engaged in this work. George Creel, *How We Advertised America: The First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information that Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 377. The YMCA's lack of official support for anti-German propaganda work was not due to Mott's lack of trying. Mott and Elihu Root had argued for YMCA involvement in this regard with President Wilson. Polk, "Constructive Efforts: The American Red Cross and YMCA in Revolutionary and Civil War Russia, 1917-24," 57. See also Steuer, "The American YMCA and War Work Service in Russia in World War I and the Russian Civil War."; 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). **N.b. See Polk dissertation. Substantial archival work remains to be done with Charles Russell papers at National Archive in DC. Saul argues his report on Root Mission was most substantive. Mott's official report in State Department archives also must be obtained. This is left out of RG 45. Crane's papers also require further work beyond those at U of Chicago. Columbia? See Foglesong and Saul notes.** Norman E. Saul, *War and Revolution: The United States and Russia, 1914-1921* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001); David S. Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

¹⁴ For more detail on this from a key Chinese delegate who knew Mott well see Stephen G. Craft, *V.K. Wellington Koo and the emergence of Modern China* (Lexington : University Press of Kentucky, 2003). **Need page numbers on this. Chap 2 is strongest.** For evidence of US discussion of granting Japan control of the Shandong province as early as September 1917 see Noriko Kawamura, *Turbulence in the Pacific : Japanese-U.S. Relations During World War I* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000). One of Wilson's biographers describes Wilson's decision on

Wilson's failure to support China's bid for Shandong prompted despair from Chinese delegate Chengting Wang but, importantly, *not criticism* of Mott for his failure to influence the president. Mott was unsuccessful in even being able to schedule a time to meet with Wilson. Chengting Wang wrote Mott describing Wilson as someone for whom "all talk of race equality was... a smoke-screen."¹⁵ In the years immediately after the war Mott appears to have prioritized Chinese contributions in the World's Student Christian Federation. Chinese participation was especially strong at the WSCF gathering in Peking in 1922. Sixteen years later, in 1935, as Japanese aggression toward China was increasing, Mott expressed regret over the failure of American and British diplomacy to correct the "unequal treaties" to which China had long been subjected.¹⁶ Mott rarely voiced areas of regret, either personally or corporately as a citizen of the United States.

Mott's support of the League of Nations may be seen as a kind of extension of his enthusiasm for large conferences of Christian students and missionary representatives at global conferences he had led for decades. He praised the argument in favor of the League of Nations set forth by William Howard Taft at a meeting at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in early March, 1919 where, according to Mott, Taft gave "the most satisfying statement regarding the League of Nations which I have heard."¹⁷ Mott's friend J. H. Oldham also spoke out in favor of the League of Nations at missionary gatherings

giving Shandong to Japan as "the most anguished choice of the whole Peace Conference." Jr. John Milton Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 493. An astute assessment of the intermingling of nationalism, religion, race, in the negotiations among Japanese delegates and Wilson is provided in Burnidge, *A Peaceful Conquest: Woodrow Wilson, Religion, and the New World Order*, 99-101.

¹⁵ Letter to John R. Mott from Chengting Wang, May 6, 1919, RG 45: 96: 1697. For a thoughtful discussion of the complexity of the Paris Peace Conference negotiations surrounding the "racial amendment" and the Shandong Province see Burnidge, *A Peaceful Conquest: Woodrow Wilson, Religion, and the New World Order*, 96-101. Historians continue to debate the meaning and scope of Wilson's appeals to "self-determination," especially with regard to whether, in Wilson's mind, it was limited to European peoples. An astute assessment of US-Mexican diplomatic relations at the start of Wilson's presidential term suggests that his ideas about "self-determination" included non-Europeans as well. Frank, "Playing with Fire: Woodrow Wilson, Self-Determination, Democracy, and Revolution in Mexico."

