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Tony Ladd and James A. Mathisen. *Muscular Christianity: Evangelical Protestants and the Development of American Sport*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999. Pp. 288. \$20.99 (Paper).

[1] In *Muscular Christianity*, kinesiologist Tony Ladd and sociologist James A. Mathisen trace the emergence of a movement called "Muscular Christianity" from its beginnings in nineteenth-century England to its full flowering in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In providing a history of the movement, they address problems and setbacks encountered as it rose and fell in popularity among Americans. The first chapter explains the beginnings of the movement within the United States, as it branched out from British Evangelical celebrations of Christian manliness embodied in celebrity athletes who publicly proclaimed their Christian faith. Such organizations as the YMCA evolved during this early period to interest athletic young men in the Christian life. Unfortunately, the authors assume that the reader is familiar with terms like "premillennialism," and fail to define them. This oversight makes the beginning chapter, and eventually the rest of the text, sound like insiders writing to insiders.

[2] The second chapter traces "Muscular Christianity" into its heyday in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The authors note that the movement was enormously popular on American college and university campuses. Leaders in "Muscular Christianity" like Dwight L. Moody and Amos Alonzo Stagg receive careful attention, often to the exclusion of minor players whose contributions were notable as well. Ladd and Mathisen claim that Protestant Evangelicalism and the sports ethos of the Gilded Age were attuned to one another, a happy marriage that would falter in the thirty years between 1920 and 1950. This period of "disengagement" is detailed in chapter three. Evangelist Billy Sunday, one-time professional baseball player, is highlighted as the leading agent in this change, although hundreds of Protestant ministers and leaders surely followed suit in decrying the moral decadence of competitive, especially professional, sports. Sports were deemphasized in YMCA programming, and the sports world became secularized to a degree that earlier "Muscular Christian" enthusiasts would have found alien.

[3] Chapters four and five tell the story of religion and sports' "reengagement." These chapters trace the key proponents of the movement in church, community, and sports, focusing on Billy Graham, Gil Dodds, and other men who reasserted the moral values of sport for Evangelical Protestants. Parachurch organizations like Sports Ambassadors and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) figure prominently. They found in sport the perfect venue for evangelizing America's youth. As in the late nineteenth century, so in the mid-twentieth century, sports heroes attracted large audiences and received great respect when speaking about their Christian convictions.

[4] Neither Ladd nor Mathisen are historians, a deficiency evident in their approach to historical writing in chapters one through five. Their explanations of change over time are simplistic. They continually return to the concept of "Muscular Christianity" when they have not adequately defined it at the beginning, and insist on its unchanging universality as a set of character traits through very different time periods in American history. Having reified what was really a shapeshifting ideology, they can only compare what looks like "Muscular Christianity" from the late nineteenth to late twentieth centuries. Theological differences between the Sports Ambassadors and FCA, for example, point to significant differences in interpretation of "Muscular Christian" ideals, but Ladd and Mathisen glide over these problems with little or no analysis.

[5] They also fail to address a crucial component of "Muscular Christianity": its gendered nature. Men, primarily, were "muscular Christians." They never address how "Muscular Christianity" has become part of women's sports, both on the collegiate and professional levels. Both the absence of women in men's sports activities, and the lack of attention to women's sports, are telling. Cultural constructions of gender were driving forces in the continuously changing ideology of sports, but Ladd and Mathisen are reticent to say anything substantive about those constructions. They also do not connect gender and religion. Yet Evangelical Protestantism, as a social movement, was affected by gender differences in innumerable ways.

[6] Despite the historiographical problems in most of the book, the final two chapters are excellent sociological analyses of contemporary relations between religion and sports. Perhaps these chapters should have been included in an anthology, or submitted to a referred journal, for they can truly stand alone as nuanced, thick descriptions of the various subcultures where religion and sport overlap in American society. Today's new wave of interest in sports and religion is examined through such magazines as *SportsFocus* and *Sports Illustrated*, the increased attention to sports in Christian college curricula, and the emergence of new parachurch movements like the Promise Keepers.

[7] This book would be useful in classrooms on such topics as sports and society, or even on the interplay between American Christianity and leisure cultures. However, it potentially needs supplementation by classroom instructors. It assumes that the general reader is familiar with theological terms, when students may not possess that familiarity. It seems most ideally suited for Evangelical Protestant sports enthusiasts active in sports programs in their churches or Christian colleges. The book serves as an excellent justification for faith and sports working together.

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