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The Development of Muscular Christianity in Victorian Britain and Beyond

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Abstract

The relationship between sport and Christianity during the last one hundred and fifty years has been largely driven by the Victorian concept of Muscular Christianity. This article examines the historical and theological roots of the movement, and how this has contributed to the relationship between sport and Christianity today. Discussion includes an analysis of social and cultural movements that have evolved as a result of the Muscular Christian philosophy. We conclude that Muscular Christianity has had a widespread influence on the development of modern sport and suggest that a revival of many of its ideals could act as an important corrective to the negative influences so pervasive in sport today.

Introduction

[1] The development of Muscular Christianity in the second half of the nineteenth century has had a sustained impact on how Anglo-American Christians view the relationship between sport, physical fitness, and religion. It has been argued that the birth of Muscular Christianity in Victorian Britain forged a strong ". . . link between Christianity and sport" that ". . . has never been broken" (Crepeau: 2). The emergence of neo-muscular Christian groups during the latter half of the twentieth century (Putney) and the promotion of sport in Catholic institutions, such as the University of Notre Dame, can be seen as a direct consequence of Victorian Muscular Christianity. Modern Evangelical Protestant organizations, such as Christians in Sport (CIS) in England and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) in the U.S., have resurrected many of the basic theological principles used to promote sport and physical fitness in Victorian Britain.

[2] The basic premise of Victorian Muscular Christianity was that participation in sport could contribute to the development of Christian morality, physical fitness, and "manly" character. The term was first adopted in the 1850s to portray the characteristics of Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) and Thomas Hughes' (1822-1896) novels. Both Kingsley and Hughes were keen sportsmen and advocates of the strenuous life. Fishing, hunting, and camping were Kingsley's favorite pastimes, which he saw as a "counterbalance" to ". . . education and bookishness" (Bloomfield: 174). Hughes was a boxing coach and established an athletics track and field program and cricket team at the Working Men's College in London where he eventually became Principal (Redmond). Not just writers but social critics, Kingsley and Hughes were heavily involved in the Christian Socialist movement and believed that the Anglican Church had become weakened by a culture of effeminacy (Putney). Kingsley supported the idea that godliness was compatible with manliness and viewed manliness as an "antidote to the poison of effeminacy – the most insidious weapon of the Tractarians – which was sapping the vitality of the Anglican Church" (Newsome: 207). From this, the doctrine of Muscular Christianity was adopted as a

response to the perceived puritanical and ascetic religiosity of the Tractarians, later known as the Oxford Movement.

[3] Aside from the religious motivations for the evolution and advancement of Muscular Christianity, the Victorians' preoccupation with health is arguably the most significant factor. "No topic more occupied the Victorian mind than Health . . . they invented, revived, or imported from abroad a multitude of athletic recreations, and England became in Sir Charles Tennyson's words, the *world's game master*" (Haley: 3). Haley suggests there were three main reasons for the prominence of the concept of the healthy body in the mid-nineteenth century.

[4] First, the Industrial Revolution brought about a Leisure Revolution within the working class population (Cunningham) and played a major role in focusing the Victorian psyche on health. Paradoxically, the automation of industry had led to sedentary lifestyles and as a consequence an exponential rise in cardio-vascular and respiratory disease. In addition, poor conditions and long arduous working hours in the factories resulted in many contracting occupational diseases. Second, the nineteenth century witnessed a number of major developments in medical science. The founding of physiology as a distinct discipline separate from biological science, and the emergence of physiological psychology engendered a holistic understanding of health and an emphasis on the mind–body connection. Third, and often less publicized, there was a real threat of war from a number of European countries and the Americans. Responding to this, the intelligentsia saw the need to protect the British Empire and produce leaders that were well educated and "manly" (Haley). Kingsley and Hughes, amongst other Protestant elite, saw Muscular Christianity as an appropriate vehicle for advancing British imperialism and increasing the health and well-being of the nation (Putney). Through the medium of sport, Kingsley saw the potential for spiritual, moral, and physical development:

> . . . in the playing field boys acquire virtues which no books can give them; not merely daring and endurance, but, better still temper, self-restraint, fairness, honor, unenvious approbation of another's success, and all that 'give and take' of life which stand a man in good stead when he goes forth into the world, and without which, indeed, his success is always maimed and partial (Kingsley cited in Haley: 119).

[5] The aim of this essay is to provide an understanding of the historical and theological development of Muscular Christianity in Victorian Britain and how this has contributed to the relationship that exists between Christianity and Sport today. Discussion will focus on the historical and theological roots of the movement and its manifestation in the late twentieth and twenty-first century.

Historical and Theological Roots of Muscular Christianity

[6] The origins of Muscular Christianity can be traced back to the New Testament where St. Paul and others used athletic metaphors to help describe the challenges of the Christian life (1 Corinthians 6:19; 9:24-25; and 2 Timothy. 4: 7).[1] However, the explicit advocacy of sport and

[1] Although most scholars date the origins of the movement from the New Testament, Eisen argues that it can be traced back to the Old Testament. In addition to religious dancing at Jewish festivals, he notes the Israelites' involvement in wrestling, military activities, and archery. Ballou also suggests that an "examination of the literature of the [Church] Fathers provides an indication that the relationship of Christianity to physical activity and sport was not as negative as the literature suggests" (196).

