

Running Head: PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Putting the Pieces Together: Examining the Division Between Christian and Secular  
Elements of Muscular Christianity

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### Abstract

Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a movement called Muscular Christianity was extremely influential in The United States. Despite the name, there was a very strong secular aspect to this movement. A portion of this movement was dedicated to more closely uniting masculinity with the church and Christianity. This group consisted of various personalities and groups that supported a similar message for men and the church at large. The most apparent aspect of this was the Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-12. This was a major rally and marketing based movement of men in Christianity.

The many pieces of Muscular Christianity all held in common the social turbulence, changing expectations for the genders, and the changes in employment brought on by the industrial revolution. Muscular Christianity had as one of its elements the M&RFM. This relation consists of the M&RFM being the single most concentrated example of the Christian movement within Muscular Christianity. There is a division within Muscular Christianity between its secular and Christian components.

## Putting the Pieces Together: Examining the Division Between Christian and Secular

### Elements of Muscular Christianity

#### Introduction

Muscular Christianity was a cultural movement that originated in England and took on its own distinct American flavor after it crossed the Atlantic. Spanning from 1880 to 1920, the movement permanently etched itself onto the American psyche. Muscular Christianity began or influenced many classic American institutions. 1880 to 1920 was an extremely turbulent time period in history that makes understanding a single movement much more difficult as it is mixed up in the mêlée of many other movements, causes, and events. This Progressive era, a time that witnessed many social movements as reactions to the changing culture, industry, and advances in knowledge. These movements included the social gospel movement, the temperance movement, the suffrage movement, as well as Muscular Christianity and the Men and Religion Forward Movement (here after M&RFM). Many of their leaders were involved with more than one of these movements.<sup>1</sup> These interconnected movements make a single history of one of the movements difficult as it is an attempt to categorize events and people which most likely were involved in more than one movement.

Muscular Christianity is by no means a well-known movement, most likely having been overshadowed by the “greater” events of the period. The M&RFM is similarly unknown, although due to its remarkable similarity to the Promise Keepers

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<sup>1</sup> One example of this participation in multiple movements is Billy Sunday’s involvement with the Temperance movement as well as his ideological agreement with the Christian aspects of Muscular Christianity and the Men and Religion Forward Movement (M&RFM). An additional example is Teddy Roosevelt, who heartily embodied both the progressive movement and Muscular Christianity.

organization of the 1990s, it has been studied somewhat more. There is a relationship between these movements that has not been well understood. An example of this misunderstanding is Philip Culbertson's entry on "Christian Men's Movements" in the *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*. In it Culbertson calls Muscular Christianity, the Freethought movement, and the M&RFM the first, second, and third evangelical Christian men's movements respectively.<sup>2</sup> This is incorrect, as Muscular Christianity was not actually an evangelical Christian movement. The Freethought movement and fraternal orders were two examples of a masculine secular reaction within Muscular Christianity, and the M&RFM was an evangelical Christian movement within Muscular Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Understanding the relationships between the various pieces of Muscular Christianity, especially that of the M&RFM, is the objective of this paper.<sup>4</sup>

A greater understanding of Muscular Christianity, what comprised it, and its relationship with its various parts has significant historical value. By better

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Culbertson, "Christian Men's Movements." *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*, eds. M. Flood, J.K. Gardiner, B. Pease, and K. Pringle 1 vol. (London, England: Routledge, 2007), page unknown. Culbertson is a pro-feminist who has written many different works from a liberal Christian perspective on gender.

<sup>3</sup> Muscular Christianity's secular nature can be seen below on pages 14 and 15, but the Freethought and fraternal orders provide the most cohesive elements and are at times directly opposed to Christianity. These elements are covered below on pages 16-19.

<sup>4</sup> Various pieces of this topic have been studied before. Some very helpful resources were L. Dean Allen's *Rise Up O Men of God: The Men and Religion Forward Movement and Promise Keepers* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), and Clifford Putney's *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001). They are used throughout this paper and their distinct focuses help to give depth to the material. There are a considerable number of primary source documents for this topic as well. Preeminent in this collection is the twelve volume set of the findings and speeches of the Christian Conservation Congress of the M&RFM. An early leader, and probably one of the best available on the topic of men and religion in this period, is Carl Case's *The Masculine in Religion* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1906). Providing various other viewpoints are also Bruce Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1924), and Harry Emerson Fosdick's *The Manhood of the Master* (New York, New York: Association Press (of the Young Men's Christian Association), 1913). The M&RFM set out to use the media through advertisements and through attracting newspaper attention, thus, there are many old newspapers that can provide additional first-hand information. These are some of the primary sources utilized in this paper.

understanding Muscular Christianity, the relationships between various social movements of the period can be better understood. Because movements are rarely isolated events in a culture by better understanding Muscular Christianity can provide a fuller understanding of the Progressive era. The M&RFM and Muscular Christianity sit atop multiple fault lines of scholarship. They touch on gender studies, religion, sociology, psychology, and business. Through a better understanding of the M&RFM and its place within Muscular Christianity these extremely diverse fields can all be enriched with a deeper historical context. This would enhance studies of the M&RFM which is now important as the historical forbearer to the modern Promise Keepers movement. The M&RFM had the distinction of being “the only countrywide religious revival in America ever to exclude women.”<sup>5</sup> Thus making it the first and only Christian Men’s Movement until Promise Keepers.

Muscular Christianity had as its main focus an adherence to “masculinity,” the body as good and health as desirable, and an amount of respect for business development, and modernism. These elements can be seen in both Christian elements of Muscular Christianity as well as elements that were at times hostile to Christianity but adhered to the rest of the focuses of Muscular Christianity. Muscular Christianity was much more cultural than any specific religious influence. Thus there are both religiously Christian and non-Christian elements within the Muscular Christianity movement. These Christian elements take place within the general principles and time period of Muscular Christianity but apply the principles to the church and to Christian men’s lives to answer questions of how a man is to act as a Christian and how he is to cope in a changing

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<sup>5</sup> Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 137. This statement was written previous to the rise of Promise Keepers which went on to be the second American Christian Men’s Movement.

society. In many ways, Christians sought to answer the rumor that Charles Spurgeon spoke of when he said, “There has got abroad a notion, somehow, that if you become a Christian you must sink your manliness and turn milksop.”<sup>6</sup> Many Christians sought to answer this by uniting Christianity and the cultural elements of Muscular Christianity.<sup>7</sup> Muscular Christianity can be split into those organizations which espoused the general principles of Muscular Christianity (secular) and those which sought to unite them with religious Christianity in order to masculinize the church (Christian). Within this smaller “Christian” section of Muscular Christianity were many different groups and individuals. The single most prominent group within this “Christian” section is the M&RFM.

This thesis demonstrates the relationship between these various elements beginning with an understanding of the cultural backdrop to and the origins of muscular Christianity. Next, the pieces of Muscular Christianity will be examined within the two categories of “secular” and “Christian” elements of Muscular Christianity. The Christian elements and their unity as a cohesive movement are particularly emphasized. These include the M&RFM, other Christian groups, and some prominent Christians that adopted some of the views of Muscular Christianity and the M&RFM. Finally, the end of the Muscular Christianity will be discussed, and the findings of this work noted. Simply put, Muscular Christianity was not inherently religious, but some Christians took Muscular Christian principles and united them with a reform movement within American Christianity in an attempt to make the church more masculine.

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<sup>6</sup> As quoted in David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> An important issue to address here is the continuing debate as to whether gender is an essential element to a person or whether it is a socially developed concept. This is an amazingly hot issue due to the impact this debate has on “alternative lifestyles” and their social acceptability. For this paper, gender will be assumed to follow an essentialist mindset since that is the mindset of most of the leaders, authors, and movements of the Christian elements of Muscular Christianity. This debate seems to be one of those that will never be completely settled, similar to the nature vs. nurture debate in psychology.