¹⁶ "John R. Mott Christian and World Citizen," anonymous typescript manuscript on the hundredth anniversary of Mott's birth, Box 1, "Biographical sketches" folder, John R. Mott papers, Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

¹⁷ Letter from John R. Mott to William H. Taft, March 12, 1919, RG 45, Box 90, Folder 1594, John R. Mott Papers, Yale Divinity School Library. **N.b. This paragraph only slightly adapted from previous IRM published article.**

around this time.¹⁸ Three days after the November 1919 failure to ratify the League of Nations in the US Senate, Mott noted that Wilson's famous phrase, "self-determination" prompted hope but "almost as much despair in certain quarters, as any words that have been spoken" during the war years.¹⁹ Clearly, Mott was disappointed with the failure of Wilson to support Chinese delegates' push for the return of Shandong, Wilson's more limited notion of "self-determination," and the United States's failure to ratify the League of Nations treaty, but there is no record of him expressing these disappointments with President Wilson or anyone else in the Wilson administration.²⁰

In the 1920s and 1930s, Mott remained engaged on several diplomatic fronts in Europe. He was seen, for example, as someone who might be able to use his influence with the American government to end the French occupation of the Ruhr region of Germany after the armistice.²¹ He was also sought out as a peacemaker between French and German mission leaders in 1931 (thirteen years after WWI's end!) in an effort to promote reconciliation on the long-simmering topic of war guilt.²² Mott was unsuccessful in bringing about reconciliation at a special session called for this purpose. A few days later, the German and French delegation were able to achieve a measure of reconciliation insofar as both groups

¹⁸ Fennell P. Turner, *Foreign Missions Conference of North America: Being the Report of the Twenty-Seventh Conference of Foreign Missions Boards in the United States and Canada, at the Hotel Taft, New Haven, Conn. January 13-15, 1920*, (New York: Foreign Missions Conference, 1920), 77.

¹⁹ "40th International Convention Detroit, book 2, 1919," Box: 13. YMCA North American international convention records, Y.USA.65. Kautz Family YMCA Archives, 381. For a recent historical analysis of the Paris Peace Conference from the perspective of colonized peoples see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁰ Mott differed from Wilson in his views on race relations, although he shared some patronizing views toward, for example, Filipino readiness for self-governance after the Philippine-American War. Very few Methodists could be categorized as anti-imperialists in the first years of the twentieth century.

²¹ WSCF leaders Suzanne Bidgrain and Conrad Hoffman were supportive of German protests against the French occupation. Mott, however, did not want to publicly take sides on this matter and told former chancellor of Germany Georg Michaelis that "I have not felt myself called upon by my convictions to say more..." Letter from John R. Mott to Georg Michaelis, January 24, 1923, 45: 58: 1082. Georg Michaelis subsequently wrote to Mott asking him to speak out against French occupation. Letter of Michaelis to John R. Mott, March 7 and April 17, 1923, 45: 58: 1082. Mott keenly understood the fraught nature of the debate over the French occupation of the German Ruhr territory. In response to this debate, Mott's secretary, R. W. Abernethy, wrote in his diary that at the WSCF gathering in Crans in May, 1923, that Mott suggested a resolution in jest to his colleague Herman Rutgers: "Resolved, that we curtail the power of the Devil." Diary of R. W. Abernethy. I am grateful to Andy Mott, John R. Mott's grandson, for sending me a copy of this diary.

²² **N.b. Explore "war guilt" complexity further.**

participated in a celebration of the Lord's Supper. Decades later, Erich Stange of the German YMCA recalled that Mott's initial failure to bring about reconciliation between French and German representatives was the only time he saw Mott cry.²³