exercise, in the guise of Muscular Christianity, did not evolve until the mid-nineteenth century in Britain, and the source of the idiom has been a point of debate amongst scholars (Redmond). It is commonly accepted that a review of Charles Kingsley's *Two Years Ago* (1857) for the *Saturday Review*, written by the cleric T.C. Sandars was the first place the term appeared (Simon and Bradley). Ironically, Kingsley abhorred it and wrote a vitriolic response to the author who had used ". . . that painful, if not offensive term, 'Muscular Christianity'" (Haley: 109). Thomas Hughes, a friend and supporter of Kingsley, then used the concept in a follow-up to *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), called *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861). In contrast to Kingsley, who seemed worried about the negative connotations that may have been attached to the secular phrase "muscular", Hughes used it to promote the athleticism that was so pervasive in his novels (Winn). This said, Rosen notes that he was careful to clearly distinguish the concept of "muscular Christians" from the "musclemen" (athletes without Christian beliefs): "the only point in common between the two being, that both hold it to be a good thing to have strong and well-exercised bodies . . . Here all likeness ends", the Christian belief is ". . . that a man's body is given him to be trained and brought into subjection and then used for the protection of the weak, the advancement of all righteous causes" (Hughes: 99).

[7] Interestingly, Redmond has noted that a closer examination of other children's literature long before the birth of the concept in Kingsley and Hughes shows that the general thesis of Muscular Christianity was implicit within works published between 1762 and 1857. The work of writers, such as J.J. Rousseau, William Clarke, Dorothy Kilner, William Howitt, and S.G. Goodrich all possess glimpses of the Christian muscular gospel that flowered in the literature of Kingsley and Hughes. In his classic, *Emile* (1762), Rousseau emphasizes the importance of physical education in the development of moral character: "Give his body constant exercise, make it strong and healthy in order to make him good and wise . . . The lessons the scholars learn from one another in the playground are worth a hundred fold more than what they learn in the classroom" (cited in Redmond: 9). In conclusion, Redmond suggests neither Kingsley nor Hughes can be accredited with the original "athletic gospel" but they "reaped the harvest" that gave birth to the Muscular Christian movement during the Victorian period.

[8] Their personal lives, education, and political and theological affiliations heavily influenced Kingsley's and Hughes' ideas. The period between 1850-1900 was characterized by social unrest and political instability in the form of labor unrest in the working class population and serious problems with public health (Clark). Both Hughes and Kingsley had been sympathizers of Chartism, a political movement that developed in response to the social injustices suffered by the working classes. As a rector and author of social novels such as *Yeast* (1848), *Westward Ho!* (1855), and *Alton Locke* (1850), Kingsley became widely known as the "Chartist clergyman" (McGlynn). Following the House of Commons' decision to reject the Chartist Petition in 1848 and the subsequent demise of Chartism, Kingsley and Hughes continued to support the grievances of the working classes as leading proponents of Christian Socialism. They joined forces with other Christian Socialist thinkers such as F.D. Maurice (1805-1872), J.M. Ludlow (1821-1911), and Thomas Arnold (1795-1842). It was Ludlow who convinced Kingsley and Maurice that Christianity and Socialism could be integrated to offer an antidote to the political doctrine of Chartism (Bloomfield).

[9] Although the Christian Socialist movement had a similar goal as Chartism, its primary focus was on providing solutions to social ills through educational and moral change, not change in political legislation (Norman). At the time, this was a radical idea. Before the late 1840s, the

Church of England's attitude to implementing social reform was conservative with leading evangelicals emphasizing the hierarchical class system, thus marginalizing the poor and downtrodden. They saw poverty as being self-inflicted through various sins such as self-indulgence and intemperance (Parsons). The class system was also reinforced during the late nineteenth century by the fashionable concept of Social Darwinism. In short, the primary concern of the Victorian Church of England before the mid-nineteenth century had been to "save the lost" (i.e., to win converts) with concern for social welfare often coming a poor second.

[10] The Christian Socialists heavily criticized the Church's advocacy of the classic political economy and hierarchical class structure, which had contributed to the dehumanizing and neglect of the working class population during the early nineteenth century (Norman). In respect to Muscular Christianity, Kingsley had stressed the social benefits that accrue from participation in athletic activities, especially in terms of demolishing class divisions. Nevertheless, the Christian Socialist idea of a classless society often concealed ". . . a deeper belief in the class system and in the bourgeois hegemony" which is personified by the middle-class boys depicted in Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Allen: 120). And although implicit, there seems to be what Allen calls a "conceptual dilemma" in Hughes' classic work, between "the classless democracy of the athletic body and the hierarchical structure of the class system" (120-21). This tension was also evident in what Hargreaves calls a "leadership cult," which existed in middle-class public schools where society's leaders were being nurtured.

[11] The Christian Socialists, a small but very influential group of academics and Protestant clergy, disseminated their ideas primarily through two journals, *Politics of the People* (1848-1849) and *The Christian Socialist* (1850-1851). F.D. Maurice, who is recognized as the movement's most influential and leading thinker, also founded the Working Men's College in London in 1854, which ran evening classes, thus acting as a vehicle to educate the working class people. The theology that underpinned the Christian Socialist thesis and which complemented Muscular Christianity can be mainly attributed to Maurice. Heavily influenced by the idealism of Coleridge he believed that the Kingdom of God should be accessible to all members of society, a theology of universal brotherhood (Norman). In Maurice's book *The Kingdom of God* (1838) and in a later controversial publication *Theological Essays* (1852), he championed an Incarnational theology, which provided an elevated view of humanity with a stress on the importance of educating the masses to recognize their place in God's Kingdom.