### Cultural Background of Muscular Christianity

Muscular Christianity developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as a response to the changes of industrialization and women's changing roles.<sup>8</sup> Clifford Putney sees Muscular Christianity as a reaction against female leadership in Christianity.<sup>9</sup> The issue is bigger than just leadership though. The feminine flavor that permeated religion of the period was a cause for concern to men. The question of what societal issues were driving Muscular Christianity is in reality more diverse and complex than what will be presented here, but a basic outline involves the perceived feminization of Christianity and social changes stemming from the shifting of women's roles and the job changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

Cultural change occurred with the changing nature jobs and cities during this period. Industrialization and urbanization were a cause of concern for many in America. L. Dean Allen credits the changing nature of work for men who were now employees instead of self-employed and often being unemployed for the first time. This new and uncomfortable job situation was a cause of the social turbulence that bred reform movements such as Muscular Christianity and the M&RFM.<sup>10</sup> Allen further explains that the "second wave of industrialization" which occurred from 1870-1920 involved larger corporations and fewer small businesses. This meant that men "were less in control of their economic fate."<sup>11</sup> These changing job conditions and their resulting problems,

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<sup>8</sup> L. Dean Allen, *Rise Up O Men of God*, 37. Allen does not include Muscular Christianity in this point, but the same causes were behind both movements. As a side note many related topics for further study are mentioned in the footnotes. A great example of this would be to take L. Dean Allen's work on Promise Keepers and the Men and Religion Forward Movement and expand it to a study of the similarities of the Christian elements of Muscular Christianity and the Modern Christian Men's Movement.

<sup>9</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Allen, *Rise Up O Men of God*, 62.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.



especially unsafe conditions, were the impetus for the Social Gospel movement.<sup>12</sup> With this loss of control in deciding their fates in view, it is easy to understand why men were searching for something to hold on to.

The changing cities and urbanization also worried moralists as well as those concerned with the nations health. The cities were seen as havens for vice as R. A. Torrey, a fundamentalist minister, implies when he refers to “the great city with its many temptations.”<sup>13</sup> The creation of many “desk jobs” caused some to worry about the state of mankind and its vitality.<sup>14</sup> Many workers did far less physical labor than in previous generations, and many men had been swept into the cities which also fostered a concern for mankind's continuing health. It even became a status symbol to have neurasthenia, “nerve sickness.”<sup>15</sup> Meaning that being a nervous wreck had become a status symbol at one point. The Y.M.C.A. attempted to compensate for this lack of exercise and was also involved in lobbying for fewer working hours as a part of the Social Gospel and Muscular Christianity movement.<sup>16</sup> The health and fitness concerns of the cities and desk jobs as well as the moral pitfalls that were more readily available in the big cities were a cause for concern as well as action.

In addition to the turbulent nature of work, women's roles began changing as well. As evidence of this shift between 1890 and 1910, the number of women working outside the home nearly doubled from four million to over seven million. All the while, women were less and less involved in domestic occupations and more so as secretaries

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Nesselbush Green, “From Sainthood to Submission: Gender images in Conservative Protestantism, 1900-1940,” *Historian* 58 3 (Spring 1996), 10th paragraph. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9607261520&site=ehost-live> (accessed on February 22, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 26, 28.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 43.

and other “office work.” Married women working outside the home more than doubled between 1900 and 1910 to eleven percent of all married women.<sup>17</sup> These figures represented an invasion of men’s public sector. Women also became involved in causes in the public sector. The two most prominent examples of these causes are the temperance and suffrage movements.<sup>18</sup> Gender roles were changing away from distinct realms for men and women as women moved into the public sector.<sup>19</sup> This was a violation of the Victorian ideal of “Public man, Private woman.” This meant that a man belonged out working and being involved in society while a woman’s proper place was in her home and the church. This caused a woman to focus on her church activities which were designated womanly and thus developed a feminized religion.

Perhaps the most influential author on the topic of the feminization of nineteenth-century religion, Ann Douglas, along with Leon Podles, saw the churches in America as having a long standing problem with attracting an equal number of male worshippers.<sup>20</sup> In the nineteenth century, the minister was supported by women, and in many ways, the church was a woman’s world.<sup>21</sup> A traveler of the time remarked “America was unique, for there was surely no other country in the world where ‘religion had so strong a hold upon the women or a slighter hold upon the men.’”<sup>22</sup> Douglas argues that as “men increasingly chose business over leadership in the churches, church leadership fell into

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<sup>17</sup> Allen, *Rise Up O Men of God*, 28.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-37.

<sup>19</sup> DeRogatis, “Gender” in *Themes in Religion and American Culture*, 218.

<sup>20</sup> Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 98. Also, Leon Podles, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity*, (Dallas, Texas: Spence Publishing Company, 1999), 16-19. Of additional interest might be to examine how theology was co-opted by the feminine. This topic is covered in Ch. 4 of Douglas’ book.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>22</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 25.

the hands of less ‘manly’ men [mainly ministers] and women.”<sup>23</sup> This explains the lowering masculine “temperature” of the churches, and it goes a long way in explaining Muscular Christianity’s interest in promoting harmony between business and the church, especially the Christian elements, and running the church on business methods.

One quip went that, if the number of men in church did not increase, “there will not be men enough in heaven to sing bass when ‘The Song of Moses and the Lamb’ is rendered by the redeemed before the Great White Throne.”<sup>24</sup> This issue was bigger than just American churches. Missions also became the stronghold of women with missionary demographics being split sixty, forty in favor of women.<sup>25</sup> During the nineteenth century, women even began their own mission boards and sent their own women missionaries. During the crusades of the M&RFM, women were celebrating a fifty-year Women’s Missionary Jubilee.<sup>26</sup> Muscular Christianity responded to this feminization of missions via the Layman’s Missions Movement and Student Volunteer Movement.

Carl Case, an American writer and pastor of the period, agreed with Ann Douglas’s view of the importance of women to the church.<sup>27</sup> Case claims that (in 1906) there were 13 million women to 7 million men in Protestant Churches. Case attributes the lack of men to an overemphasis on the feminine virtues in the church.<sup>28</sup> An example of this is the primacy given to emotion.<sup>29</sup> Carl Case pointed out that if women have been

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>26</sup> Allen, *Rise Up O Men of God*, 43-44.

<sup>27</sup> Case, *The Masculine in Religion*, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 47.

“subjected” by a patriarchal church she has managed to still remain the power behind the throne as well as to dictate the understanding of religion to be feminine.<sup>30</sup>

The Christian elements of Muscular Christianity particularly were reacting against this feminine mindset of religion. This can be seen by the repeated need mentioned for “virility” in religion. They set out to create a masculine religion. To do so, they had to overcome what David Murrow calls the gaps of presence, participation, and personality.<sup>31</sup> On a somewhat related note, the development of Fundamentalism during this period is due partially to gender issues as has been argued by Betty DeBerg.<sup>32</sup> Fundamentalism eventually appears as a final stronghold of Muscular Christianity. The Fundamentalist reaction is against both the changes in women’s positions in the church and the even greater changes for women in all of society previously mentioned. The feminized church and the social turbulence of changing female roles, jobs, and cities all created a country ripe for the coming of Muscular Christianity.

#### Origin of Muscular Christianity

The man with the best claim to the title “Father of Muscular Christianity” is British author and Anglican Minister, Charles Kingsley. He had an “obsession with health and manliness.”<sup>33</sup> From the beginning, the social gospel was closely tied to Muscular Christianity. The term “Muscular Christianity” actually originated as a

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>31</sup> Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, 51. Also throughout chapters seven through nine.

