



The History and Meaning of the YMCA LOGO



Re-compiled by Craig Seibert , YMCA of Greater Charlotte based on original version by YMCA of the USA

Archived at www.USMissionNetworkResources.org
and www.WorldMissionNetworkResources.org

To appreciate the history and significance behind the meaning of the YMCA LOGO, a person must first understand the history of the organization and its mission. Here is an abbreviated review of the YMCAs founding and its original mission statement.

The Founding



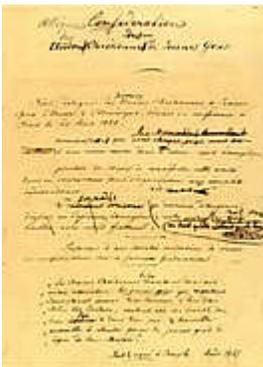
Sir George Williams was born in a farmhouse in southern England in 1821. He was brought up in the Church of England. However, when young George arrived in the city to become an assistant drapers apprentice, he found his faith lacking. He managed to find a few young workers who, by their example, encouraged him to give his own life more completely to Jesus Christ. On June 4, 1844, twelve men, led by George Williams, founded the Young Men's Christian Association, and thus the YMCA was born.

The original Mission Statement

"The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) seeks to unite those young men, who regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Savior, according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be His disciples in their faith and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of His Kingdom amongst young men."

1855 – The First YMCA World Alliance Conference

The YMCA experienced quick growth from 1844 to 1855, spreading to the United States, Switzerland, France, Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands. In 1855, the First World Alliance of YMCAs was held in Paris France with representatives from each of the six countries in attendance.



Original Paris Basis, 1855

It was there that the Paris Basis was drawn up, re-affirming the original mission with a call for unity in alignment with the prayer that Jesus prayed for his disciples in the book of John 17:21, that they be one so that the world would believe.

The application of this Bible passage is exemplified in this phrase they added to the end of the Paris Basis.

"Any differences of opinion on other subjects, however important in themselves, shall not interfere with the harmonious relations of the constituent members and associates of the World Alliance."



1st World Alliance of YMCAs conference in Paris, 1855

1) E. W. Heyblom, Netherlands. ~ 2) E. Renevier, France. ~ 3) T. H. Gladstone, Great Britain. ~ 4) E. Laget, France. ~ 5) Henry Dunant, Switzerland. ~ 6) Max Perrot, Switzerland. ~ 7) T. H. Tarlton, Great Britain. ~ 8) A. Stevens, USA. ~ 9) George Williams, Great Britain. ~ 10) G. Dürselenen, Germany

1881 – The First Official Logo



It was in 1881, at the 9th World Council that the first official insignia of the World Alliance of YMCAs was first adopted, 37 years after the founding of the YMCA in England, and 26 years after the First World Council. A modified version of this emblem is still in use today for the World Alliance and for the YMCA in the United States.

This emblem was designed carefully to give identity and provide a symbol of the YMCA's meaning and purpose.

This first emblem was described in the following way:

“Here is what the emblem means

- **Five Parts of the Globe** - *The names of the five parts of the globe are inscribed on the segments of a circle united by cartouches which bear the monograms of the Association's name in different languages.*
- **The Circle** - *The circle recalls the fact that our scattered associations form one body.*
- **The X (Chi) and P(Rho)** - *The larger monogram of the name Christ within the circle (being the combination of the two initial letters of the name in Greek), as seen in the catacombs painted by the early Christians, will constantly remind the associations that Christ is their centre, their true bond of union, their supreme object, their strength and their sole cause and end.*
- **The Bible** - *Over the symbol of Christ is placed the Bible, because as St. John declares, the Divine Word is the special means whereby young people overcome the world, and in this way [the emblem] bears the distinguishing mark of the Reformation.*
- **John 17:21 Passage** - *The Bible is open at the page containing our Redeemer's high-priestly prayer, John XVII, and the 21st verse of the chapter is specially indicated: 'That they all may be one'.*

“The emblem is not an arbitrary or hackneyed rallying sign; it bears the character of a symbol, and expresses simply and clearly the spiritual treasures common to all associations.”