[12] During the first half of the nineteenth century, there had been an emphasis on the Atonement within theological circles. Nevertheless, the advent of the Christian Socialist movement, especially in the work of Maurice, saw a shift ". . . to promote the study of social and political questions in the light of the Incarnation" (Norman: 30). This it was argued, has a sound biblical basis in the teachings of Jesus (e.g., Mark 3:20-30; Matthew 12:25-32; Luke 4) and provided the basis for Kingsley's theological position, which recognized the significance of the embodied soul, and in turn the goodness of athleticism and physical strength in the formation of character. Donald Hall has noted that the frequent reference to the body in the *Politics for the People* and other Christian Socialist literature provides evidence that ". . . the metaphors and pedagogical goals of the Christian Socialists and muscular Christians are inextricably linked" (48). This highlights the importance and significance of Hughes and Kingsley's work within the Christian Socialist movement and its impact upon social and cultural change during the Victorian period. Of the two, Kingsley has written more on the muscular Christian ethic and deserves the

credit for providing Muscular Christianity ". . . with a cohesive and conscious philosophy, consisting equally of athleticism, patriotism, and religion" (Putney: 12).

[13] It can be argued that the most significant idea to evolve from Kingsley's corpus of writings is "Christian manliness." His doctrine of masculinity had been originally based upon his ". . . instincts which told him that the life of a clergyman was compatible with married life and with that of a sportsman" (Haley: 111). From this, he sought to provide philosophical and theological justification for his feelings and borrowed from a diverse group of thinkers. The philosophical lineage of Kingsleyan masculinity is derived from Plato's concept of *thumos*, which he interpreted as a primal manly force involved in sex, morality, and fighting (Rosen). Although Bloomfield acknowledges that it is speculative, she suggests Kingsley's work may have also been influenced by the mystical and occult philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). There are a number of clear parallels in their work and perhaps most significantly their ". . . desire – to seek the relationship between soul and body" (173). Due to the influence of Plato's mind–body dualism and the liberal philosophy of Swedenborg in his work, his more orthodox contemporaries frequently accused Kingsley of Neo-Platonism and Pantheism, an accusation that he angrily refuted. These philosophical roots were formed while he was reading Classics at Cambridge University, where he gained a first class degree. He then developed and focused his ideas into a doctrine of social action and reform through reading the works of, and collaborating with essayist and social historian Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) and theologian F.D. Maurice.

[14] Carlyle had been influenced by the German Romanticist thought of Herder and Goethe. In trying to synthesize what Kant had described as the *noumena* and *phenomena*, Johan Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) had promoted the ". . . veneration of the body as being natural, beautiful manifestation of life and vitality, a vehicle through which, by means of gesture, the soul could speak" (Bloomfield: 180). Hence, it is possible to trace certain elements of German Romanticism in the thought of Kingsley. Haley proposes that Kingsley's notion of the muscular Christian or "healthy hero" was primarily based upon three of Carlyle's ideas: the body is an expression of the spirit and therefore the obedience to healthy impulse is a sign of constitutional harmony; the state of health is acknowledgment of the laws of nature and compliance with these laws; and heroism is a life of action made possible by observing the laws of health (111-12). In light of this, neither Kingsley, Maurice, or Hughes accepted the entire "vague theistic gospel" of Carlyle, but nevertheless it had a significant impact upon their work. Primarily, it was the ". . . angry Old Testament rhetoric of Carlyle's social criticism," which was a ". . . brutally direct stimulus to social action and intervention" that most significantly influenced the Christian socialist theology of Maurice and his associates (Vance: 59).

[15] In Alderson's analysis of Christian manliness in Kingsley's novel *Alton Locke* (1850), he contends that "the imperatives of a counter-revolutionary and Protestant culture . . . enabled the Kingsleyan sense of the ideal male body to become so central to the masculine self-definition of Britain's rulers" (43-44). In addition to the fears within the Protestant elite of the feminization of the Victorian Church, the rise of evolutionary theory and in the late nineteenth century Freudian and Jungian psychologies also helped strengthen Kingsley's notion of masculinity (Rosen). The doctrine of masculinity has been absorbed into the "deep structure" of society and continues to have a pervasive influence in athletics, religion, and men's movements within modern Anglo-American culture. For example, twentieth century men's movements that "seek to rid men of the problems of pre-sixties' macho and post-sixties' sensitivities" owe much to Kingsley (Rosen: 39-40). And in relation to sports participation, Harris proposes that ". . . the muscular novel

according to Kingsley and Hughes contributed to the immense vogue of athletics from the late sixties onwards" (11).

[16] In light of the widespread and prolonged influence of Kingsley's notion of the muscular Christian, there were notable Victorian and post-Victorian writers, such as Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) and E.M. Forster (1879-1970), who strongly disagreed with Kingsley's ideas (Putney). Forster suggested that those educated within the movement ended up with "well-developed bodies . . . and underdeveloped hearts" (5). Likewise, in a contemporary analysis of values, sport, and education, Grace suggests, "the irony of muscular Christianity is that it elevated sport more than the Gospels" (17). There were also staunch criticisms from a number of leading professors within American academia, especially before 1880. A major reason for this was the American Civil War. Soldiers hardly needed to prove their manliness on a playing field after demonstrating it on the battlefield and thus often derided the concept of Muscular Christianity (Putney).

