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2017

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**CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP
AND THE FOREIGN WORK OF THE YMCA**

By
REBECCA ANN HODGES

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY

in the

Graduate Division

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

COMMITTEE IN CHARGE:

Professor Rebecca McLennan, Chair

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Professor Wendy Brown

SUMMER 2017

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ABSTRACT

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP AND THE FOREIGN WORK OF THE YMCA

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in History

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Beginning in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Christian reformers of the North American Young Men's Christian Association and related organizations set themselves the task of training the rising leadership of nations around the world in a set of ideals they termed "Christian citizenship." Motivated by ideas about God's universal grace, by liberal ideals of personhood, and by fears of moral crisis, the middle class evangelical reformers of the YMCA, the YWCA, the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM), and the World's Student Christian Federation (WSCF) sought not only to "evangelize the world in this generation," but to teach good citizenship and encourage fair play among individuals and among nations—to foster ideals of justice, equality, and democracy among their constituencies in China, Japan, India, and beyond, in a millennial project ultimately designed to save the world, politically as well as spiritually. From the 1890s into the 1920s, Christian reformers dedicated themselves to the work of imparting the ideals of "Christian citizenship" through educational, social, and religious programs, as well as through training in sports and sportsmanship. By the 1920s, many of these reformers had come to assume that democratic nationhood should be universal—provided that both the national leaders and a critical mass of citizens had acquired a particular kind of personhood. Ultimately, however, their responses to struggles for national self-determination in the 1920s would show that their universalist commitments were, in most cases, indefinitely deferred, contingent on a pedagogical process that was never complete.

This dissertation tells the story of the ideals of "Christian citizenship" as developed by these reformers between 1886 and 1925. On the basis of ideas and attitudes expressed by celebrated Association leaders such as Nobel Laureate John Mott, by less known figures such as YMCA Physical Director Harry Kingman, and more generally in institutional histories and surveys, official periodicals, newspaper articles, conference reports, memoirs and personal writings, and visual representations such as logos and architectural drawings, this dissertation argues that the project of fostering "Christian social relations" and instilling the ideals of "Christian citizenship" in the so-called "plastic nations" of the world was at the heart of the North American Associations' Foreign Work during this period, and it suggests that the history of these ideas contributes to an understanding of the history of the democratic project more broadly.

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DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is dedicated to my grandmothers.

My father's mother, Teddy Hodges, was raised in a YMCA family. Her father, John Long, was a YMCA Secretary in Brockton, Massachusetts in the 1920s and 1930s, specializing in citizenship programs for immigrants. In the 1950s and 1960s he served as the YMCA Secretary for the Southern Philippines, and I was first introduced to the subject matter of this dissertation through the stories my great-grandparents told of their experiences in the YMCA World Service, successor to the Foreign Work. Of the values she was raised with, the most important to my Grandma Teddy was the Golden Rule, which she later extended into a commitment to the Categorical Imperative. The depth of her commitment to this moral code, and especially to its implications for human equality, is of a piece with the attitudes of the men and women featured here, and it contributed to the foundations of this study in more ways than one.

My mother's mother, Dina Angress, is a Holocaust survivor. With every reason to take a darker view, she came out of the Second World War with a steadfast belief in the goodness of humanity, and like the reformers of this study, her determined optimism and her experience of crisis drove her to commit herself to making the world a better place. Both my grandmothers returned to school after raising their own families—my Grandma Dina received a Masters in Social Work from San Francisco State University and my Grandma Teddy, a Ph.D. in Library Science from the University of California at Berkeley. I am proud to be following in their footsteps, receiving degrees from the same institutions after having taken some time with my own children.

I owe more than I can express to the amazing people, more numerous than I can name, whom I encountered at these two universities. I am particularly grateful to my dissertation committee, Rebecca McLennan, David Henkin, and Wendy Brown, for their careful readings and for their warm support. I also owe much to David Hollinger, Kerwin Klein, Mark Peterson, James Vernon, Bill Issel, Barbara Loomis, and Eva Sheppard Wolf, all brilliant historians and inspiring teachers, and I am deeply grateful as well to my friends and colleagues at both schools, and especially to Allan Lumba, Ari Cushner, James Skee, Gene Zubovich, Hannah Farber, Jess McIntosh, Julie Stein, Adrienne Francisco, Gabe Milner, Alex Garcia, and Jacqui Shine. Barry Pateman and the people of the Emma Goldman Papers Project taught me the ropes of archival work, and Ryan Bean of the Kautz Family YMCA Archives provided invaluable service in reading and responding to this text. More than to any other, I owe an intellectual debt to Chris Chekuri, whose help and input as a mentor and as a friend has meant more to me than I can say.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, and especially my husband, Alex Derbes, who has supported me both emotionally and financially through the years I have spent on this project. Thank you.