~ Minutes from the Ninth World Council of YMCAs, 1881

1891 – The Spirit-Mind-Body Triangle



In 1891, 10 years after the first logo was settled upon, Luther Gulick introduced into the conversation the Spirit-Mind-Body triangle that represented the three-fold nature of man that he saw being emphasized in the Bible. Eventually this became a training presentation that he would give on what the triangle means. His explanation resonated with YMCA workers and leaders and the YMCA began to move out on the theme of developing people in—spirit—mind and body.

Here is how Luther Gulick described the Triangle.

*“**First.** The triangle is not simply three separate sides, but these three sides are so joined together as to form a triangular figure, which differs in shape absolutely and radically from any one of its sides. Thus with the individual man, he is not a body and a mind and a spirit, but a wonderful result of their union, something entirely different from any single aspect of himself.*

*“**Second.** The triangle stands, not merely for symmetrical body, a symmetrical mind, a symmetrical character, but for the symmetrical man, each part developed with reference to the whole, and not merely with reference to itself.*

“Thus the man who gives his time and attention largely to the education of his physical nature is violating the triangle idea no less than the man who gives his time entirely to the intellectual, ignoring the spiritual and the physical. Each part should be developed with reference to its proper place in the whole. Each of the three is absolutely essential, although each has a different value. Thus character is of more value than intellect, and intellect, than merely physical excellence.”

“What authority have we for believing that this triangle idea is correct? It is scriptural.”

- *"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." ~ Deuteronomy 6:5 [Moses speaking to the people of Israel]*
- *"And He answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." ~ Luke 10:27 [Jesus responding to a question]*

*"In each passage referring to what; is involved in the service of the Lord, "heart" is always stated, but usually in connection with other elements. Thus such statements as, **'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength, 'indicate that the scriptural view is that the service of the Lord includes the whole man'".***

~ Luther Gullick, 1891

1895 – The Merged Logo



In 1895, 4 years later, the red triangle and the original logo were synthesized into a new logo that began to be used more and more within the United States. Because it was predominantly a U.S. logo, the names of the five geographic areas of the world were removed, yet the rings remained. It was suggested that the meaning of the ring was like that of a wedding band, love without end and for each other as well as the unity of Christ's followers everywhere. Thus the ring reinforced the John 17:21 verse that is central to the Logo.

1896 – The John17:21 Logo



In 1896, just 1 year later, the 1895 Logo was modified by widening the X and P and added a second ring. The first ring had already been established to represent unity, friendship, and love without end amongst all believers and in turn to all people. The second ring was to indicate the completeness of God's created order. The two rings together then form the basis of the Christian principle of care and respect for all people, because all people are created in the image of God, even if they do not choose to follow him. This 1896 Logo, remains the YMCAs official emblem even today. It is often referred to as the JOHN1721 Logo.

1897 – YMCA Triangle LOGO



In 1897, the YMCA created a secondary logo for public use that actually had the word YMCA in the logo itself. This Logo incorporates the red triangle (without spirit-mind-body printed on it), and was designed to be simple enough in color and form that it could be used for public display and that people would recognize it as the public LOGO of the YMCA. This did not displace the YMCAs official JOHN17:21 Logo of 1896.

1967 to 2010 – Y LOGO



After 70 years, the YMCA in the USA created a new secondary logo in 1967 that was used until 2010. By this time the YMCAs global impact and awareness was such that a logo in the shape of a Y with the incorporation of the red triangle was enough for everyone to know the logo represented the YMCA. It is one of the most recognized organizational logos in the USA and world.

The World Alliance LOGO today



The World Alliance of YMCAs, (that is all of the YMCAs outside the USA + the YMCA of the USA), still use a slightly modified version of the original logo of 1881. It is freshened up with a bit of color and with an exterior wrap of words "World Alliance of YMCAs"

International YMCAs may also use the more contemporary "Y" Logo for public display and marketing as it has achieved global brand recognition, but the World Alliance logo remains the official emblem today.

A deeper look at the 1881 LOGO



In 1881, five parts of the original logo were explained (see 1881 Logo description in this document) the 1) Parts of the Globe, 2) The Ring, 3) The XP (Chi and Rho), 4) The Bible, 5) The John 17:21 passage.