<sup>32</sup> Green, “From Sainthood to Submission,” 6th paragraph. This is another untapped topic. Fundamentalism and its beginnings are intertwined with this period, and it appears as a final carrier of Muscular Christianity, but much more could be done with this topic.

<sup>33</sup> Edwin Woodruff Tait, “Charles Kingsley,” *Christian History & Biography*, 86 (Spring 2005): 26. Kingsley, and by extension Muscular Christianity, have had a lasting impact on American society. This impact includes the modern writer Robert Bly, one of the leaders of the mytho-poetic men’s movement and author of *Iron John*. Rosen, “The Volcano and the Cathedral: muscular Christianity and the origins of primal manliness,” in *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, 40-41.

derogatory term, but it stuck.<sup>34</sup> Part of Kingsley's reaction was against Roman Catholicism, especially the feminine aspects of bridal mysticism and celibacy.<sup>35</sup> Muscular Christianity took three points from Kingsley's works: sports, anti-otherworldly, and pro-British Empire.<sup>36</sup> This last point was generally dropped when Muscular Christianity came to America.<sup>37</sup>

Besides Kingsley, Thomas Hughes author of *Tom Brown's School Days*, was very influential. He based one of his extremely masculine and character enhancing works on his old school headmaster Thomas Arnold. Part of Arnold's methods involved using sports to build character.<sup>38</sup> This is the early marriage between Muscular Christianity and sports. Muscular Christian English literature had other authors, none more famous than Rudyard Kipling, but eventually, the literature faded away. However, the concept lived on and moved to America.

In 1859 Thomas Wentworth Higginson submitted an article on Muscular Christianity to the *Atlantic Monthly* and now is considered the father of Muscular Christianity in America. He, among others, criticized Americans as unhealthy when compared to their exercising cousins from England. The reason Muscular Christianity took so long to catch on in America (circa 1880) is due to the Civil War. The war stunted the feminine decline by confirming the manliness of a generation, therefore the masculine

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<sup>34</sup> David Rosen, "The Volcano and the Cathedral: muscular Christianity and the origins of primal manliness," in *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture no. 2. Donald E. Hall, ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 17.

<sup>35</sup> Podles, *The Church Impotent*, 157. Bridal Mysticism dwells on the Biblical image of the Church as the bride of Christ. Proponents of this view even see the individual Christian as the spouse of Christ. This view was especially encouraged by Bernard of Clairvaux a medieval monk. For more information on this see chapters six and seven of Podles work.

<sup>36</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 11-13.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

need to prove oneself through sports was unnecessary until later. The industrialization of America lagged behind that of England, so the corporations, turbulent job situations, and less physical jobs that were eventually an influence on Muscular Christianity also developed later. The feminized state of religion as well as the church's opposition to sports were additional causes for the delay of Muscular Christianity in America.<sup>39</sup>

Muscular Christianity sparked many different movements and inspired various people in their work. Probably one of the biggest cultural icons that would fit this category is the Boy Scouts which were founded in 1907 by Lord Baden-Powell. The English version of the Boy Scouts was involved with the Muscular ideas of the outdoors and fitness but had little to do with God and evangelism.<sup>40</sup> In America however, there was a much closer link between the Boy Scouts and churches since churches attempted to especially reach boys. This closeness can be seen in the eighty percent of troops that were sponsored by churches in 1915 and that in 1921 ninety percent of Scouts claimed to be attending Sunday school.<sup>41</sup> The Y.M.C.A., which seemed to be behind every aspect of Muscular Christianity in America, was also a supporter of the Boy Scouts in America.<sup>42</sup>

Theodore Roosevelt, a Muscular Christian enthusiast, improved himself with exercise from a sickly child to a robust rancher in the Dakotas, and then to President of the United States. Roosevelt functioned as the charismatic "standard bearer of Progressivism."<sup>43</sup> As a standard bearer, he was invariably involved in more than just Muscular Christianity, but his endorsement and personal example are hardly to be discounted.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 21-25.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 113-114.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 33-35.

As Muscular Christianity rose to prominence it sparked an increase in outdoor activity in America. Part of Teddy Roosevelt's involvement included his efforts to establishing national parks. This increased importance and interest in the outdoors spawned the magazines *Field and Stream* and *Outdoor Life*, both in 1897. This popularity of the out-of-doors brought about the establishment of "organized camping" such as that of the Y.M.C.A. Another group to develop during this time was the Playground Association of America, with Teddy Roosevelt as its honorary president. This group sought to counter the dangers of the city by allowing the children play as an "antidote to civilization." At this time colleges and public schools began requiring physical training as part of the curriculum. These activity and health-oriented pursuits are associated with the "cult of the strenuous life" which was a part of Muscular Christianity.<sup>44</sup>

#### Examples of "Secular" Muscular Christianity

Despite its name Muscular Christianity and its smaller organizations were not necessarily Christian in any religious aspect. Because of its origin with a "Christian" culture and as a literary genre it has Christian cultural elements. These are quite distinct from a religious Christianity. The cultural masculine and modern (scientific) elements of Muscular Christianity can be seen in the Freethought and fraternal orders that arose during this period.<sup>45</sup> These groups were also reacting to the same causes that impacted other elements of Muscular Christianity. These basic ideas of Muscular Christianity, which were of themselves unreligious, were adopted and fitted by churches and American Christianity in their effort to masculinize the American church. It is at this

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 35-38.

<sup>45</sup> See Putney's list of the basic tenants of Muscular Christianity Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 11-13. These are explained in detail above on page 13.

point that Muscular Christianity actually becomes in any genuine way “Christian.” In order to demonstrate the division within Muscular Christianity between Christian and non- or anti- Christian elements I have included two non-Christian examples, the Freethinkers and fraternal orders. Following this are those elements of Christianity which adopted Muscular Christianity in their effort to modernize and de-feminize the American church.

The Freethought Movement was, more or less, the abandonment of Protestantism between 1880-1920 resulting from, struggles with the stigma of being considered “unmanly” as well as backward or unscientific, and some intellectuals even walked away from professing Christianity because of this.<sup>46</sup> This movement perceived the church as unscientific superstition unfitting for a society that had advanced as far as that of turn of the century America, and its supporters considered the church to be “feminized.” Because of these reasons they sought to completely separate the church from state. These atheists banded together and formed the National Liberal League (renamed the American Secular Union) as well as the Free Religious Association.

The Freethought movement was composed of up to eighty percent men. The movement highly esteemed rational thought, reason, and science. The Freethinker’s champion was Robert G. Ingersoll a lecturer and writer. In many ways the Freethought

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<sup>46</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 7. There is debate as to whether The Freethinkers should be considered a part of Muscular Christianity. They obviously would have objected to being called anything Christian, muscular or otherwise. Their distinctiveness might entitle them to be considered as a parallel movement that was not a part of Muscular Christianity but was a masculine secular reaction to a feminized church. The reason I have included them here is because the Freethinkers adopted the basic tenants of Muscular Christianity, manly and anti-otherworldly (see pg.13 and Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 11-13.) In their case this other-worldly emphasis was pitted against a “superstitious,” ritualistic, and feminized church. Actually the Freethinkers rejected the church for the exact same reason the M&RFM attempted to reform it. The Freethinkers were also responding to the same social disruptions as the rest of Muscular Christianity, changing jobs, women’s gender roles, etc. So while they certainly are not Christian, the Freethinkers otherwise fit within the definition of Muscular Christianity.



movement was the antithesis of the M&RFM.<sup>47</sup> Both of these groups viewed Christianity as feminine and saw that the current state of religion was outdated and ineffective. They even held similar views of the masculinity they were trying to establish, but their positions on the solutions to these challenges were diametrically opposed.<sup>48</sup> While the Freethinkers were opposed to Christianity, their adherence to the basic principles of Muscular Christianity: the development of the body, the remasculinizing of the culture, and modern advancement indicates their agreement with Muscular Christianity. This is the first example of a non-Christian element to Muscular Christianity.