Introduction

In the late summer of 1925, Harry Kingman of the YMCA was forced to leave Shanghai. After the so-called May 30th Incident, in which British police shot and killed several Chinese nationalist students, Kingman had written a letter to the editor of a local English-language newspaper calling on his fellows to make a “sportsmanlike” attempt to imagine themselves “in the other man’s place.”¹ His letter had received considerable attention—nationalist students translated it and distributed it across China, while in the local English-language press the reaction to it had been vitriolic, generating enough ill-will against Kingman that he was obliged to relocate. One of his denouncers, a fellow Shanghai-based American, accused Kingman and others of the YMCA not only of making a show of mediating between viewpoints on “questions to which they know there are not two sides” but of “putting into the mouths of these raw youths and childish minds a mass of (to them) undigestible ideas of ‘justice,’ ‘patriotism,’ ‘unequal treaties,’ etc., etc.”² But why should Kingman’s mildly worded plea for a spirit of good sportsmanship, couched in an appeal to the Golden Rule, cause such a strong reaction? And what exactly were these purportedly “undigestible ideas” that Kingman and his YMCA colleagues had been seeking to impart, successfully enough that nationalist students were finding them useful in their struggles against imperialism—successfully enough that a seemingly simple appeal for good sportsmanship should be answered with vitriol and banishment?

In fact, it was not unexpected that Harry Kingman’s invocation of the ideal of good sportsmanship should be interpreted as encouraging Chinese students in their demands for national sovereignty and for equality and justice among nations. Due to the work of the YMCA, in Shanghai in 1925 those ideas were linked. As this dissertation will argue, the North American Young Men’s Christian Association and related organizations, beginning in the last decade of the nineteenth century, set themselves the task of training the rising leadership of nations around the world in a set of ideals they termed “Christian citizenship,” and they imparted these ideals through educational, social, and religious programs, as well as through training in sports and sportsmanship. Motivated by ideas about God’s universal grace, by liberal ideals of personhood, and by fears of moral crisis, Christian reformers of the YMCA sought not only to “evangelize the world in this generation,” but to teach good sportsmanship and encourage fair play among individuals and among nations—to foster ideals of justice, equality, and democratic nationhood among their constituencies in China, Japan, India, and beyond, in a millennial project ultimately designed to save the world, politically as well as spiritually. This project was at the heart of the North American YMCA’s Foreign Work, from the 1890s into the 1920s. During that period, many of these Christian reformers came to assume that democratic nationhood should be universal—provided that both the national leaders and a critical mass of citizens had acquired a particular kind of

¹ Harry Kingman, “The Students’ Viewpoint,” *The North - China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette (1870-1941)*; Shanghai, June 6, 1925.

² John Harris, “John Bull the Goat: A Letter to Some Americans, From an American,” *The North - China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette (1870-1941)*; Shanghai, June 13, 1925.

Christian personhood.

* * * * *

When the French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville set out in the early 1830s on his tour of America, he famously found that his study of democracy required new ways of thinking about “a world itself quite new.” He noted that while the social bonds of feudalism had linked everyone “from peasant to king, in one long chain,” democracy “breaks the chain and frees each link”—in this new world, men were “isolated and then dropped one by one into the common mass.”³ This newly atomized, increasingly self-interested mass of individuals that populated Tocqueville’s democracy also caused concern among Christian reformers from the emerging middle class, who fretted about the perceived moral failings of a populace less and less restrained by the social bonds of a pre-industrial era. One of the most persistent and influential of the organizations founded by these reformers was the Young Men’s Christian Association, established in 1844 to “meet the young stranger as he enters our city, take him by the hand...and in every way throw around him good influences.”⁴ These young strangers in the industrializing Anglo-American world had recently left their families, their communities, their churches, and their erstwhile authority figures behind to make their way in the growing cities. Even as they found themselves dealing with an emerging mass society, these young men were more individuated than they had been before, newly alone in the new urban crowds.⁵

Tocqueville saw this growing mass of atomized individuals as a political problem as well as a moral one. Like Tocqueville, the middle-class Christian reformers of the YMCA believed that religion could mitigate the dangers of the democratic mass, and they acted tirelessly on that belief for more than a century. While the root problem for these reformers remained the moral crisis represented by the “young stranger,” Christian reformers’ solutions were markedly different during the mid-nineteenth century than they would be in the early twentieth and beyond, as the conceptual landscape that structured their work would undergo important shifts. In fact, after the turn of the twentieth century, these reformers came to organize their work around the idea that their perceived moral problem did indeed have important political implications—and that a universalized Christian construction not just of the individual citizen but of social relations more broadly was required for the successful function of democracy in a world of nations.

In exploring this development, this study is organized into five chapters. The first

³ Alexis Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000), 12, 508, 87, 691–92. Discussion of this quote was featured in a Political Science lecture by Wendy Brown at UC Berkeley, Sept. 8, 2009.