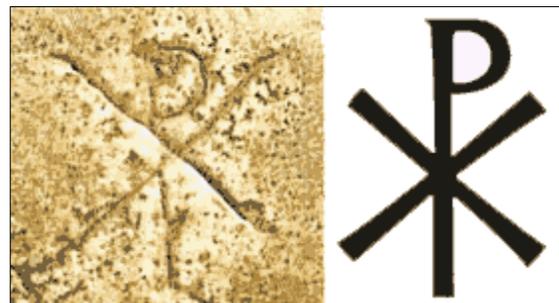
This section is intended to take a deeper look at the logo and particularly look at the aspects of 3) The XP (Chi and Rho), 4) The Bible, and 5) The John 17:21 passage. As Bible literacy has been in great decline over the years, there are meanings and understandings that many people would have known or been familiar with in 1881, that do not exist today.

The Chi and the Rho

The Catacombs of St. Callixtus in Rome, is a burial place of tens of thousands of early Christians. This underground funereal labyrinth contains some of the very earliest artifacts of Christianity. There are thousands of niches hollowed out in the walls, used for burial from about 150 - 410 AD. Violent persecution of Christians occurred regularly during this period, so many of these tombs are the revered tombs of Christian martyrs who were killed for their faith in Christ.

Christians mourning their loved ones would express their faith in Christ and his promises through symbols inscribed into soft marble tombstones. Interestingly, the symbol of the cross was not regularly used in the catacombs.

Chi and Rho are the first two letters (XP) of "Christ" in Greek ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ.



Chi-Rho symbol from the first two letters of Greek *Christos*

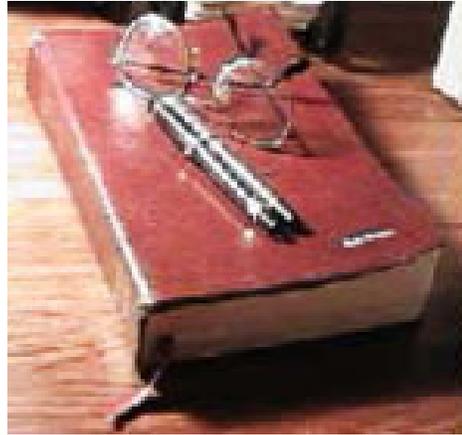
(*Christos*). Sometimes it is called the Monogram of Christ, Chrismon, or Labarum. It was used very early by persecuted Christians in the catacombs. The Chi-Rho is often shown with the first and last Greek letters, Alpha (Αα) and Omega (Ωω), a symbol of eternal life in Christ, who is the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Revelation 1:11 and Revelation 22:13).

The Bible

Distinguishing Characteristics

The Bible has several distinguishing characteristics that make it the most unique book in the World. Here are just a few.

- **Best Seller** - It is the all time New York Times best seller. It is not on the list because it would always be number 1.
- **Unmatched Prophecy Record** - There is no other book with prophecies made hundreds of years earlier than their fulfillment that have systematically come true.
- **Historical Accuracy** - Archeology continues to uncover new findings that prove the Bible's authenticity.
- **Survivor** - There have been almost 20 concerted efforts to rid the world of the Bible, but it has survived them all.
- **Transformational** - Those that take the time to read it find that it speaks to issues of the heart.



Reading the Bible for Yourself

YMCAs throughout their history had classes that would “build the spirit” through training in personal Bible Study. Here are some key concepts that would be taught.

You can experience God daily and grow in your relationship with Him through regular time set aside to interact with Him through prayer and through His word. This in turn carries over into your day where you can continue to experience Him by considering what He has spoken to your hearts already and what He thinks about situations you face throughout the day. Here is how this works on a very practical level:

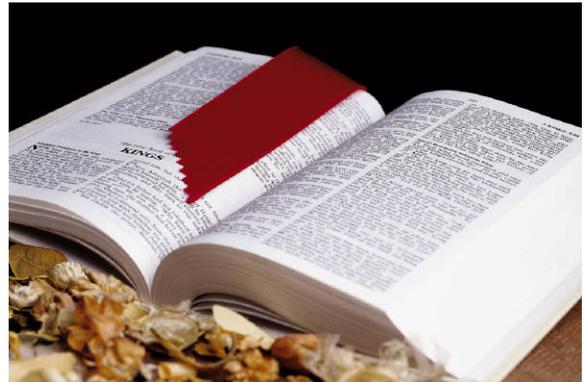
- **Daily or regular Bible intake** - Each time you read and meditate on a Bible passage there will usually be one key verse, concept, word or idea that seems to stand out. It may hit you like a ton of bricks or an “ah-ha” experience. Or it may just be a slight impression that there is something

more here or that this is an important idea that God would like you to consider further.