Between 1860 and 1880, “hundreds of fraternal organizations imitated the Odd Fellows and Freemasons.” (These two groups were older and more established fraternal orders.) This fraternal order boom was so great that some insurance salesmen began including rituals and initiations and even their own societies. At one point there were more Americans being insured by fraternal organizations than by insurance companies. At the opening of the twentieth century up to forty percent of men held membership in a fraternal society. The largest participants in these lodges were middle-class Protestant men. There were parallels between these fraternal societies, and the modern day Mytho-Poetic Men’s Movement.<sup>49</sup> This boom in lodges shows the need for men to have a social outlet and that this outlet was not being found in Christianity. In fact, the lodges were

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<sup>47</sup> Evelyn A. Kirkley, “Is it Manly to be a Christian? The Debate in Victorian and Modern America,” in *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities*, eds. Stephen B. Boyd, W. Merle Longwood, and Mark W. Muesse (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 80-82.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85. The Freethought movement and M&RFM were reacting to the exact same situation, using the same Muscular Christian principles, but the Freethinkers sought to solve the problem by abandoning the church while the M&RFM (and others like Carl Case, or Bruce Barton) sought to use those principles of masculinity and anti-otherworldliness, which the Freethinkers used to discredit the church, to save the church by adapting it to the changing environment it was faced with and recapturing the church’s masculine element.

<sup>49</sup> This movement is an attempt by men to reconnect to some ancient mythical ideal of masculinity through rituals, initiation, and the exploring of legends. A prominent leader and of the Mytho-Poetics is Robert Bly, the author of *Iron John*.

perceived to be in opposition to the established religion of the time, not a direct form of opposition but as a more masculine alternative:

For many, lodge credos proved to be more relevant and lodge rituals more compelling than traditional Protestant worship. Fraternalists repeatedly denied that their rituals were anything but supplemental to revealed Christianity (much of fraternal ritual being culled, in fact, directly from the Bible); yet, the evidence suggests otherwise. Lynn Dumenil concedes that many Masons found theirs a “superior” religion. They felt that while the churches were narrow-minded and sectarian, they themselves evinced tolerance and brotherhood. An additional reason for Fraternalists feeling alienated from 19<sup>th</sup>-century Protestantism was the latter’s “feminized” iconography.<sup>50</sup>

These orders also resented the Victorian idea of the “feminine monopoly on virtue.”<sup>51</sup>

The fraternal orders, because of their timing, emphasis on masculine issues, and disdain for the feminized church, should be included as a part of Muscular Christianity. Like the Freethought movement though, the fraternal orders are a part of Muscular Christianity which was not actually Christian in any religious sense.<sup>52</sup>

#### Elements of “Christian” Muscular Christianity

The M&RFM has its roots in the Y.M.C.A. and one individual who inspired it, Harry Arnold of the Maine branch of the Y.M.C.A.<sup>53</sup> Having directed a successful conference in Maine for men’s groups, Harry Arnold went to Fred B. Smith, a fellow Y.M.C.A. worker, to help coordinate a national campaign to reach men. A conference with the Y.M.C.A., denominational brotherhood organizations, and the International

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<sup>50</sup> Putney, “Service Over Secrecy,” 182.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>52</sup> Many fraternal orders consider themselves to be religious or “Christian” organizations, but most of these only adopted Christian imagery and had no actual tie to Christianity other than being an alternative for those disinterested in church. Many Christians of the period saw the lodge as an enemy of the church see Carl Case’s *The Masculine in Religion*.

<sup>53</sup> Allen, *Rise Up O Men of God*, 2.

Sunday School Association was organized by Arnold and Smith.<sup>54</sup> At this meeting, a representative of one of the brotherhoods presented a plan for a national outreach to men. This meeting launched into a larger conference at Buffalo, New York; there, Smith was chosen as the campaign leader. The five focuses of the campaign were to be “Bible study, boy’s work, evangelism, social service and missions.”<sup>55</sup> This was to be the first “men only” nation wide religious movement.<sup>56</sup>

The M&RFM sought a moral renewal of the country and a growth in the prevalence of religion.<sup>57</sup> The church’s “social unresponsiveness” was also an issue that the M&RFM challenged.<sup>58</sup> This is a reference to the dramatic ways that society was changing while the church remained stagnant. This explains the emphasis which the movement placed on social work in the community. The most obvious goal of the M&RFM was to reach men and increase “church participation” by 3,000,000. By adding this number of male church participants, the genders would have been balanced in the church, perhaps for the first time in American history.<sup>59</sup> To this end, their slogan was “More Men for Religion, More Religion for Men.”<sup>60</sup> A final expressed reason for the M&RFM was to reunite churches and businesses instead of having church be “the domain solely of ministers, women, and other nonbusiness [sic] types.”<sup>61</sup> They saw business and church parting and that men were going along with businesses; therefore, they attempted to show that the two could be reconciled with men coming to church and

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>56</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 137.

<sup>57</sup> “Faces Moral Perils,” *The Washington Post*, November 19, 1911, 9.

<sup>58</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 138.

<sup>59</sup> Allen, *Rise Up O Men of God*, 6.

<sup>60</sup> Kirkley, “Is it Manly to be a Christian?,” 83.

<sup>61</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 137.

causing the church to become more efficient and business like instead of remaining stagnant.<sup>62</sup> This emphasis is demonstrated in the movement's methods and organization.

The M&RFM was run like a major corporation. They even placed newspaper ads on the sports pages; where these ads hawking Christianity to men were side by side with car and whiskey ads. (see fig. 1 next page) *Collier's*, speaking of the M&RFM, stated that its leaders "have taken hold of religion, and are boosting it with the fervor and publicity skills which a gang of salesman [sic] would apply to soap that floats or suits that wear."<sup>63</sup> The M&RFM's leaders were unashamed of this emphasis and even published an article entitled "Going after Souls on a Business Basis."<sup>64</sup> The movement was organized around "committees of 100" who were the local representatives and who set up each rally. The M&RFM also used surveys, charts, and in all things sought to be effective. Some of this framework was adapted from the Laymen's Missionary Movement.<sup>65</sup> As part of their attempt at efficiency, the M&RFM brought together ten different denominational brotherhoods along with the Gideons, the International Sunday School Association, and (of course) the Y.M.C.A. The movement was also approved of by many other Christian organizations.<sup>66</sup> More importantly, many of the organizations that supported the M&RFM were Muscular Christian groups themselves.

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<sup>62</sup> Allen, *Rise Up O Men of God*, 85.

<sup>63</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 158. This reference is humorously close to the advertising magnate Bruce Barton who is covered later in this paper.

<sup>64</sup> Allen, *Rise Up O Men of God*, 26.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60. This large amount of coordination and cooperation could be stretched to resemble the vertical integration of the business trusts and monopolies of the time.

The illustration which would normally appear here is under copyright.

It is from page 5 of the *New York Times* of March 29, 1912.

I received it from the scholarly internet database ProQuest Historical Newspapers,

The New York Times (1851-2003)

The M&RFM was unquestioningly masculine in its methods. It combined the vigor of Muscular Christianity with the business drive just mentioned. This masculine emphasis can even be seen at a planning conference for the movement which included “the hardest kind of exercise.”<sup>67</sup> Fred B. Smith was known in Christian circles as a “great-big he-man.”<sup>68</sup> Hymns were even changed to take on a more masculine note. This resulted in the publication of new men’s hymnals.<sup>69</sup> The M&RFM centered its appeal the language of the time that was appealing to men, that of business and Muscular Christianity.