⁴ From the founding document of the Boston YMCA, 1852, as quoted in Charles Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951), 18.

⁵ Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); T. J. Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010); Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*. addresses this idea specifically in relation to the YMCA. See also Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, (1887).

covers the conceptual bases for the YMCA in the 1840s, beginning with its roots in the theology of the Second Great Awakening. It details the founding of the YMCA, a narrative of which was perennially reinvoked for institution-building and character-building purposes, and it describes the structural elements of the organization which persisted and allowed for later developments. It also briefly introduces the Young Women's Christian Association. This first generation of Association reformers considered the moral corruption of young men in the city to be a problem, and the solution they proposed involved the perfection of individuals through Christian association.

The second chapter describes the missionary turn taken by the Christian reformers of the YMCA and the YWCA in the 1880s. After the Mt. Hermon Student Conference in 1886, missionary-minded young men and women of the Associations launched the Student Volunteer Movement in order to "evangelize the world in this generation," a phrase they claimed as their watchword. The problem they sought to address now involved the moral corruption of all humanity, and they extended their project of individual perfection to include the entire population of the planet. Their efforts were shaped by the ways in which they imagined the figure of the missionary, the heathen masses, the mission field, and the world itself. It was also driven by a sense of moral crisis that, for the founding generation, had been rooted in the city, but was now perceived as extending to global proportions. This sense of crisis existed in tension with a grand sense of optimism, arising both from evangelical energy and from the liberal confidence characteristic of the period.

The Social Gospel movement and the liberal "New Theology" of the late nineteenth century both played critical roles in the recasting of the Associations' sense of mission. Chapter Three traces the influence of these new theologies, arguing that as the Associations embraced new theological ideas they came to place more emphasis on the social aspects of their character-building project. Their moral crisis had now gained social dimensions, and they increasingly turned to political solutions, elaborating a mission to Christianize not only the individual, but the social relations of the nation and the world. This mission, at heart, was a pedagogical one, and involved the inculcation of a set of ideals elaborated as "Christian citizenship."

Beginning in 1889, the North American YMCA took its project to the world. In what they called their Foreign Work, Christian reformers with missionary sensibilities sought to establish Associations and Christian student groups in non-Christian nations, under the auspices of the YMCA, the YWCA, the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM,) and the newly established World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). As described in the fourth chapter, the YMCA's insistence that the new national Associations replicate the established North American model as exactly as possible, while being governed as extensively as possible by local Association leaders, was based in an assumption of human semblance, and on this assumption, Christian reformers sought not only to evangelize, but to instill the same ideals of Christian citizenship they had developed at home. In their Foreign Work, the Christian reformers of the Associations came to consider students, as future national leaders, to be "strategic points" in their mission to

Christianize the social relations of nations.

The final chapter considers the idea of Christian citizenship as it related to the YMCA's ideal of "sportsmanship," and shows how Christian reformers' ideas about the development of individual and national character through physical education were linked to conceptions of citizenship and approaches to nation-building. These conceptions of citizen and nation were shaped by their experience of the First World War and its aftermath, as Christian reformers and their constituencies incorporated ideas about democracy and national self-determination into their visions. The First World War forced Christian reformers' sense of moral crisis to the breaking point and shook their Progressive confidence, and in the aftermath of the war, as they placed growing emphasis on the idea of democracy, the universalist ideals underlying their Foreign Work were put to the test in their responses to rising nationalist movements.

Although often inconsistently applied, the ideal of citizenship developed and disseminated by the Christian reformers of the Associations had an historically significant impact, and was celebrated, shared, and promoted by many of the most influential national leaders of the day. United States Presidents Benjamin Harrison, William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, Woodrow Wilson, and perennial presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan all were enthusiastic and involved supporters of the YMCA's programs for Christian citizenship at home and abroad. Taft, in particular, was a YMCA man—he had become interested in its Foreign Work while Governor-General of the Philippines and had traveled to Shanghai in 1907 to participate in the dedication of the YMCA building in which Harry Kingman would later work. He aligned himself so whole-heartedly with the work that in 1910 he invited two