[17] One of the key figures in the Oxford Movement, Catholic theologian John Henry Newman (1801-1890), had also publicly voiced his criticisms of Kingsley's philosophy. In his novel *Westward Ho!* (1855), Kingsley attacked the Catholic Church, and specifically its asceticism and condemnation of the flesh, and judged what he called "Mariolatry" as a major reason for the feminization of Victorian culture (Schiefelbein). According to Schiefelbein, this points out that Kingsley himself had been prone to confusion between his ascetic impulses and his sexual desires. The result was the most unfortunate (for Kingsley!) and infamous Kingsley-Newman controversy, which centred on a disagreement over the anthropological nature of man. Kingsley promoted a vision of the "divineness of the whole manhood," a synthesis of mind and body, and an education wherein ". . . one did not need to attend a university to form a manly character" (Haley: 119). While Newman agreed with Kingsley's understanding of the wholeness of man, he rejected his anti-intellectualism and emphasis on the corporeal dimension within the Christian life. In agreement with Newman, Fasick has argued against Kingsley's "hyper-masculinity" commenting, "despite his homage to gentleness and patience, Kingsley's real attraction is apparently to the displays of power and aggression with which he adorns his novels" (109). Haley notes that Newman adopted a more sophisticated approach arguing, "the man of philosophic habit has 'illumination,' not an inborn, infallible guide to conduct," which in turn differentiated between manliness and what Newman called gentlemanliness (Haley: 118). Kingsley had frequently criticized a number of High Anglican and Catholic clergy, but when he personally attacked Newman, Newman was quick to respond producing *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), a rigorous defense of Catholicism. In the eyes of the intelligentsia, this won Newman the debate, much to Kingsley's embarrassment (Putney).

The Fruits of Muscular Christianity: Socio-Cultural Developments in Victorian Britain

[18] Following the rise of Chartism and Christian Socialism, and shifting theological perspectives during the mid-Victorian period, a significant number of the Protestant elite, especially Kingsley and Hughes, advocated the use of sports and exercise to promote the harmonious development of mind, body, and spirit (Hall, 1994). Mathisen identified four models of Muscular Christianity that had developed from the ideas of Hughes and Kingsley by the end of the nineteenth century. These are the classical model, evangelical model, the YMCA model, and the Olympic model. The promulgation of sport and physical pursuits in English Public

Schools such as Rugby, Eton, and Uppingham, was arguably the most significant socio-cultural development to evolve from "classical" Muscular Christianity.

[19] During the late 1850s, the tenets of Muscular Christianity became an integral part of the public school educational system. The primary reason was to encourage Christian morality and help develop the character of the future captains of industry and political leaders, and in turn strengthen the British Empire (Wilkinson). Edward Thring (1821-1887), headmaster of Uppingham between 1853-1857, sums this up when he states, "the whole efforts of a school ought to be directed to making boys, manly, earnest and true" (Rawnsley: 12). The main impetus for the integration of the muscular Christian ethic into Public Schools was Thomas Hughes' book[2] *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857), a story of a boy whose character was shaped playing sport at Rugby School. Hughes had been heavily influenced by Rev. Dr. Thomas Arnold, his headmaster at Rugby during the 1830s, who instilled in him ". . . a strong religious faith and loyalty to Christ" (Brown: x). Although, it is Arnold that is most frequently cited in the literature as the driving force behind sports in public schools, the Rev. George Cotton had masterminded the sports program at Rugby School under Arnold. Cotton was perhaps the prototype of what Mangan called "a novel kind of school master – the athletic pedagogue" (23).

[20] The Muscular Christianity movement within public schools relied heavily upon the notion of Kingsleyan manliness. The sport of rugby was particularly popular as it gave plenty of opportunity to "take hard knocks without malice" (Mason 1981), a desirable trait in possible future leaders of industry and the military. Rugby, Dobbs suggests, was almost the perfect game for the promotion of Muscular Christianity, and if it had not already existed leaders of the movement would have invented it:

> If the Muscular Christians and their disciples in the public schools, given sufficient wit, had been asked to invent a game that exhausted boys before they could fall victims to vice and idleness, which at the same time instilled the manly virtues of absorbing and inflicting pain in about equal proportions, which elevated the team above the individual, which bred courage, loyalty and discipline, which as yet had no taint of professionalism and which, as an added bonus, occupied 30 boys at a time instead of a mere twenty-two, it is probably something like rugby that they would have devised (89).

[21] Dobbs' reference to rugby as an activity that would distract boys from vice and idleness was closely associated to the two unmentionables of the Victorian period: masturbation and homosexuality (Dobre-Laza). It was hoped that "games and religious worship . . ." would ". . . offer the Muscular Christian substitute gratifications for sexual desire . . ." which may otherwise be expressed in the perceived vice of masturbation (Harrington: 50). Homosexuality was also a major concern of public school masters. Holt has commented that ". . . at precisely the moment when the new norms of maleness were coming into force, the incarnation of the opposite of 'manliness' was defined in the form of homosexuality, which for the first time was generally

[2]Although often termed a classic, Gay notes that "the 'literary merits' of the book were scarcely formidable. What mattered more was that it gave the public what it wanted, an optimistic, breezy, 'realistic' tale with moral attached" (110).

designated a crime in 1885" (90). Thus, Kingsleyan masculinity acted as the antithesis of homosexuality and aesthetics during the Victorian age (Dobre-Laza).[3]

[22] A number of modern sports historians are skeptical about the motivations behind the original muscular Christians and the implementation of these ideas in nineteenth century public schools. For example, Baker (2000) argues that the ideologies behind the promotion of sport in Victorian Schools were primarily related to class, the Protestant work ethic, and the idea of manliness that was pedaled as an antidote to the feminization of the Church. As Grace has argued, Baker presents a purely functionalist thesis, which has some merit but is a rather narrow and simplistic analysis of a movement that has offered much to our understanding of sport and Christian values. In summary, the birth of Muscular Christianity in nineteenth century public schools has been one of the most significant factors in the development of sport and physical training in our modern educational systems (Mechikoff and Estes).