In October 1911, the M&RFM campaigns were commenced in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They aspired to campaign in 75 major cities of the United States and Canada. The M&RFM had taken the two years previously to conduct studies in the cities they would visit. This movement was heralded in the papers even before it began with much emphasis placed on its social gospel and society altering aspects.<sup>70</sup> In Chicago as well as the other cities it campaigned in, the M&RFM established committees of prominent men to prepare studies of the status of religion and men in their communities as well as to coordinate the rallies and events of the campaign in that city.<sup>71</sup> In one headline, J.P. Morgan’s support of the effort was flaunted as the campaign kicked off in New York City before its actual first tour stop in Minnesota. The emphasis on uniting Christianity and business is seen in the following statement by a committee member in Chicago: “They

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>69</sup> See the hymnal by Clarence A. Barbour, *Men and Religion Songs*, (New York, New York: (Young Men’s Christian) Association Press, 1912).

<sup>70</sup> “Plans of Forward Movement,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 31, 1911, 6.

<sup>71</sup> “Detail Plans to Convert Men and Boys in Chicago,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 3, 1911, 3. This is a specific example of what was done throughout the country. See also Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 139.

are going to put through this religious campaign with the same energy and thoroughness with which they have throughout great undertakings in the business world.” In the same article, the writer notes that the movement’s leaders “will work in unison to show men that the principles of Christianity are applicable to everyday life and modern business affairs.”<sup>72</sup>

A *New York Times* article touted that the movement “is expected to reach 23,000,000 Church-going people.” It thoroughly explains how businesslike the movement’s plans were with six, five man teams, with each man an expert in one of the “lines of effort... namely, work with boys, social service, study of the Bible and Biblical literature, evangelism and community extension work among shop and factory workers.” These teams would cross the country from west to east visiting 76 “principal and 1500 smaller cities.” Each city had its own committee of 100 to assist, coordinate, and plan the event locally. The campaign had the backing of not only J. P. Morgan but also Cleveland H. Dodge, James H. Post, and Cyrus H. McCormick.<sup>73</sup> Each of these city campaigns was to last eight days. In some publications, missions became a sixth additional area of emphasis.<sup>74</sup>

An article on the planning for the Chicago meetings, laid heavy emphasis on the fact that the organizers were businessmen and that there was a need to reach out and bring together both business leaders and union workers in the movement. The Chicago committee took as its slogan “Get the man” for their city’s campaign.<sup>75</sup> One of the most humorous examples of the ties between Christianity and business in the M&RFM

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<sup>72</sup> “Morgan Helps Religious Crusade Throughout Land,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 18, 1911, 1.

<sup>73</sup> “Continent-wide Revival Campaign,” *New York Times*, September 18, 1911, 8.

<sup>74</sup> “Seek to Win 74 Cities,” Special to the *New York Times*, *New York Times*, October 16, 1911, 1. These teams demonstrate the Progressive Movement’s drive toward specialists, and experts.

<sup>75</sup> “600 Men Organize in Soul Campaign,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 6, 1911, 1.

occurred in a meeting where a Reverend George A. Miller commented that “If Christian people studied their Bible as thoroughly and with as much interest as a life insurance agent studies his policies” then “the Bible would be less subject to attack, and be much more effectively defended when it is attacked.”<sup>76</sup> In Washington D. C. the movement even held meetings in government offices such as the pension office, a fire station, and post office.<sup>77</sup> This again shows how Christianity and business were coming together; the meetings were actually at places of employment. In New York City, the movement took out advertisements on Broadway as well as in every New York newspaper’s sports page.<sup>78</sup> The efforts in each city were certainly not just to get men into church and to evangelize the lost; but they also included setting up a continued presence in each of these cities to continue to emphasize the main points of the movement.<sup>79</sup>

The campaigns ended with the Christian Conservation Congress in New York City between April 19 and 24, 1912, in Carnegie Hall.<sup>80</sup> Among the speakers were Booker T. Washington, William Jennings Bryan, Jane Addams, John D. Rockefeller Jr., and the Chairman of the national committee of the M&RFM James G. Cannon.<sup>81</sup> At the congress, a report was given that the movement had held 7,062 meetings during the campaigns. These meetings had a combined attendance of over 1.5 million and had inspired 7,580 men to become church members and 26,000 male church members to greater personal involvement. In disbanding, M&RFM entrusted the continuance of the

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<sup>76</sup> “Ignorant of the Bible,” *The Washington Post*, November 15, 1911, 2.

<sup>77</sup> “Religious Crusade Spreads,” *The Washington Post*, February 9, 1912, 2.

<sup>78</sup> “Church Test of Publicity,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1912, 1.

<sup>79</sup> “Forward Movement for Men to Begin,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1912, 10.

<sup>80</sup> Allen, *Rise Up O Men of God*, 61.

<sup>81</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 141. And “Forward Movement Ends its Campaign,” *New York Times*, April 25, 1912, 12.



work to “local churches, Y.M.C.A.’s, brotherhoods, and Sunday School Associations.”<sup>82</sup> The M&RFM had planed all along to only exist for the eight months of the campaign. This goes back to its goal of stirring up men in America to be more involved in religion; it then left the reaping of this harvest to other organizations and churches.

The number of church members recruited was lower than had been expected. The ultimate goal of the movement, to bring 3 million men into the church to even out its demographics, had limited success. The relative number for men did increase, specifically in a few denominations. “Indeed reports in 1925 were that ‘male converts had nearly equaled female converts during the past several years.’” The gender difference was never completely leveled out.<sup>83</sup> The M&RFM was successful in utilizing different techniques such as surveys and their use of advertising and the media. The one aspect of the movement that seems to have taken root the strongest was the aspect of the social gospel.<sup>84</sup> While the M&RFM dominated the horizon of “Christian” elements to Muscular Christianity, there were also other organizations involved in uniting Christianity and the basic tenets of Muscular Christianity.<sup>85</sup>

Another organization within the fold of Muscular Christianity was the Student Volunteer Movement.<sup>86</sup> Teddy Roosevelt once wrote to the head of the S.V.M. John R. Mott praising the group’s efforts to counter those elements of the culture which Muscular Christianity was also trying to rebuff.<sup>87</sup> With their motto, “The evangelization of the

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<sup>82</sup> “Forward Movement Ends its Campaign,” *New York Times*, April 25, 1912, 12.

<sup>83</sup> As quoted in Podles, *The Church Impotent*, 246-247.

<sup>84</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 141-142.

<sup>85</sup> An argument could be developed for both sides as to whether the Social Gospel belongs in this category or as an independent movement. For the sake of this paper, it is considered a separate but sympathetic movement that was involved in lots of “cross pollination” with the Christian elements of Muscular Christianity.

<sup>86</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 7.

<sup>87</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 73.

world in this generation” the S.V. M. was committed to Christian missions, and they attacked their commission with a military bent. This is quite a masculine element, which is why one author referred to them as “Muscular Missionaries.”<sup>88</sup> The S.V.M. was one of the religious movements of the time that followed business principles in their management.<sup>89</sup> Later, the S.V.M. became more influenced by the Social Gospel and began turning inward on national affairs. The S.V.M. was originally a purely male movement, but later, women were included as assistants.<sup>90</sup> It was part of the masculinizing of evangelism along with other organizations that “absorbed” female only mission boards.<sup>91</sup> This helped to curb the female dominance in missions. In 1893, women composed 60 percent of American missionaries. This was partially due to the opportunity that missions provided women for service that they would not have as readily available in America.<sup>92</sup>

The Laymen’s Missionary Movement (L.M.M.) was another strongly masculine missions organization. The L.M.M. chose as its goal, “to enlist men in the interest of the kingdom.” To do this, they sought to stir male hearts by emphasizing missions as a noble and “heroic” endeavor.<sup>93</sup> They shared this emphasis in common with the M&RFM. One member of the L.M.M. directly attributes its success to this masculine emphasis.<sup>94</sup> The L.M.M. is just another example of the remasculinizing of American missions as part of the Christian elements of Muscular Christianity.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 127-129.