Mott's influence and interest in foreign affairs continued into the 1940s in several ways. The person who took over leadership of the WSCF after Mott stepped down in 1927, Francis Pickens Miller, became very influential in foreign policy circles generally and with the Council on Foreign Relations, specifically. Mott continued to follow his career, congratulating him on his WSCF leadership and on an article published in the premier foreign policy journal, *Foreign Affairs*.²⁴ With the rise of the Nazi regime, World Council of Churches (in the process of formation) leader Willem Visser 't Hooft asked Mott if he could persuade the Brazilian government to accept non-Aryan refugees (presumably Jewish converts to Christianity) from Germany. Mott subsequently agreed to speak with the Brazilian president about this concern raised by Visser 't Hooft.²⁵ In the years prior to Mott receiving the 1946 Nobel Peace Prize, Mott's continued positive reputation in diplomatic circles prompted friends to request (and receive) letters of support for Mott receiving the Peace Prize from leaders in international studies and

²³ Notes taken from tape recording of discussion with Dr. Erich Stange, past National General Secretary of the German YMCA, July 2 and 3, 1968," Charles Howard Hopkins interview, 45: 218: 3431.

²⁴ Letter from John R. Mott to Francis Miller, July 3, 1941, 45: 59: 1093. John R. Mott Papers. After Mott's death, Francis Miller also provided one of the most critical evaluations of Mott, describing him as at times "thoroughly egocentric" and laying blame on him for policy decisions that "effectively destroyed the promise of the student Christian movement in the United States." Letter from Francis Miller to Raymond P. Morris, October 2, 1959, 45: 211: 3333. John R. Mott Papers. Miller elaborates on the nature of these "policy decisions" in his memoir. Miller desired that the student YMCA become organizationally independent (but affiliated) with the national YMCA organization in the United States to more fully embrace the progressive stances of the student generation in the mid-1920s. Miller felt betrayed by John R. Mott in Mott's vote against Miller's proposal to separate the student YMCA from the larger organization. This is described in Francis Pickens Miller, *Man from the Valley: Memoirs of a 20th Century Virginian* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 52-54.

²⁵ Letter from Willem Visser 't Hooft to John R. Mott, April 16, 1940, 45: 94: 1672; Letter from John R. Mott to Willem Visser 't Hooft, May 2, 1940, 45: 94: 1672. Another colleague of Mott's in the European Student Relief organization, Conrad Hoffmann, was also very involved in seeking to provide for non-Aryan Christians who were nonetheless violently targeted by the Hitler regime. Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 128-29.

international law such as Joseph P. Chamberlain, George Grafton Wilson, Max Huber, and Philip Marshall Brown.²⁶

Diplomatic Beginnings

Mott's expansive array of diplomatic efforts before, during, and after World War I illustrates Mott's pragmatism, familiarity with important leaders in American foreign policy, as well as the complex nature of his political and religious network of leaders around the world. One gains further insight on Mott's diplomacy by considering how he got started in this kind of work. Mott's influence in diplomatic circles ironically began with his rejection of Woodrow Wilson's offer to serve as the US ambassador to China in 1913. He was Wilson's second choice after Harvard University president Charles Eliot, but Wilson still asked Mott twice to consider his offer – to no avail. Mott took the invitation seriously, however, and friends and colleagues sought to influence Mott in both accepting and rejecting Wilson's offer.

It was a letter from Mott's colleague and predecessor as General Secretary of the YMCA International Committee, Richard C. Morse, that most held sway. In that letter, Morse underscored two reasons why Mott should decline the President's offer. He counseled Mott that he could still help the US Embassy in China from his present position and that "China will receive a greater benefit... than if you had accepted." The second reason to decline Wilson's offer was the more prophetic: "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

²⁶ These and other world leaders are cited as having contributed letters in support of Mott receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946. Charles Howard Hopkins, *Memoirs of Ethan T. Colton, Sr. (1872-1952) Revision by the Author in 1968* (New York: National Board of Young Men's Christian Associations, 1969), 140-141. Among these experts in international law and diplomacy who wrote letters supporting Mott's candidacy for the Peace Prize, only letters from George Grafton Wilson and Joseph P. Chamberlain have been preserved in the archives of the Norwegian Nobel Institute in Oslo, Norway.