[23] A form of Muscular Christianity was also adopted as an evangelical tool by a number of individuals and groups during the Victorian period. C.T. Studd (1860-1931), a world-renowned cricketer and leader of the so called Cambridge Seven, and the American lay evangelist Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), both recognized the compatibility of sport and Christianity. However, their philosophy was not directly in line with "classical" Kingsleyan Muscular Christianity, which was largely a liberal and high Church phenomenon. As evangelicals, they emphasized that sport, although a valid recreational activity, was unimportant compared to gospel ministry. The story of Scotsman Eric Liddell, Olympic athlete, international rugby player, and Christian missionary in the early 1920s, powerfully depicted in the Academy award winning film *Chariots of Fire* (1981), closely resonates with the type of Muscular Christianity advocated by Studd and Moody. Liddell's decision not to race on a Sunday, due to his Christian faith (Exodus 20: 8), so missing the 100 meter final of the 1924 Olympics and his decision to give up a distinguished athletics career to become a missionary in China (Liddell), demonstrates many of the virtues of the muscular Christian ethic. Vance highlights that Liddell was a popular speaker at evangelical rallies and in universities where students were keen to listen to the testimony and ideas of the "flying Scotsman," and that Liddell has "carried the neo-evangelical version of what was essentially Victorian Christian manliness into the middle of the twentieth century" (172).

[24] Muscular Christianity also influenced the founding of the British Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in London in 1844 by George Williams. However, at its inception the YMCA emphasized ". . . bible-study, prayer and education" and had frowned upon sport and athletic activities as an unwanted distraction from evangelism. But they found it increasingly difficult to retain members due to competition with these secular attractions (Vance: 168). Over the next twenty to thirty years more liberal views crept into the philosophy of the YMCA, which had previously been characterized by evangelical piety. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Kingsleyan manliness became a pervasive theme in evangelical literature and rhetoric, and the concept of Muscular Christianity was thoroughly institutionalized into Victorian culture

[3]Notably, the Marquis of Queensberry, the man who codified boxing, was also the man who instigated the prosecution of aesthete Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) for homosexuality (Dobre-Laza).

and the YMCA (Rosen). The result was the proliferation of gymnasia and health and fitness programs within the YMCA on both sides of the Atlantic.[4]

[25] The main impetus for the founding of the YMCA in Britain had been the unhealthy social conditions arising from the industrial revolution. Young men, who had previously worked in a rural setting, worked ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week, in factories with generally appalling conditions. Shortly after the founding of the YMCA in Britain, a number of American Protestant ministers from various denominations, along with Captain Thomas Sullivan, formed a YMCA in Boston in 1851. This was based upon the British model and in time led to the development of the YMCA in numerous major American cities. Two hundred and five were established across the states by 1860 (Putney). The lay evangelists Dwight L. Moody and John Mott (1865-1955) were heavily involved with the American YMCA during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Many young men were sent abroad as missionary-like YMCA secretaries and war workers. This was a major dimension of the significant missionary outreach by Christian Churches around the turn of the century (YMCA).

[26] In terms of promoting Muscular Christianity, Dr Luther H. Gulick (1865-1918), an instructor in the YMCA Training School in Springfield, MA, was perhaps the most influential figure within the YMCA (Putney). Gulick created the distinctive triangular emblem of the YMCA that conceptualized fitness as an integration of mind, body and spirit, and in turn emphasized their muscular Christian ethos. Putney suggests that Gulick campaigned to ". . . Christianize the gym" (Putney: 71) and in turn reinforced the growing relationship between sport and Christianity. The founding of the Boys' Brigade by Sir William Alexander Smith (1854-1914) in Glasgow in 1883 further strengthened the synthesis of sport and Christianity during the Victorian era. Sport and other activities were used in addition to drills as a means of building Christian manly character. Smith identified the use of outdoor adventure in building character and manliness, and was intrigued by the scouting methods used by soldiers in the Boer war. This led to Smith asking Sir S.S. Baden Powell (1857-1941), a hero of the war, to re-write his *Aids to Scouting* for the Boys Brigade. Eventually, this resulted in the publication of *Scouting for Boys* (1907) and the formation of the Boy Scouts in Britain in 1897, an independent organization, which unlike the Boys Brigade evolved into a mainly secular organization (Vance). The Americans soon followed suit with a number of YMCA staff members playing a key role in establishing the Boy Scouts of America in 1910 (YMCA).

[27] Commenting on the significance of the YMCA and the movement of Muscular Christianity in which it is embedded, the prominent American psychologist G. Stanley Hall stated with great insight that "among all the marvelous advances of Christianity either within this organization [the YMCA] or without it . . . the future historian of the Church will place this movement of carrying the gospel to the body as one of the most epoch making" (377). Over the last one hundred and fifty years the YMCA has evolved into a worldwide organization and respected Christian institution that has made a significant contribution to the promotion of sport and physical training in a Christian context.