<sup>89</sup> Allen, *Rise Up O Men of God*, 25.

<sup>90</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 136-137.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 137.

Founded in 1844 by George Williams, the Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) began as an effort to reach young men with the gospel, but it took a fateful turn in 1869 when the New York Y.M.C.A. first started using gymnasiums as an evangelism tool.<sup>95</sup> By 1900, 455 Y.M.C.A.s had gyms paralleling the growth of Muscular Christianity in other areas at this time.<sup>96</sup> D. L. Moody also could be considered a Muscular Christian as seen in his association with the Y.M.C.A., although he was also still involved in some aspects of feminized Christianity.<sup>97</sup> In 1885, the Y.M.C.A. began its first camp for boys in Orange Lake, New York.<sup>98</sup> The Y.M.C.A. was central in both the religious and secular elements of Muscular Christianity. It provided an early avenue for the bodily improvement and exercise emphasized in Muscular Christianity, and its Christian roots meant that it was a perfect conduit for Christians to grasp the principles of Muscular Christianity and attempt to reform the church using them. T. J. Jackson Lears argues that this unity of religion and sports was a catalyst for the “therapeutic ethos” of the twentieth-century.<sup>99</sup> The mindset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century may very well be a corruption of these secular and Christian elements in the Y.M.C.A.

The breadth and importance of Y.M.C.A. to Muscular Christianity has already been seen in its foundation and support of both the S.V.M. and M&RFM. In some ways, it even spans between the Christian and secular elements of Muscular Christianity as it unites sports and religion, both of the manly sort, together.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 43.

Protestant Brotherhoods began as an outreach to young men in churches and as an attempt to create a welcoming atmosphere where men would be comfortable.<sup>100</sup> They were popular from 1880 to World War I. Individual churches created their own brotherhoods, and in 1883, the Episcopalian Brotherhood of St. Andrew was created. This group was organized militarily, emphasized service, and promoted evangelism of other young men. Other denominations such as the Methodists and Presbyterians also had associated brotherhoods.<sup>101</sup> The most famous brotherhood today is certainly the Gideons. This brotherhood of traveling salesmen was organized in 1899 and sought “the elevation of manhood,” to evangelize other salesmen, and to have a “Christian community” while they were on the road.<sup>102</sup> One Catholic and one Protestant brotherhood of note are the Knights of Columbus and the Brotherhood of St. Paul. Both of these brotherhoods were run similarly to secular fraternal orders.<sup>103</sup> These groups show that brotherhoods were riding the same wave as the secular fraternal orders as well as being an attempt to provide a religious alternative to them.<sup>104</sup>

An area where the brotherhoods were prominent is in their support of the M&RFM. They were involved from the initial planning meeting to supporting the rallies at each city. These brotherhoods included Baptists, Disciples of Christ, the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, Congregationalists, Gideons, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, United Brethren, and the United Presbyterians.<sup>105</sup> The original men’s ministries, these

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<sup>100</sup> These are something like a cross between a modern men’s ministry and a church greeter.

<sup>101</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 83-86.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 86, 88.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 88. Here Putney seems to allude to this idea regarding the Knights of Columbus.

<sup>105</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 246.

brotherhoods countered the secular fraternal orders and helped to promote the Christian elements of Muscular Christianity.

Probably the writer who held the best grasp and understanding of what was happening in Christianity and masculinity was Carl Delos Case. Case held a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago.<sup>106</sup> He also was the pastor of Hanson Place Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York.<sup>107</sup> His work *The Masculine in Religion* is critical of a feminized church and included solutions and advised action that the church should take.<sup>108</sup> Case opened with the question, how does masculinity and femininity affect Christianity?<sup>109</sup> He then went on to explain the feminine dominance in the church and the reason men stopped going. He declared churches to be feminine and saw that the masculine is not emphasized in the church, so men are not interested in going.<sup>110</sup> Case attributed some impact on men and their religious views to the Y.M.C.A. and their work.<sup>111</sup> He argued that a woman atheist would be unnatural because it would be against her nature, which is to be “religious.” Similarly, for a strong man to be religious would be against his nature. This nature issue is because religion has valued feminine virtues too highly while ignoring the masculine elements to Christianity.<sup>112</sup> Case argued that there is a place for both masculine and feminine virtues in the church.<sup>113</sup> He identified a breach between business and Christianity which came from an over-piousness which emphasized prayer and belief instead of action as a Christian. He even stated, “It makes the ordinary life

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>107</sup> From the title page of Case, *The Masculine in Religion*.

<sup>108</sup> *The Masculine in Religion* reads very much like the modern work *Why Men Hate Going to Church* by David Murrow.

<sup>109</sup> Case, *The Masculine in Religion*, 21.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 24-25. See Chapters 2-6 of Murrow. *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, 2-49.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>112</sup> Case, *The Masculine in Religion*, 29-31. This exact idea is covered in Chapters two through five of Murrow *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, 12-35.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 28, 60.

atheistic to recognize God only in the emotions.”<sup>114</sup> Once he established that what we do for God can be as spiritual as prayer, then he saw faith and business being quite compatible.<sup>115</sup> Case then answered his thesis question by stating that a man is “more of a man, by being a Christian.” A man’s worship can include his career and not just spiritual or emotional acts.<sup>116</sup>

Having answered his question about masculinity, Case sought to provide some suggestions in chapters dealing with men in the church, the lodge, and in business. The second two spheres were often seen as conflicting with that of the church, and Case attempted to learn from what they do right to help the church become better at working with men. Case employed a questionnaire to provide some input into this section. This shows an attempt to be scientific and modern in his approach.<sup>117</sup> One interesting comment from Case is that men are uninterested in church because of a lack of opportunity to get involved and do something.<sup>118</sup> This naturally seems to flow toward social service and the Social Gospel which would be expected from Case. Men want something to do, to be involved, and use their gifts.<sup>119</sup> Case concluded his work with a chapter on the manliness of Christ. This covers the same concepts as Bruce Barton’s *The Man Nobody Knows* and Fosdick’s *The Manhood of the Master*. Case seemed to even predict a movement revitalizing the church’s masculinity like the M&RFM.<sup>120</sup> Case’s

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 77-78. David Murrow and much of the modern church have followed this as seen by the popularity of Christian pollster George Barna.

<sup>118</sup> Case, *The Masculine in Religion*, 81.

<sup>119</sup> Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, chapter six, 37-49. This covers mostly the negative aspect similar to Case’s point that men don’t go to church because they don’t have any involvement, ownership, or opportunity to use what they do as men for God. The message is conveyed that God does not need what they have to offer.

<sup>120</sup> Case, *The Masculine in Religion*, 88.

contributions to the Christian elements of Muscular Christianity are his well developed understanding of the situation, his workable solutions, and his ability to remain balanced and recognize the need for both the masculine and feminine in Christianity.