international relationships you sustain (emphasis in original)."²⁷ For much of Mott's career he did prioritize his international relationships from his position as ecumenical leader and world Christian statesman, but Mott also failed sometimes to follow Morse's advice in "maintaining unimpaired all other international relationships." As noted above, Mott directly and enthusiastically supported American foreign policy priorities, and this damaged some ecumenical relationships for a very long time.²⁸

The advice Mott received from Morse that he could serve the world and the cause of Christ by not identifying with a single nation-state as its ambassador was analogous to advice Mott received from Methodist leaders concerning denominational service. Mott cared about Methodism, to be sure, but leaders in Methodism repeatedly counseled Mott to serve the church on its edges by being involved in the YMCA and other organizations.²⁹ Mott may have used a similar argument himself with some YMCA colleagues, several of whom were also Methodists.³⁰ The most explicit support Mott gave to American Methodism was at the 1939 so-called Uniting Conference where some observers credited him with the successful merger of Methodist denominations.³¹

²⁷ Letter from Richard C. Morse to John R. Mott, March 25, 1913, RG 45, Box 60, Folder 1112 (henceforth, 45:60: 1112), John R. Mott Papers, Yale Divinity School Library.

²⁸ Prior to US entry into WWI in April of 1917 Mott was briefly a member of the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation. Mott's enthusiasm for the American war effort was robust but did not rise to the level of revivalist preacher Billy Sunday who suggested that "Christian pacifists" should be lynched. "Let the coroner attend to the rest of the job." Sunday cited in Burnidge, *A Peaceful Conquest: Woodrow Wilson, Religion, and the New World Order*, 74. 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 as a diplomat in Russia see Pierard, "John R. Mott and the rift in the ecumenical movement during World War I".

²⁹ John R. Mott letter to parents, July 18, 1892; Letter from James M. Thoburn to John R. Mott, August 21, 1899; John R. Mott letter to James M. Thoburn, August 25, 1899, RG 45 Box 91, Folder 1609

³⁰ Close YMCA colleagues Fletcher Brockman, Charles Hurrey, and Willis Weatherford were all Methodists.

³¹ Mott wrote a book intended to be studied by Methodist members nationwide. It was the only explicitly denominational text (or article) he ever wrote. John R. Mott, *Methodists United for Action* (Nashville: Dept. of Education and Promotion, Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, 1939). **Nb: Find citation of persons who credit Mott with uniting Methodism.** Mott did not speak out about the segregated nature of the Methodist Church at the so-called Uniting Conference despite being outspoken against racial segregation at WSCF world conferences, in South Africa, and elsewhere.

The invitation in 1913 of Mott by President Wilson to serve as the US ambassador to China (and his subsequent refusal) may have been the event that brought Mott to the awareness of men in diplomatic circles, but it was not the first time Mott had become acquainted with this realm of service. The diplomat with whom Mott had the longest relationship and most admired was Elihu Root. A former Secretary of War in the McKinley administration (1899-1904) and then Theodore Roosevelt's Secretary of State (1905-1909), perhaps no statesman in the US 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.³² In 1913 he was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for his work in this area.

Mott first met Root in August of 1906 when they both happened to be in Rio de Janeiro. Root was in Brazil for the third Pan-American Congress while Mott was visiting YMCA affiliates in both Brazil and Argentina. He had just completed a trans-Atlantic voyage from his first visit to South Africa.³³ Mott shared with Root some of his plans for the YMCA in Latin America. Root had been a YMCA student leader a generation before Mott and was clearly inspiring to him. Mott noted the increased interest in the Monroe Doctrine which had been "tremendously quickened" due to Root's Latin American visit and argued that it "suggests religious responsibility as well as political." He appealed to his North American supporters to "extend the hand of helpfulness" to the people of Latin America.³⁴ The confluence of

³² 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, <https://doi.org/10.2307/444707>, www.jstor.org/stable/444707.