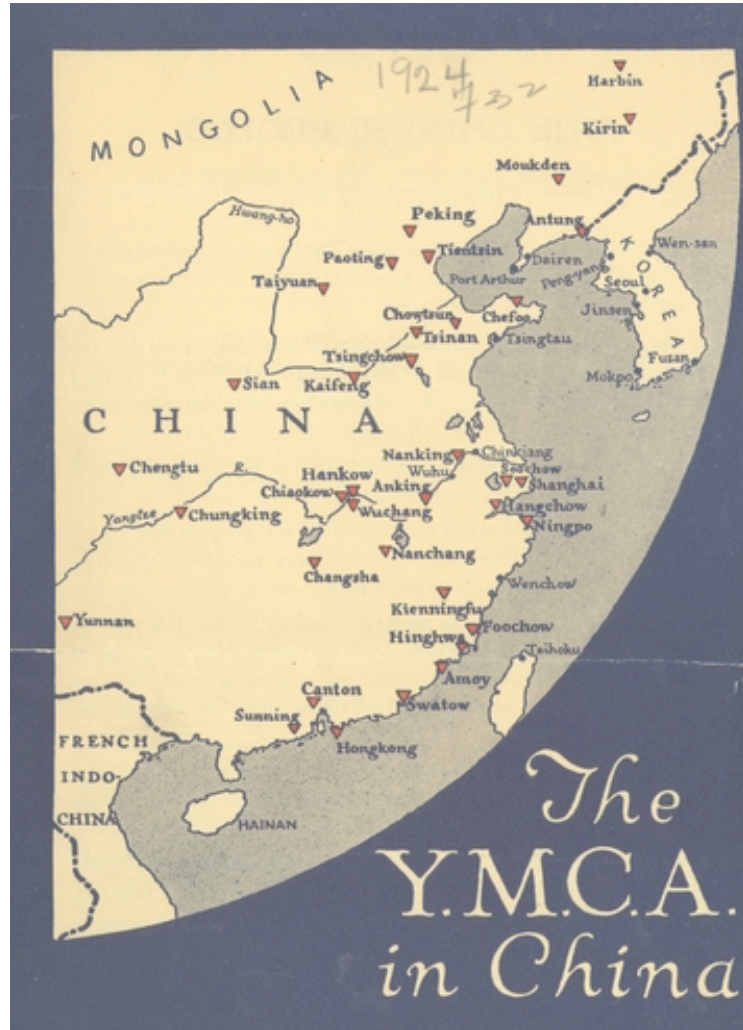


Fig. 1. Front cover of an information booklet on the YMCA in China from 1924, showing cities with one or more established Associations. Programs administrated by some of these Associations reached hundreds of thousands of people. International Work, China, Print Material, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries. <http://purl.umn.edu/77375>

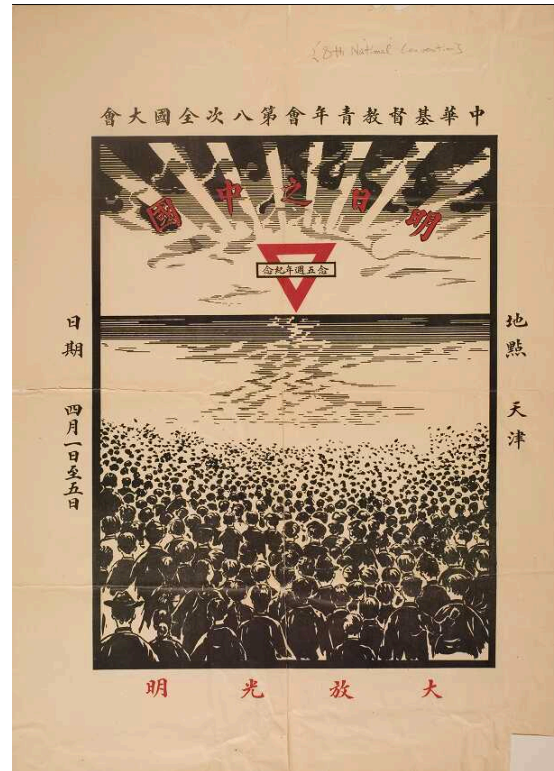
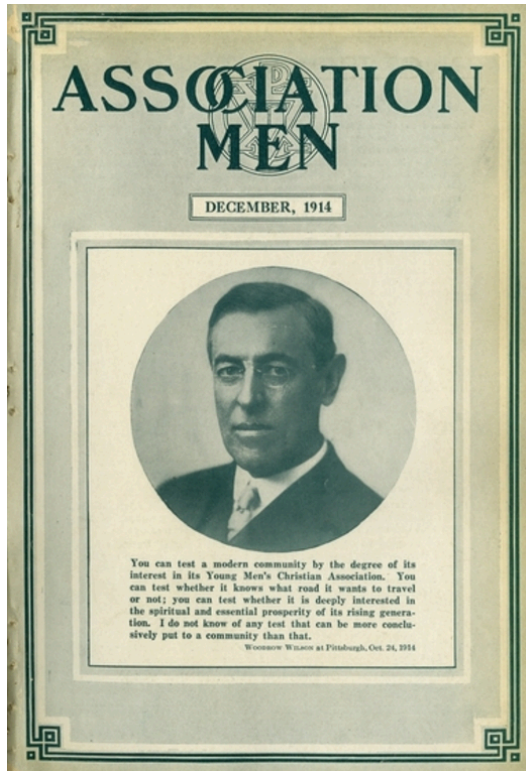


Fig. 2. Cover of the official YMCA periodical, Dec. 1914, Periodicals, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, <http://purl.umn.edu/77505>; Poster for the Eighth National YMCA Convention in China, held in Tientsin, April 1920, Photographs, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, <http://purl.umn.edu/241850>.