Harry Emerson Fosdick was an influential supporter of the M&RFM and a professor at Union Theological Seminary.<sup>121</sup> Fosdick was also a prominent proponent of the Social Gospel.<sup>122</sup> Part of this interconnectedness was the central role that masculinizing religion held in the Social Gospel's teachings.<sup>123</sup> Fosdick's emphasis on the masculine Jesus correlates well with Bruce Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows*.<sup>124</sup> Barton actually was in contact with Fosdick concerning some of these issues about which they both wrote. His work *The Manhood of the Master* is formatted as a devotional with seven separate readings from each of the twelve chapters.<sup>125</sup> *The Manhood of the Master* came as part of an attempt to re-image the personal yet feminine Jesus that flourished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>126</sup> Fosdick, in his first chapter, pictures Jesus as joyful instead of solemn and pious.<sup>127</sup> Later on Fosdick depicts Jesus as righteously angry, and his love wrath is balanced by a love that compels it in defense of others.<sup>128</sup> Fosdick, in a chapter titled "The Master's Self-Restraint," draws the reader's attention to Jesus' struggles and

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<sup>121</sup> Richard M. Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew: Bruce Barton and the Making of Modern America* (Chicago, Illinois: Ivan R. Dee, 2005), 89. Kirkley "Is it Manly to be a Christian?", 83.

<sup>122</sup> The Social Gospel was in some ways distinct from Muscular Christianity and is generally considered a separate movement. Although, since it is responding to the feminine "do nothing" church and attempting to make the church relevant to the culture and changing times the Social Gospel is responding to the same problems that the rest of Christianity was at this time and it may be more closely linked to M&RFM than has been studied so far.

<sup>123</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 42.

<sup>124</sup> Podles, *The Church Impotent*, 160.

<sup>125</sup> In this format, it is quite reminiscent of Charles Swindoll's book *Man to Man* which is a modern devotional of various aspects of Christian masculinity.

<sup>126</sup> Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 88.

<sup>127</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Manhood of the Master*, 13.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 34, 40.

temptations, arguing that a great man has more temptations than most.<sup>129</sup> Further into the book the fearlessness of Christ is emphasized as he faced the world that thought him a revolutionary.<sup>130</sup> As Fosdick concludes, “All centuries, all races, both sexes, all ages, find in the Master their virtues consummated.”<sup>131</sup>

Much of Fosdick’s attempt is to masculinize the Jesus image of the 19th century while maintaining Jesus as the ultimate example for all people. Fosdick is attempting to achieve the same result of a more masculinized Christianity as Case and the others, but he attempts to do so without overcompensating for the feminine bent to Christianity at the time.

Billy Sunday was the liveliest and probably the most popular evangelist from 1890-1920. He was a converted professional baseball player who was very much a man’s man and had strait forward, blunt sermons for men.<sup>132</sup> The correlation between these aspects of Sunday and the basic concepts of Muscular Christianity are quite obvious.<sup>133</sup> Sunday proclaimed, “The manliest men believe in Jesus.”<sup>134</sup> Philip Culbertson describes him as the leader of the fourth Christian men’s movement.<sup>135</sup> This correctly shows Sunday’s prominence, but Culbertson’s divisions of evangelical Christian men’s

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>132</sup> Robert F. Martin “Billy Sunday and Christian Manliness,” *Historian* 58 4 (Summer 1996), 8th and 22nd paragraphs <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=311372> (Accessed on February 22, 2007).

See also DeRogatis, “Gender,” in *Themes In Religion and American Culture*, 217.

<sup>133</sup> There is also quite a correlation between Sunday and the founder of Promise Keepers Bill McCartney see Craig Berry, “Promise Keepers: Echoes of the Past,” *Network News* 18 1 (Winter 1998), <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=289620&site=ehost-live> (accessed on February 22, 2007). This whole article is a comparison of Sunday and McCartney. It also, while focusing on these two individuals, provides a comparison of their two organizations and their platforms as well.

<sup>134</sup> Green, “From Sainthood to Submission,” 14th paragraph.

<sup>135</sup> Culbertson, “Christian Men’s Movements,” His inaccuracies come through an improper understanding of the Freethought movement and because he views Muscular Christianity as distinct from the M&RFM and Billy Sunday. In reality Muscular Christianity was a larger, not necessarily evangelical Christian, movement with Sunday and the M&RFM as smaller elements within its encompassing umbrella.



movement are somewhat inaccurate. Sunday is noted for saying, “Lord save us from off-handed, flabby-cheeked, brittle-boned, weak-kneed, thin-skinned, pliable, plastic, spineless, effeminate, sissified, three-caret Christianity.”<sup>136</sup> While he was associated with Muscular Christianity, Billy Sunday did not directly participate in the M&RFM, but he shared similar views on the position of men in Christianity.<sup>137</sup> Sunday formed part of a larger ring of Christian “Muscular Christians” around the actual M&RFM. Part of this larger ring was the Y.M.C.A. with which Sunday was originally affiliated.<sup>138</sup>

During World War I, Sunday was active in promoting the war. After the war was over, Sunday lost much of his audience in the backlash against Muscular Christianity.<sup>139</sup> Sunday’s emphasis on the relationship of Christian men and business connects him with the next prominent Christian involved in Muscular Christianity, Bruce Barton.<sup>140</sup>

Bruce Barton attempted to show that religion and business were not conflicting, exclusive interests in a man’s life. Barton began his career in advertising in 1919 and fulfilled contracts with General Motors and General Electric.<sup>141</sup> In his lifetime, Barton was a congressman, an editor, and a business leader.<sup>142</sup> Barton, previous to writing *The Man Nobody Knows*, also was in contact with Fosdick whose interest in Muscular Christianity has already been discussed.<sup>143</sup> While disliking the Puritan’s alleged cultural narrowness, Barton was a proponent of their New England heritage and especially the

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<sup>136</sup> Quoted in Allen, *Rise Up O Men of God*, 73.

<sup>137</sup> DeRogatis, “Gender” in *Themes in Religion and American Culture*, 217. As well as Robert F. Martin “Billy Sunday and Christian Manliness,” *Historian* 58 4 (Summer 1996), 7<sup>th</sup> paragraph, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=3113728&site=ehost-live> (accessed on February 22, 2007).

<sup>138</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 59. The Y.M.C.A. was extremely involved in the Men and Religion Forward Movement as was discussed earlier.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 175, 201. This backlash will be more fully reviewed as a whole later.

<sup>140</sup> Robert F. Martin “Billy Sunday and Christian Manliness,” 13<sup>th</sup> paragraph.

<sup>141</sup> Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, x. This is an excellent new biography of Barton.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

famous work ethic.<sup>144</sup> The conflict between the church and business is seen as business leaders were increasingly nominated to the boards of colleges, a traditional position for ministers. “Protestantism’s public prestige was diminishing alongside the rise of corporate dominance.”<sup>145</sup> The church during the 1920s was fighting within itself (modernists and fundamentalists) while business was growing along with the roaring twenties.<sup>146</sup> A historian of the period, Fredrick Louis Allen, saw what he called the “new veneration” in which churches and businesses switched in preeminence.<sup>147</sup>

With chapters titled “The Executive,” “The Outdoor Man,” “The Sociable Man,” “His Method,” “His Advertisements,” “The Founder of Modern Business,” and “The Master,” Barton covered many aspects of Jesus including focusing on his masculinity, leadership, and techniques of management.<sup>148</sup> In his effort at relating Jesus to business Barton used Jesus’ words about attempting to save your life and losing it to illustrate the business principle of service from George Perkins of New York Life Insurance.<sup>149</sup> Barton’s Jesus had the rugged outdoor attitude adopted by the Boy Scouts and other proponents of Muscular Christianity like Teddy Roosevelt.<sup>150</sup> Barton saw Jesus as modern, interested in business, and masculine.