[28] The development of the Modern Olympic Games in 1896 by Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937) also had strong links with the ideology of Muscular Christianity. Notably, early in

[4] There were marked differences between the YMCA in the UK and USA. For example, Thomas P. Gladstone, a patron of the YMCA, observed that the Americans were developing ". . . more of a secular element than in England" (Baker 1994: 397). This was primarily due to the narrow evangelical and puritanical roots of the British YMCA.

his life de Coubertin had contemplated entering the priesthood, having been brought up in the Roman Catholic tradition and attending a Jesuit school. However, he could not accept the dogma of the Church and advocated what has been termed "the religion of humanity"[5] (Baker 2001: 15). Nevertheless, "Coubertin wrote in his memoirs that for him '. . . sport is religion with Church, dogma, cult . . . but especially with religious feeling', thus Coubertin . . . clearly had a religious understanding of Olympism" (Kortzfleisch: 231-36). Widund has also noted the similarities between de Coubertin's understanding of the Olympic ethos and St. Paul's writings, which encourage us to run the "good race" (1 Corinthians 9:24-25). Addressing the members of the International Olympic Committee at a banquet in London, de Coubertin said "the importance of these Olympiads is not so much to win as to take part . . . The important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have won but to have fought well" (Widund: 11). This became the core message of the modern Olympic movement and was borne in part from de Coubertin's engagement with the Muscular Christian ideal.

[29] After reading a French translation of Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and consequently visiting Rugby School, de Coubertin saw the athletic traditions of the English public schools system as a vehicle for rebuilding the character of France after the Franco-Prussian war (Vance) and as a perfect model for the rebirth of the Ancient Olympics (776 B.C.). In his own words, the philosophy of the games was "to unite ancient spirit and modern form" (Lammer: 107). He viewed the sports arena as ". . . a laboratory for manliness . . . an incomparable pedagogical tool . . . and it was all the invention of the Reverend Thomas Arnold. The Rugby School experiment, he said [inaccurately!], gave birth to 'muscular Christianity' . . . a Greek formula perfected by Anglo-Saxon Civilization" (cited in Lucas: 51). In his *Pedagogie Sportive* (1934) de Coubertin credits Kingsley and Arnold as totally altering the direction and definition of non-professional sport (Lucas). This is certainly true and our next task is to briefly outline how Muscular Christianity has impacted upon the modern world where ". . . the invocation of God and Christ in the world of sports has reached epidemic proportions" (Crepeau: 2).

The Legacy of Muscular Christianity in the Modern World

[30] Sport in the modern world has become what Pope John Paul II states is a ". . . paradigm of mass psychology" that permeates all levels of contemporary society (in Feeney: 80). The Pope himself enjoyed swimming, skiing, and mountain climbing during his younger years, and is a strong advocate of the philosophy of Muscular Christianity (Feeney). In an address to the National Olympic Committee in Rome in 1979 he commented, "the Church has always been interested in . . . sport, because she prizes everything that contributes constructively to the harmonious and complete development of man, body and soul" (in Feeney: 60). Just prior to the 2004 Athens Olympics, the Vatican recognized the importance of promoting ethics in sports and formed an office for "Church and Sport" within the pontifical Council for the laity. The Council's statement states that the new office will strive to foster "a culture of sport" that is "an instrument of peace and brotherhood among peoples" (Glatz: 12).

[31] In line with this, many Catholic colleges and universities, such as the University of Notre Dame, have emphasized the importance of a holistic education that includes sport and athletic

[5]His humanism did not exclude religion. The program of events for the opening ceremony of the Athens Olympics, 5 April 1896, was on a Sunday and consequently included Mass for competitors.

activities. Notably, Lawrence Dallaglio, the English rugby union ex-captain who is often venerated for his leadership qualities and who epitomizes "manliness," is a former pupil of Ampleforth College, an English Catholic boarding school. Following the tradition of the nineteenth century public schools, the college is renowned for its sporting prowess, especially its twelve rugby teams. Their mission statement is imbued with the ideals of Victorian Muscular Christianity:

> To share with parents in the spiritual, moral and intellectual formation of their children . . . to work for excellence in all our endeavours, academic, sporting and cultural . . . to help Ampleforth boys and girls grow up mature and honourable, inspired by high ideals and capable of leadership, so that they may serve others generously.

[32] The use of sports and outdoor pursuits as a method of instilling character in leaders has not been restricted to academic institutions. A Devon based Bible College, the Riverside Christian Centre, has recently incorporated "extreme sports" into its curriculum. Sports such as rafting, potholing, abseiling, white-water canoeing and surfing are used as ". . . part of the development of Christian leaders of the future" (Saunders 2003a). This is further evidence of the resurgence of the original muscular Christian ethic adopted by nineteenth century public school headmasters. In part, this has contributed to the establishment of academic research centers, such as The Centre for the Study of Sport and Spirituality at York St. John College, England. Other institutions have developed sports ministry centers that offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses in sport and theology.

[33] In the United States, the University of Notre Dame and Neumann College formed a sports ministry partnership ". . . with the goal of bringing a faith-based approach to Catholic youth sports programmes in parishes across the country . . . a renewal of Catholic youth sport organizations . . . in the 1920s and 1930s" (The Mendelson Centre and Neumann College). A key part of this venture has been the establishment of the Centre for Sport, Spirituality and Character Development at Neumann College and the Mendelson Centre for Sports, Character and Community at the Notre Dame campus. Dr. Edward Hastings and Len DiPaul, co-directors of the Centre for Sport Spirituality and Character Development, have ". . . a vision of sports as an educational enterprise which promotes the inescapable spiritual and ethical dimension that exists within athletics." The center offered one undergraduate and two undergraduate modules, titled Sport and Spirituality, The Soul of Athletics and The Spiritual, and Moral Dimensions of Athletics respectively.