- **God shows the application of His word** - It may be that the day you read something you know how to apply it- it might change a decision you are going to make or it answers a prayer you have prayed, or something else. However, it may be that God may use it in the days ahead and you do not see that right now. It may be for you or a circumstance you will face or it could be for another person of faith or someone struggling with their faith. It might simply be a scripture that you pray for yourself, that God would make it real in your life.
- **God leads and guides** - Over time, God will actually bring certain themes up through different passages and circumstances that you will begin to see as guidance items - that God is actually using them to lead and guide you in a certain direction or toward a certain decision.
- **You experience intimacy with God** - This habit lived out over time creates the intimate experience of God that our souls longs for. We truly will experience Him in a personal way.
- **Journal** - People are forgetful. Keep a journal of what God has shown you, how He has made Himself real to you, and how you have experienced Him. This will provide you a deeply meaningful record of growth that you can reflect back on. It will also serve as an anchor for the storms of life as well as an encouragement that the God of the universe loves you deeply.

The John 17:21 Passage

This passage may not be familiar to you or the context of its meaning. Most of the chapter of John 17 is Jesus in prayer. He prays for himself and for his disciples that he had around him as well as future believers who would come to faith through the disciples and the generations of believers that would follow them and would share Jesus message of salvation, grace and restoration to God.



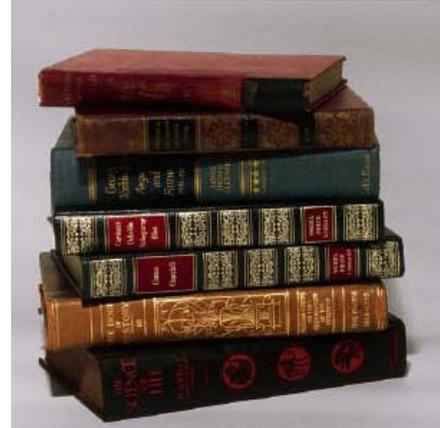
The fullest meaning can be gathered from reading all of chapter 17. For brevity sake here, we can get a fuller meaning of John 17:21 by also looking at John 17:20 the verse that precedes it. Here are the two verse below.

John 17:20-21 - Jesus Prays for All Believers

²⁰ "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

A Commentary on John 17:20-21

The meaning of this verse is further explored here in a Commentary. A commentary is an additional resource that is written by someone who is a Bible expert and has studied the meanings of the original words of the Bible in Greek or Hebrew (the primary languages the Bible was written in). This commentary is by a scholar named **William Barclay** and it provides some additional insight into the verses meaning.



“[So far in Chapter 17 of the book of John], Jesus' prayer has been going out to the ends of the earth. First, he prayed for himself as the Cross faced him. Second, he prayed for his disciples, and for God's keeping power for them. Now his prayers take a sweep into the distant future, and he prays for those who in distant lands and far-off ages will also enter the Christian faith.

Here two great characteristics of Jesus are full displayed.

First, we see his complete faith and his radiant certainty. At that moment his followers were few, but even with the Cross facing him, his confidence was unshaken, and he was praying for those who would come to believe in his name. This passage should be especially precious to today's Christians, because it is Jesus' prayer for his followers in this day and age.

Second, we see his confidence in his men. He knew that they did not fully understand him; he knew that in a very short time they were going to abandon him in his hour of sorest need. Yet to these very same men he looked with complete confidence to spread his name throughout the world. Jesus never lost his faith in God or his confidence in men.

What was his prayer for the Church which was to be? ~ It was that all its members would be one as he and his Father are one.

What was that unity for which Jesus prayed? ~ It was not a unity of administration or organization; it was not in any sense an ecclesiastical unity. It was a unity of personal relationship.

We have already seen that the union between Jesus and God was one of love and obedience. It was a unity of love for which Jesus prayed, a unity in which men loved each other because they loved him, a unity based entirely on the relationship between heart and heart.



Christians will never organize their Churches all in the same way. They will never worship God all in the same way. They will never even all believe precisely the same things. But Christian unity transcends all these differences and joins men together in love.