³³ Mott's experience in South Africa was especially influential in shaping Mott's changing views of race relations in the US and around the world.

³⁴ 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.

religious and political responsibilities that Mott affirmed in his support of the Monroe Doctrine would be repeated several times in his life to good and bad effect.³⁵

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,’ ...”³⁶ 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.³⁷

Mott’s appreciation for Root is not at all surprising given their previous correspondence, common 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 early contemplated a career in law and had a lifelong respect and even friendship with prominent American business leaders, most notably John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Cyrus McCormick, Jr.³⁸

In 1917, two years after finishing his term as a U.S. Senator, the paths of Root and Mott crossed once again when Mott was asked to join a diplomatic mission led by Elihu Root to Russia as part of an

³⁵ For an account of German mission leaders’ disdain toward Mott’s actions as a diplomat in Russia see Pierard, “John R. Mott and the rift in the ecumenical movement during World War I”. **Further discussion possible of the Roosevelt Corollary, a kind of revision of the Monroe Doctrine.**

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ On the use of this language at the Hague Peace Conference see Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the age of nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 18. This phrase was previously used by Alfred Tennyson in his 1835 poem, “Locksley Hall.”

³⁸ 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.

effort by the US to keep the new Provisional Government of Russia engaged in the war after the overthrow of the czar in March of 1917. It is not surprising that Mott was asked to join this mission. The idea of sending the Root Commission had originally been proposed to Woodrow Wilson by his closest advisor, “Colonel” Edward House, who had met John R. Mott in December of 1914 and was profoundly impressed with him.³⁹

I had a delightful hour with John R. Mott today. He impressed me as being both sensible and powerful. There were two things that I got from him of value. One was that he believes the Germans are pretty well permeated with the philosophy of Treitschke. The other is that because of this he does not believe the war can be profitably ended for the good of mankind until it has been fought out more nearly to a finish.⁴⁰

There was ample time for Elihu Root, Mott, and others to get to know one another on the “Root Commission” as the fourteen-member delegation traveled across North America by rail for their trans-Pacific passage and then Russia’s Trans-Siberian railway to St. Petersburg. The war in the Atlantic required this more-lengthy route.

During the long voyage Mott read six books about Russia and several others on foreign policy. The four foreign policy texts Mott read were by Elihu Root and John Watson Foster, both Republican international lawyers.⁴¹ Foster was the father-in-law of Robert Lansing, Wilson’s Secretary of State who had recently taken over the job from pacifist William Jennings Bryan.⁴² In letters home to Leila, Mott wrote about the abiding respect he had for Elihu Root.

³⁹ That “Colonel” Edward House pressed Woodrow Wilson to send the Root Commission is recorded in Charles E. Neu, *Colonel House: a biography of Woodrow Wilson's silent partner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 297.

⁴⁰ Letter from Edward Mandell House to “Governor” [Woodrow Wilson], December 31, 1914. Mott met with President Wilson a week later to brief him on his recent travels to Germany, Britain, and France. In that meeting with Wilson and Charles Richard Crane (who had served as an ambassador to China in the Taft administration and also subsequently went on the Root Commission to Russia) Mott underscored the importance of the US maintaining “strict neutrality.” So, on the one hand, in a conversation with House, Mott is despairing of an early resolution to the conflict due to the extremes of German nationalism. On the other hand, he is pushing for continued US neutrality.

⁴¹ 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*.

⁴² Ibid.

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.⁴³

The scope of this paper does not permit a thorough examination of all that occurred on the Root Mission. There are two aspects of Mott's work as part of the Root Mission that are important to consider in light of subsequent developments in interreligious and ecumenical relations.