[34] Similarly, the British Protestant Evangelical organization Christians in Sport (CIS) has recently established a one-year course at All Nations Christian College, called Sports and Intercultural Leadership Studies, which is validated by the Open University as a Certificate of Higher Education. Modules offered on the course are Theology of Sport, Sports Mission, and Sports Leadership. Graham Daniels, General Director of CIS, suggests the course will allow graduates to view the world of sport as a mission field. With around twenty-five million people participating in sport in England during April 2003, Daniels sees it as imperative not to ". . . take Christians out of this mission field!" (Saunders 2003b:7).

[35] As sport is a major socializing agent in the western world, evangelical groups such as CIS, have been quick to pick up the mantle of the original muscular Christians. Many Protestant evangelical organizations have been founded in the United States. The Fellowship of Christian

Athletes (FCA), Athletes in Action (AIA), and Pro Athletes Outreach (PAO) are three of the largest, and are active in nearly all intercollegiate athletic programs (Crepeau) – an approach wholeheartedly sponsored by the famed evangelist Billy Graham. Graham's regular use of famous sports people in his crusades became a significant mode of evangelical Muscular Christianity from the 1940s until the 1990s (Ladd and Mathisen). Organizations such as the CIS, FIA, and others are active worldwide, sending "Sports Ministers" to third world countries such as Africa, Latin America, and south-east Asia, to deliver the gospel message.

[36] Literature in this area is limited; however, recent publications such as *Sports Outreach: Principles and Practice for Successful Sports Ministry* (Connor) and *Into the Stadium: An Active Guide to Sport Ministry in the Local Church* (Mason 1982) acknowledge a growing interest. Many well-known sportsmen and women have used their status and popularity as a means of witnessing for their Christian faith. Examples are Olympic triple-jump champion Jonathan Edwards, European golfer Bernhard Langer, and ex-track athlete Kriss Akabusi, who have all been actively involved with CIS and have published autobiographies or biographies describing their lives as Christians in elite sport.

[37] Triple jumper, Jonathan Edwards is perhaps the most well known Christian sports person in Britain and has often been portrayed as a modern-day Eric Liddell (Folley). As the British trials for the 1988 Seoul Olympics were on a Sunday, Edwards bravely decided to follow in the footsteps of Liddell and not compete. The media created a furor, much to Edwards' surprise, but some writers clearly saw virtue in Edwards' actions:

> A religious athlete is a contradiction in terms in our psyched up, hyped up, drugged up days of sport. Eric Liddell, of *Chariots of Fire*, was already an anachronism when he refused to compete on a Sunday in the Paris Olympic games. But that was 1924 when there were still a few Christians left in Britain. They have become an endangered species who surprise the rest of us with their eccentric belief in God and the soul and other such things you can't buy with a credit card. Jonathan Edwards might as well be a time traveller, hundreds of Years old, who's come along in his personal Tardis to shake things up a bit (cited in Folley: 56-57).

[38] Edwards clearly saw his Christian beliefs as more important than sport and money, I am sure to the delight of many evangelicals! He admitted at the time that his decision had not been directly influenced by the story of Liddell and that he was flattered at the comparisons that had been made to the great Scot. He had much respect for Liddell, ". . . an exceptional man . . . who won Olympic gold, but we remember him as a man of faith . . . He committed himself to serve God and, though he could have used success by staying in Scotland and sharing the gospel, he bravely went as a missionary to China" (Folley: 61). Nevertheless, in time Edwards reconsidered and decided to compete on what he had previously viewed as the one true holy day in the week. Using Romans 14:15, which states that "one man considers one day more sacred than the other; another man considers every day alike" he argued that modern-day Christians are not under any requirement to observe the Old Testament law of the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8). This decision provoked a mixed response from family, friends, media, and the sporting world.

[39] Aside from the question of competing on Sunday, there is no doubt that Edwards has had a tremendously positive influence on the world of sport and wider culture. Having recently retired from professional athletics, Edwards continues to use the platform his fame and popularity have

provided to promote the gospel if not always through explicit evangelism. Like Liddell, he has often spoken at evangelical conferences, and on Easter Sunday 2003 presented the well-known BBC program Songs of Praise. Recently, Edwards has also become a member of a board that oversees standards of taste and decency on television and radio (Buckeridge). To a much lesser degree, this is reminiscent of the work of Kingsley and Hughes, who also strove to reinforce Christian ideals and implement social reform within Victorian culture.