President Woodrow Wilson: "You can test a modern community by the degree of its interest in its Young Men's Christian Association. You can test whether it knows what road it wants to travel or not; you can test whether it is deeply interested in the spiritual and essential prosperity of its rising generation. I do not know of any test that can be more conclusively put to a community than that."

Poster: "The Chinese nation will shine brightly in the coming day." (rough translation) A Chinese YMCA and Civic Education Mass Movement slogan not featured on this poster was "Character Will Save the Nation."

hundred "masters of commerce, industry, and finance" to a conference at the White House to make the case for financial support of the YMCA's Foreign Work, on the basis of the importance of the worldwide dissemination of this particular ideal of citizenship. The conference raised funds far exceeding what was asked, with heavy investments by regular Foreign Work funders John D. Rockefeller and John Wanamaker, among many others—all of whom bought in to the YMCA's project of fostering "Christian citizenship" in non-Christian nations.⁶ Taft's work with the YMCA continued beyond his presidency—in 1922, as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, he published a weighty seven-hundred-page set of volumes through the official Association Press on the service of the YMCA in the First World War. Wilson, too, was deeply interested in the YMCA, and close with its most internationally oriented leaders during his presidency. In the nations where the YMCA established its Foreign Work, high-level interest in its particular ideal of citizenship lent YMCA programs importance out of proportion with their numbers on the field. In China, in particular, a large proportion of the national

⁶ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 677–78.

leaders of the Kuomintang government had been educated by Christian reformers, and “Father of the Nation” Sun Yat-Sen himself was associated with the YMCA, as were 33 other prominent officials of the Republican government.⁷ These Chinese national leaders worked extensively with the YMCA, developing large-scale national programs in citizenship training, literacy, and social reform coordinated by or operated through the Chinese National YMCA. Chinese Communists sometimes worked with the YMCA as well—Mao Tse-Tung participated in a YMCA “mass education campaign” in the early 1920s.⁸

In the first decades of the twentieth century, with long-running and extensive support and funding from powerful political leaders and “masters of commerce, industry, and finance,” the YMCA erected scores of large and well-appointed buildings in city centers across the non-Christian world, dominating the landscape of Christian social reform in these nations, and anchoring Christian-inspired civic education programs that reached a significant portion of the national elite. The importance and reach of the citizenship ideals developed and disseminated by the YMCA and associated organizations was far greater than the small number of Foreign Work Secretaries⁹ on the field would suggest.

In tracing the responses of the men and women of the Associations to social problems,¹⁰ this dissertation engages the historiography of social reform, extending from the antebellum period through the Progressive Era. Building on this historical literature, the present study shows the extent to which theologically inspired approaches to reform continued to fall back on the moral perfection of the individual even as these reformers adopted the Social Gospel and came to place more importance on social relations.¹¹ This dissertation draws new attention to the language used by reformers,¹² and

⁷ Charles A. Keller, “The Christian Student Movement, YMCAs, and Transnationalism in Republican China,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 13 (2004): 62.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Professional YMCA and YWCA workers charged with directing Association programs were called Secretaries. They were careful to differentiate their work from that of missionaries, although they sometimes worked as evangelists.

¹⁰ The men and women associated with the YMCA and its affiliated organizations in many cases did not consider themselves reformers but religious workers. However, their aims, their interests, and their social and cultural affiliations and preoccupations, all place them well within the current of the history of American and Anglo-American reform. Over more than a century, they sought social change, and the reasons they did so and the approaches they took were closely associated with those of other reform projects of their times.

¹¹ In contrast, Michael McGerr stresses that a Progressive turn toward association and toward political approaches to reform represented a turn away from individualism. Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 68. Heather Cox Richardson, meanwhile, argues that “Americans entered the twentieth century so secure in the values of middle-class individualism that united them that they believed it was their duty to impose those values beyond their borders.” Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America After the Civil War* (Yale University Press, 2007), 343. Her argument that the way middle class Americans imagined the West structured their policies is similar to my argument that the way Christian reformers imagined the figure of the missionary and the mission field structured their approaches to reform.