One of Mott's responsibilities as a member of the Root Mission was to investigate the status of the Jewish community in Russia under the Russian Provisional Government. Woodrow Wilson had considered sending a Jewish delegate on the Root Mission but decided against this. As a well-known Christian leader in the United States, Mott was seen as someone who could take this on instead. Prior to departing for Russia Mott consulted with the first Jewish Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis. As the member of the Root Mission charged with focusing on "religious and social betterment," Mott had at least three interviews with leading Russian Jewish representatives during his weeks in Russia and at least once posed a question to the rest of the Root Mission delegation about the welfare of Jews in Russia at a briefing during their trans-Pacific voyage.⁴⁴

During the war years, Mott also learned of persistent anti-Semitism in Austrian and other student movements in Central Europe. It was in May of 1920 when Rouse first underscored for Mott the problem of anti-Semitism that she saw unfolding in central Europe. "*Do* give much attention to the Jewish problem on this tour. There's a ghastly danger in front of us there [emphasis in original]"⁴⁵ Rouse had to frequently navigate Jewish-Christian conflict in her organizing work with European Student Relief, the student feeding program of the World's Student Christian Federation. The administrative head of

⁴³ John R. Mott correspondence with Leila Mott, 2 June 1917. RG 45, Box 107, Folder 1838. Yale.

⁴⁴ "Special Diplomatic Mission to Russia," McCormick's personal secretary report, Box 114, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society. For more on Mott's role in Russia as it relates to Russian Jews see C. Howard Hopkins and John W. Long, "American Jews and the Root Mission to Russia in 1917: Some New Evidence," *American Jewish History* 69, 3 (1980): 342-354.

⁴⁵ Ruth Rouse letter to John R. Mott, May 25, 1920, RG 45, Box 153, Folder 2549, John R. Mott Papers, Yale Divinity School Library, New Haven, Connecticut.

the ESR, Conrad Hoffman, subsequently became involved in Presbyterian efforts to evangelize Jews. Theologically, Mott never elaborated much on his own theology of religions. He doubtless desired Jews to confess faith in Christ, but he also expressed a kind of eschatological universalism in the post-war years. "I am sure... that some day [Christ's] program shall comprehend every [person] living, every nation and race in the whole range of their being, in all their relationships, both now and for ever more."⁴⁶

Another aspect of Mott's work on the Root Mission involved developing stronger relationships with the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian "Old Believers" church. Mott gave a speech before the Sobhor encouraging Russian Orthodox attendees to continue to support the war. He also met with monastic and seminary leaders and spoke about current trends in theological education in the United States. This meeting with seminary leaders would prove especially important in subsequent oppressive years for Russian Orthodoxy under Stalin's regime. Mott pushed his friend and donor John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to financially support the establishment of St. Sergius Seminary in Paris for Russian emigres. The YMCA's publication of Russian theological works in the 1920s was also important for the continued vitality of Russian Orthodoxy in exile. Russian Orthodox participants in the World Council of Churches have noted that Mott's work in this regard and the relationships he developed during the Root Mission and beyond were critical for Russian Orthodox participation in the World Council of Churches.

In conclusion, what can be said about the importance of Methodism in Mott's life for the work he did in addressing such a wide array of diplomatic activity and diplomatic crises in the years prior to, during, and after World War I? At first glance, the influence of Methodism appears slight, but several connections may be suggested. Mott's relentless pragmatism in developing relationships across social and political boundaries may be seen as following in the footsteps of Wesley's own ecclesiological pragmatism in leading a movement that evaded categorization as Anglican or nonconformist. Mott's

⁴⁶ John R. Mott, "Ideas that have been dynamic of God in my life all through these years," typescript document from 1928. Box 1 John R. Mott papers, Kautz Family YMCA Archive.

belief in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring people together across lines of division is also, to some extent, an expression of his Methodist commitments. The power of the Holy Spirit to transform individual and corporate life was a key aspect of the holiness movement during Mott's adolescence and young adulthood. Mott commented frequently on the pneumatological dimensions of his work. More important, however, may be Mott's legacy in the World Council of Churches that has sought to build relationships with Jewish communities and continues to esteem the contributions of Eastern Orthodox participants in the WCC.

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