[40] Through the example of his life in sport and beyond, Edwards and other Christian athletes provide a welcome response to the ". . . egotism, cynicism, nihilism . . . obsessive focus on money, and win at all costs mentality" (Spencer: 143) that is so pervasive in modern sport. Paradoxically, recent scandals surrounding athletes at the explicitly Christian Baylor University, ". . . who have been pursuing a very public quest to become America's Protestant Notre Dame" (Armstrong: 1), emphasize the disparity between the muscular Christian ideal and today's dominant sports ethic, especially in the United States. Revelations of under-the-table scholarships and drug use have caused much embarrassment. In America it is common place for ". . . coaches and players to make the sign of the cross and spew references to their faiths during post-game jubilation . . . and from their celebrity pulpits . . . encourage their followers to subscribe to their faiths" (Elliott: 1-2). However, it is legitimate to ask how much of this outward witness is demonstrated in athletes' personal lives. Although a high percentage of Americans assert a belief in God, this is not reflected in ". . . ethical conduct inasmuch as many sense that the nation is in moral discord" (Spencer: 145). Writing in *Christianity Today*, Armstrong suggests a need for a twenty-first century Thomas Arnold to resurrect the genuine Muscular Christian message in American sport and education:

> . . . the darker side of the "athletic ethic" [in the United States] . . . has little to do with an excess of evangelistic zeal, and everything to do with the usual muck of life in a country too rich and self-indulgent for its own good. Perhaps the memory of the original ideals will spark some modern reformer to usher school athletics, as a prodigal son, back to the father (4).

[41] The decline in ethical and moral standards within professional sport has predictably been absorbed into the Olympic Games. Modern day Olympics have been polluted with drug-taking, political boycotts and cheating. Volkwein attributes this primarily to professionalization and commercialization of top-level sport, which has distorted the notion of fair play and the true spirit of sport advocated by de Coubertin at the end of the nineteenth century. Following the rising tide of world terrorism, fuelled by religious fundamentalism, there were serious concerns raised over the safety of athletes and spectators at the 2004 Olympics in Athens (e.g., Bone and McGrory). Fortunately, no such terrorist atrocities occurred. Predictably, there were a number of high profile drug scandals that tainted the games. Embarrassingly for the hosts, it was the controversy surrounding the Greek sprinters, Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou, which received the most media attention (e.g., Bose). Despite these depressing facts, the bond between Christianity and the modern Olympics has certainly not been severed. The Olympic Charter includes a reference to freedom of religious worship, which has led the Church and evangelical sports organizations to recognize the opportunity for witness and service at major sporting events (Weir).

[42] Explicit Christian ministry at major sporting events started at the 1972 Munich Olympics, with chaplains providing an "unofficial" service to athletes. However, major events ministry did not begin until 1988, at the summer Olympics in Seoul and the Winter Olympics in Calgary,

Canada. The International Bible Society produced an evangelistic booklet in the form of a souvenir program for the 1988 games, which proved to be a major success and a significant development in the history of sports ministry. From this, the use of "non-crass" evangelical literature was a key strategy at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Christian publishers also created many other resources for the 2000 games, such as CDs, websites, and Sports New Testaments. More than one million Christian sports resources were distributed during the period leading up to the Sydney games and perhaps most notably two-hundred and twenty-five thousand *Sports New Testaments* were sold. Christian outreach also played a major role with approximately forty-five denominations and para-Church ministry groups and seven hundred Churches involved in service and witness across Australia. A conservative estimate suggests that there were two-thousand, two-hundred and twenty-five commitments of faith during the Sydney Olympics (Weir, 2004). Predictably, this success has resulted in the evolution of sports ministry into a worldwide phenomenon.

[43] It was estimated that sport ministry, in some form, occurred in-between one-hundred and two-hundred countries throughout the period of the 2004 Athens Olympics. In Athens, the Church of England's Greater Athens Chaplaincy and the local Greek Evangelical Church corroborated to form a group of forty Protestant Chaplains to minister to Olympic athletes for the games in August and the Paralympics in September. In addition, many evangelical sport organizations sent representatives to Athens for the 2004 Olympics. At the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, AIA sent seventy volunteers ". . . to promote the good will of sport and help in a variety of ways" (AIA: 1). Unfortunately, Coffman may be right in suggesting that although the ethic of Muscular Christianity is still alive in ". . . fit and fresh faced Christians" who ". . . make the best ambassadors for faith . . . you just won't hear about it at the Olympics" (3).

Concluding Remarks

[44] The aim of this essay was to examine the historical and theological development of Muscular Christianity and how this has impacted upon the relationship between sport and Christianity in the late twentieth and twenty-first century. It can be argued that Muscular Christianity and its rebirth in the form of Sports Ministry, has provided the basis for much of the research and scholarship on Christianity and sport today. During the last thirty years and especially in the last decade, there has been a significant increase in literature exploring the relationship between sport and religion (Novak 1976; Hoffman), the use of Christian prayer in sport (Czech et al; Kreider), spirituality in sport (Hastings; Götz) and sport psychology (Watson and Nesti), and the relationship between Judaeo-Christian ethics and sport (Grace; Spencer; Stevenson). Hopefully, this will provide a much needed corrective to the negative influences so pervasive in modern sport.

[45] There is vast potential for research and scholarship on the relationship between Christianity and sport. Professor Michael Novak, renowned social theorist and author of the seminal text *The Joy of Sports* (1976), recently noted that ". . . research into the multiple dimensions of sports (religious, psychological, anthropological, philosophical) continues to go deeper . . . sports have an intellectual and moral depth that has been too neglected in academic life" (Novak 2003). The revitalization of the Muscular Christian ethic could be a useful means of combating the obesity pandemic that has engulfed the Western world. Alongside the promotion of sport and exercise, the Christian doctrine of gluttony could be used as a valid method, amongst others, in combating this growing health and social problem. Other areas that are worthy of further investigation

include: the effectiveness of sports ministry and evangelism in the modern world; the ethical, sociological and political issues that may surround sports evangelism; the use of sports and outdoor activities in modern educational systems and in training Christian ministers and youth workers; and the spiritual and religious dimensions of the Olympic movement.

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