¹² James Salazar pays similar attention to language. James B. Salazar, *Bodies of Reform: The Rhetoric of Character in Gilded Age America* (New York; London: NYU Press, 2010).

suggests that, among other things, rhetorical habits of claiming to mediate from a disinterested high moral middle ground (as Harry Kingman did in Shanghai in 1925), and of scaling up from the individual to the group to the nation when calling for the application of Christian principle to social problems, facilitated the continued focus on the individual as the subject of reform. Further, this study contributes to the debate over whether reform was a middle-class project of social control¹³ as opposed to a manifestation of more liberatory ideas,¹⁴ arguing that Christian reform was animated by a tension between these tendencies. The organizations detailed in this study, while solidly middle-class and solidly committed to instituting and sustaining social order, were driven primarily by the energies and interests of those they sought to reform, and they interested themselves in universalist notions of equality and human semblance. On the basis of this grassroots energy, the Associations considered here—the YMCA, YWCA, World Student Christian Federation, and the Student Volunteer Movement—all considered themselves, with reason, to belong to a Movement with a capital M. However, in many cases, the reformers' universalist commitments were indefinitely deferred, and this dissertation seeks to contribute to the historiography of reform by laying out how and why this was so.

In examining Christian reform as a middle-class project, this study also finds that a liberal optimism existing in conjunction with an anxiety about civic virtue is central to understanding the mindsets and motivations of the men and women featured here, and, as such, finds connections between the historiography of social reform and the scholarly debates about the making of American liberalism and its relationship to civic republicanism.¹⁵ This study hopes to contribute in part by illustrating the degree to which these two seemingly contradictory mindsets often worked in tandem to animate reform movements—and perhaps the rising American middle class more generally. This present study also seeks to contribute to discussions about the degree to which the so-called liberal individual can be traced to the emancipatory tendencies of evangelicalism.¹⁶ David Hollinger has observed that “the accommodation of Protestant

¹³ Clifford S. Griffin, “Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44, no. 3 (1957): 423–44. Anne Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Ronald Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1990).

¹⁴ For instance, Lori Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins: A Story of Woman's Rights in Antebellum New York* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Originally, Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 2012); Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011). Also J.G.A. Pocock, Lance Banning, Drew McCoy, Joyce Appleby, Robert Shalhope, and Isaac Kramnick, among others. Nancy Cohen's *Reconstruction of American Liberalism* makes a similar argument regarding “a new liberalism that posited an active role for the state in society and economy, even as it justified constraints on democracy and the ascendancy of corporate capitalism.” (5) Johnston's *Radical Middle Class* shows how lower middle class Progressive reformers entwined republican moral economy with liberal individualism, (although I am not inclined to agree with him that they were “radical” for doing so).

¹⁶ For the impact of evangelical Protestantism on American identity, see Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2003); Jon

Christianity with the Enlightenment ... continues to structure the culture and politics of the nation,"¹⁷ and, as this dissertation suggests, it has left its imprint on the idea of the world of nations as well.¹⁸

On the history of the Associations as reform organizations, Ian Tyrrell offers a valuable contribution in his recent work, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire*. Tyrrell argues that "moral reform groups and missionaries often thought of their work as... a kind of Christian moral empire that rose above 'nation.'"¹⁹ However, this dissertation finds that many of these reformers sought not to rise above nations but to make them stronger—their mission was not necessarily to transcend nationhood but to reinforce it by Christianizing nations from within. While Tyrrell's use of the idea of Christian moral empire is in some senses very apt, the reformers of this study would have seen themselves as proponents of nationhood than of empire. This dissertation attempts to explore that discrepancy.

A further strain of historical literature that has informed this study conceptually addresses empire from a broadly postcolonial or critical perspective.²⁰ The questions of the tension between universalism and particularism inherent in liberal ideals, and the idea of the individual as an historical development, are both drawn from this literature. Conceptually, James L. Hevia's *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* was especially useful in this study—Hevia describes the pedagogical project of imperialism as "one designed to teach natives how to behave in a white man's world of new and unfamiliar relations of power."²¹ and the Christian reformers of this study implemented this same sort of pedagogical project, with the idea

Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Harvard University Press, 1992); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (UNC Press Books, 2012); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2013); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Gary J. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (Yale University Press, 1989).

¹⁷ David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 1.

¹⁸ Andrew Preston and John Nurser, among others, have both shown the degree to which missionaries and other Protestant leaders were involved in developing, disseminating, and instituting the idea of human rights. Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); John Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations: The Ecumenical Church and Human Rights* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 4.

²⁰ For instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (University of California Press, 2002); Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (University of Chicago Press, 2010); Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (University of Chicago Press, 1999); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton University Press, 1993); Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (University of Chicago Press, 1996); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

²¹ James Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

of preparing their constituencies to undertake the duties of “Christian citizenship”—at some point in the future. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s point that imperial subjects were consigned to what he called “the waiting room of history” informed this portion of the argument.²² On the whole, histories of Anglo-American reform have not engaged with these questions from this perspective, and, in doing so, this work seeks to contribute both to the historiography of reform and to this critical body of work.²³