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 86-87. This is one area of additional study. While Barton disliked the Puritans, as they were typified, he was an extremely strong advocate for the uniting of religion and work as seen in his attempt to make Jesus a business leader, in *The Man Nobody Knows*. The Puritans would have fully supported this integrated kind of life. This also goes into the issue of the “private woman” “public man” with religion falling into the private category and therefore becoming womanly while business was public and therefore masculine. A study addressing this dichotomy would be intriguing and may end up showing that Barton is, in essence, advocating a neo-Puritan ideology of work and religion’s integration. For more information see Leon Podles, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of American Christianity*, (Dallas, Texas: Spence Publishing Company, 1999), 160 n81.

<sup>145</sup> Allen, *Rise Up O Men of God*, 25.

<sup>146</sup> Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 87.

<sup>147</sup> As quoted in Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 106.

<sup>148</sup> Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 52.

*The Man Nobody Knows* was extremely popular and was included on the nonfiction bestseller list in 1925 and reigning as the number one nonfiction best seller of 1926.<sup>151</sup> Over 250,000 copies were sold within the first 18 months of publication, and it even eclipsed *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald in sales.<sup>152</sup>

The late date for *The Man Nobody Knows* (1924) puts it into an era even more turbulent due to the results of World War I and somewhat outside the “official timeframe” for Muscular Christianity. The content of the book and its popularity shows that masculine themes were still striking a nerve in the Christian man of the period. This shows that while much of Muscular Christianity’s more bravado aspects died in World War I, some continued on. Barton’s emphasis on demonstrating the compatibility of Christianity and business shows the tack he took after the disgrace of the “manly” and heroic side of Muscular Christianity.

In many ways, Barton provides an answer to the quandary of church and business fighting for a man’s attention. In *The Man Nobody Knows*, Barton pictured Jesus as a successful businessman even having the quote from the gospels, “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s *business*?” (emphasis his), placed before the title page of *The Man Nobody Knows*. In his linking of Jesus with business, Barton was not alone; Walter Rauschenbusch and Charles Jefferson followed a similar line of thought.<sup>153</sup> Barton wished to dispel the view of Jesus the “lamb of God” a “sissified” savior who was “meek and lowly.”<sup>154</sup> In its place, Barton depicted Jesus as the strong carpenter, the social

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<sup>151</sup> Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 101.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>153</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 93. These were two prominent author/ ministers of the time, especially involved in the Social Gospel movement.

<sup>154</sup> Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*, in the unnumbered intro “How it Came to be Written”, 42.

success, and “the founder of modern business.”<sup>155</sup> In depicting a Jesus similar to himself, Barton has followed what many before have done.<sup>156</sup>

One editor commenting on *The Man Nobody Knows* said that Barton had “taken Jesus out of the stained glass window and made Him a man.”<sup>157</sup> The almost caricatured feel of his work makes *The Man Nobody Knows* easy to dismiss, but this work was a serious attempt to reconcile religion and business and to recapture Christ’s masculinity.<sup>158</sup> Barton’s thesis for the book, along with the earlier quotation about Jesus needing to be about his Father’s business, can be seen in his use of Pilate’s declaration, speaking of Jesus, “behold the man.”<sup>159</sup> Barton “remasculinizes” Jesus and depicts him as a successful business leader (which was the most esteemed position in America at that time). Barton’s goal was to allow Christianity into the real world and to show its pertinence to the modern reader.<sup>160</sup>

### Conclusion

The grand masculine nationalistic spirit, of which Muscular Christianity is a part, marched into World War I full of visions of glory and bravado, and received a thrashing like none other. After the war the churches were hit by what Robert Handy called “the second disestablishment,” and churches’ importance in the culture declined.<sup>161</sup> David Murrow sees an important turning point when women and pastors teamed up to pass the

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., in the unnumbered intro “How it Came to be Written.”

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 140. Here Barton says that if Jesus were around in the 1920’s he is sure He would have been an advertiser. Often a good understanding of what a religious group holds up as the goal for its men can be found in its Christology. It would be a useful study to see how religious groups project on to the person of Christ what virtues the esteem and value in their men, since Christ was the “perfect man.” I believe you will find this trend to hold quite steady through out history. Religious groups will project their masculine values onto their view of Christ. A similar example of this the insistence of religious groups to visually portray Jesus like them, whether Anglo-Saxon, African American, or other wise.

<sup>157</sup> Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 90-91.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>159</sup> Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*, 56.

<sup>160</sup> Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 85.

<sup>161</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 195.

18th amendment.<sup>162</sup> He sees this as the “final straw” for some men. Muscular Christianity was overall successful as can be seen in some of its elements that remain with us till today. The Christian elements as well were mildly successful at curbing the feminine church and increasing the number of men in church.<sup>163</sup> An example of this is the impact that the M&RFM had even trickling into the 1950’s. There is speculation that this movement may have helped to promote that family friendly atmosphere of the 1950s.<sup>164</sup> Arthur S. Link calls America’s ideological shift after World War One, the “extraordinary (postwar) reaction against idealism and reform.”<sup>165</sup> Thus the “return to normalcy” was actually a rejection of Progressivism and the other social movements of the time. *The Man Nobody Knows* stands alone in the 1920s as an attempt to continue the masculine drive of the previous decade. The ideological shift away from “idealism and reform” included a large decline for Billy Sunday and the S.V.M. Part of the church’s decline also resulted from the Liberal v. Fundamentalist split that had been long in coming and can be seen at the Scopes Trial.<sup>166</sup> Out of this battle neither side truly triumphed.

The battle between the Fundamentalists and Liberals introduces us to the final player in the drama of Muscular Christianity. Muscular Christianity having originated with liberal churchmen in America found its final refuge with the Fundamentalists.<sup>167</sup> It is even argued that Muscular Christianity went unnoticed in Fundamentalist circles and has cropped up again through Promise Keepers, Youth for Christ, and the Fellowship of

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<sup>162</sup> Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, 62.

<sup>163</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 143, 197.

<sup>164</sup> Podles, *The Church Impotent*, 161.

<sup>165</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 200.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

Christian Athletes.<sup>168</sup> Thus it could be argued that Muscular Christianity has survived to this day with the Fundamentalists or has lately experienced a rebirth.<sup>169</sup>

There were many different organizations and other pieces of America that were impacted by the more general aspects of Muscular Christianity. Clifford Putney argues that there were other secular Progressives calling for a more manly country and not just Muscular Christians.<sup>170</sup> This could be better understood by realizing that Muscular Christianity was much more a cultural movement and on its surface was only Christian in the respect of emanating from a “Christian” culture. Within Muscular Christianity there was a more specifically Christian element that adopted the basic ideas of Muscular Christianity: sports, exercise, and the exaltation of male virtues and attempted to apply them in an effort to remasculinize the church. This meant recruiting men to be more active in churches thus providing “More men for religion,” as well as altering the churches feminine bent to provide, “more religion for men.”<sup>171</sup> This “Christian” side of Muscular Christianity is directly contrasted with the Freethought movement and the predominance of fraternal orders at this time. Both of these groups were based around Muscular Christian principles and were extremely masculine in their outlook. This contrast shows that a division within Muscular Christianity did exist between “secular” and “Christian” elements.

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 206-207.

<sup>169</sup> Mark W. Muesse “Religious Machismo: Masculinity and Fundamentalism,” in *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities* eds. Stephen B. Boyd, W. Merle Longwood, and Mark W. Muesse (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996),89-102. Much is made of the rise of fundamentalists at this time, and tracing their particular relationship to the more Christian ideas of Muscular Christianity would be a fruitful study. DeRogatis, “Gender,” 218. This work as well discusses the rise of fundamentalism around this period.

<sup>170</sup> Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 4.

<sup>171</sup> This is the M&RFM’s motto. I see this movement as the most visible and specific example of the Christian elements in Muscular Christianity.

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