The cause of Christian unity at the present time, and indeed all through history, has been injured and hindered, because men loved their own ecclesiastical organizations, their own creeds, their own ritual, more than they loved each other.

If we really loved each other and really loved Christ, no Church would exclude any man who was Christ's disciple. Only love implanted in men's hearts by God can tear down the barriers which they have erected between each other and between their Churches.

Further, as Jesus saw it and prayed for it, it was to be precisely that unity which convinced the world of the truth of Christianity and of the place of Christ. It is more natural for men to be divided than to be united. It is more human for men to fly apart than to come together. Real unity between all Christians would be a "supernatural fact which would require a supernatural explanation."

It is the tragic fact that it is just that united front that the Church has never shown to men. Faced by the disunity of Christians, the world cannot see the supreme value of the Christian faith. It is our individual duty to demonstrate that unity of love with our fellow men which is the answer to Christ's prayer. The rank and file of the Churches can do and must do what the leaders of the Church refuse officially to do" —[Barclay's Daily Study Bible](#)

The radiant rays



Lastly, as we conclude this section on the **Deeper meaning of the Logo**, there is one part of the logo that has yet to be mentioned. It is the rays of light that are emanating from the center of the LOGO behind the XP and the Bible.

The richness of meaning here is significant and probably could fill another several pages, but a few things are worth mentioning here in brief.

The Power of the Holy Spirit – Jesus promised that after he was crucified, dead, and buried and then raised back to life and once again joined God the Father in heaven that he would send the Holy Spirit. (Book of Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit would be the Spirit of God manifesting himself in the life of everyone who believes. The Holy Spirit would provide power, supernatural

insight, conviction of sin, guidance, understanding of the Bible and the manifestation of the fruits of the spirit in believers lives - *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23*

The Power of God's Word - *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12-13*

The Power of Christ's Resurrection - *Christ rose from the dead and will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. He died once for all to end sin's power, but now he lives forever in unbroken fellowship with God. So look upon your old sin nature as dead and unresponsive to sin, and instead be alive to God, alert to him, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:9-11*

Concluding Thoughts

This inspired history hopefully has caused you to appreciate the great spiritual heritage of the YMCA and where it has received its world changing power and vision. This review of history may have you excited and ready to launch out and try some new things and connect with others to get it done together.

This review may also leave you with the same challenge that George Williams' friends gave him. To surrender your life more earnestly to Christ. If your curious what that means for you no matter what your faith background is or current religious affiliation, you might find that the 21 Day Faith Experiment would be a great next step. Here is what you need to know.

The 21 Faith Experiment

The Bible is actually one book made up of 66 smaller books. One of these books is the book of John. John was one of Jesus' most intimate friends. The book opens up with 18 verses of poetry in the first chapter and then begins the history of John's friendship and observations of Jesus. It contains much of the core essence of what the Bible is all about.

You can find this book in the table of contents. It is 21 chapters long. ***The Faith Experiment simply involves reading one chapter a day for 5 - 10 minutes for 21 days.***

The awesome thing about this experiment is that you will be reading it for yourself. Many people have formed their opinions about the Bible on what other people have said about it. You will, however, gain first hand knowledge of what it says directly from your own reading and observation. To make the most of it consider the following.

- **Say a prayer** - "God if this is true help me to understand it". You may feel funny saying this, but give it a try.
- **Read with an open mind** - Think about what the text is actually saying, not what others have said it means.
- **You will not understand everything** - Don't worry about it. You will be surprised at how much you do understand.
- **Apply any truth you discover** - If something strikes you as a personal application point, it is possible that God is prompting your heart or guiding you to something He wants you to understand. Apply what you learn and see if it works.
- **Obtain an understandable translation** - If you want to get a more understandable translation of the Bible at a local bookstore (NIV, NAS, TLB, are accurate and clear), a sales associate can help you.
- **Look forward to what you might discover** - You will find out exciting things about yourself and about life. Write down what you learn or what you feel God is showing you.

Remember, "We cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are." - Max DePree

Have fun with it and thanks for your interest in wanting to no more about the YMCA Logo, its history, and its meaning.

Craig Seibert

The Primary YMCA Logos in use today

These would be the three logos most seen in use today.



The Y Logo for marketing and promotion with varied color setups



The JOHN17:21 Emblem that provides focus on Mission and Purpose



The World Alliance Emblem representing the global YMCA movement