On the topic of the Associations, the deepest and most extensive histories have been produced or commissioned by the Associations themselves. The YMCA and affiliated organizations invested heavily in historical and biographical accounts of their projects and their leaders, relying on such texts for institution-building purposes. The narratives they produced continue to dominate the study of the topic, with C. H. Hopkins’ monumental work looming especially large.²⁴ These histories are generally well-written, well-researched, and laudatory. A handful of monographs have built on this base, including Thomas Winter’s *Making Men, Making Class*, which finds a link between a middle-class crisis of masculinity and the ways in which ideas of personality and character were used in YMCA Industrial Departments to “make class;” Jessica Elfenbein’s work which figures the YMCA in Baltimore as a typical voluntary association that linked the public and private sectors in “the making of a modern city,” a phrase she takes as her title; and Paula Lupkin’s *Manhood Factories*, which argues that YMCA architecture was central to “the making of modern urban culture.”²⁵ That the limited historiography of the YMCA plausibly finds it to have “made” such diverse and significant aspects of Americanness as manhood, class, the landscape and civic culture of the modern city, is significant, and an indication of the underappreciated power and importance of the organization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A few scholars, as well, have focused on the Foreign Work of the Associations. Nancy Boyd’s *Emissaries* (published by the official YWCA press), M. D. David’s *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India* (commissioned and published by the YMCA of

²² Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

²³ An exception is Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2013). While not a history of reform, Ngai brings a critical perspective to a related topic in her study of the history of illegal immigration in the US.

²⁴ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*; Charles Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979). See also the works of C.P. Shedd, L.L. Doggett, J.E. Hodder-Williams, R.C. Morse, Paul Super, W.H. Morgan, Robert Wilder, Elizabeth Wilson, Anna Rice, Ruth Rouse, Sherwood Eddy, Galen Fisher, Kenneth Scott Latourette, etc.

²⁵ Thomas Winter, *Making Men, Making Class: The YMCA and Workingmen, 1877-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Jessica Elfenbein, *The Making of a Modern City: Philanthropy, Civic Culture, and the Baltimore YMCA* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); Paula Lupkin, *Manhood Factories: YMCA Architecture and the Making of Modern Urban Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); John Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand: Same-Sex Relations and the YMCA* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998); Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); Nina Mjagkij, *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Kenneth A. Steuer, *Pursuit of an “Unparalleled Opportunity”: The American YMCA and Prisoner-of-War Diplomacy Among the Central Power Nations During World War I, 1914-1923* (Columbia University Press, 2005); David P. Setran, *The College “Y”: Student Religion in the Era of Secularization* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Nancy Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

India), and Michael Parker's *Kingdom of Character* are all solid, fact-filled, and uncritical narrative accounts of the YWCA's Foreign Work, the YMCA in India, and of the Student Volunteer Movement, respectively, in the tradition of Hopkins and other celebratory chroniclers of these institutions.²⁶ Parker argues that the Student Volunteer Movement was a "working-out" of the "Victorian motif of character," but this promising conceptual frame is for the most part limited to a few paragraphs in the introduction and conclusion.²⁷ Jon Davidann's work on the YMCA in Japan, *A World of Crisis and Progress*, argues that a small but powerful cadre of elite Japanese Christians saw the YMCA "as an institution that could save and uplift the nation."²⁸ He goes on to detail a "crisis of Christian nationalism" that turned these national leaders away from the Christian precepts as laid out by the YMCA as the basis of national advancement, and toward a more secular idea of "progress." While Davidann's work is strong and convincing conceptually, his assessment of certain key characters and interchanges covered in this present work do not seem to be supported by the sources.²⁹ A few monographs have taken the YMCA in China as their topic. Shirley Garrett and Jun Xing both review Association programs primarily as an extension of the Social Gospel, and Xing's work is useful in showing how the YMCA moved from social reform via character building toward social reconstruction via mass campaigns and model villages in the late 1920s and 1930s.³⁰ Ryan Dunch's *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China, 1857-1927* is geographically limited to a particular province and addresses Chinese Christians generally, but describes the YMCA's particular ideal of Christian citizenship in passing and recognizes that this ideal was important in that Chinese nationalists, Christian or otherwise, "tended in this period to see the process of building China into a strong, modern nation primarily as a matter of moral education, of molding the Chinese people into a nationally conscious and public-spirited citizenry." Dunch further argues that the YMCA was key in introducing "the symbolic repertoire of the

²⁶ Nancy Boyd, *Emissaries: The Overseas Work of the American YWCA 1895-1970* (New York: Woman's Press, 1986); M David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India* (New Delhi: National Council of YMCAs of India, 1992); Michael Parker, *The Kingdom of Character: The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1886-1926* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library Publishers, 2007).

²⁷ Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*; Nathan D. Showalter, *The End of a Crusade: The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions and the Great War* (Scarecrow Press, Incorporated, 1998). Parker xv. On the Student Volunteer Movement, Showalter also makes a limited argument in *End of a Crusade* that the SVM went into decline after missionaries conflated national aims with evangelization during the First World War. He mentions but downplays the concurrent rise of indigenous Student Christian Movements.

²⁸ Jon Davidann, *A World of Crisis and Progress: The American YMCA in Japan, 1890-1930* (Bethlehem, Pa.: Lehigh University Press, 1998).

²⁹ Specifically, the sources used here contradict Davidann's readings of YMCA Secretaries John Swift and Galen Fisher, of Swift's views on indigenization and of Fisher's theological beliefs and social commitments, and of the impact and importance of both men in the evolution of the YMCA's Foreign Work program. In some cases, Davidann seems to take certain phrases from the documents out of context.

³⁰ Shirley Garrett, *Social Reformers in Urban China: The Chinese Y.M.C.A., 1895-1926* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970); Jun Xing, *Baptized in the Fire of Revolution: The American Social Gospel and the YMCA in China, 1919-1937* (Bethlehem, Pa.: Lehigh University Press, 1996).

modern nation-state” in Fuzhou Province—the very performance of nationalism.³¹ Writing from an International Relations perspective, Charles Keller, in his article “The Christian Student Movement, YMCAs, and Transnationalism in Republican China,” expands on this work by showing that some Association ideals and practices were adopted not only by the Kuomintang, but also by the Chinese Communist Party. Like Tyrrell, Keller relies primarily on the concept of transnationalism to frame his analysis, arguing that the YMCA was a “loci of transnational knowledge” in China in the first half of the twentieth century.³² Unlike most of this work on the YMCA in China, this dissertation does not seek to make the argument that Western liberal or evangelical ideas were important in the “making of a modern China.” Instead, it suggests that the ideal of “Christian citizenship,” formulated in no small part for export, and further articulated through interactions on the field, was an important strain in the making of a certain American conception of personhood, and, perhaps, in the making of the ideal of a world of democratic nations.

In tracing the history of these ideas, this dissertation has drawn extensively from texts produced by the Associations and by those aligned with them. The Associations’ attitudes toward efficient administration, expertise, and the careful consideration of problems led them to produce reams of reports, to publish and distribute the chronicles of their conventions, and to generate exhaustive archival files. The Associations also maintained multiple journals and many of their leaders published books and memoirs. The archive is extensive and reveals recurring strains of ideas and patterns of language, evolving over time. This dissertation covers only a portion of the research done, and a sequel would cover the theological developments of the 1920s and 30s, and an attendant cultural turn by the Associations, as the final movement following the missionary turn of the 1880s, the social turn of the 1890s, and the political turn of the 1900s. But that, now, is another story.

³¹ Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China, 1857-1927* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xviii.

³² Keller, “The Christian Student Movement, YMCAs, and Transnationalism in Republican China,” 61–62.

Chapter 1

TO ASSOCIATE THEIR EFFORTS FOR THE EXTENSION OF HIS KINGDOM AMONGST YOUNG MEN

Young men from the country and smaller towns are ever coming to our cities. They come as strangers to meet strangers. They come to meet temptation. They come to have their characters formed, and their destinies for the present and future in many cases decided by the companionship to which they are first introduced. They come needing counsel and guidance. - From an Address at the Third Annual YMCA Convention in 1856.¹

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the “young stranger” was a problem. Having left behind the ordered authority of his family, his community, and his church, would he be corrupted by temptation and lost in the atomized mass of the city? Or could he (and the city) be saved? Christian reformers of the rising middle class considered the problem of the corruption of young strangers in their growing cities to be a moral crisis. Their understanding of the problem and their approaches to solutions were framed by their evangelical beliefs, by their anxieties about civic virtue, and by the increasingly liberal optimism of their times. They hoped to meet this perceived crisis by meeting each young stranger as an individual, and by means of “right influences,” to set him on a path toward moral perfection. They proposed to address the perceived moral crisis of the city by “counsel and guidance” of young strangers who had “come to have their characters formed.”

From its founding in 1844, the Young Men’s Christian Association conceived of itself as a lay religious organization designed to address social ills by bringing individuals into Christian association. The idea of the Young Men’s Christian Association caught on quickly across the Anglo-American world in the mid-nineteenth century, not only because it sought to address the problem of the moral corruption of the city as imagined by prominent citizens, but because it responded well to the predilections of the so-called young strangers themselves. The evangelical energy and worldly interests of the Association’s young membership drove its expansion, both geographically, and beyond its first purpose of evangelical proselytization. Throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, the YMCA remained a transatlantic, nondenominational organization, driven by the optimistic energies of Christian laymen and by their anxiety about the moral condition of the increasingly atomized individual—an individual specifically classed as a young man, and usually as an unmarried urban clerk or student. For more than a century this class of young man remained the imagined figure of the individual that the YMCA sought to bring into Christian

¹ *Journal of Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention of Young Men’s Christian Associations of the United States and British Provinces, 1856* (Washington D.C.: Central Committee of the Confederation, 1856), 19, <http://purl.umn.edu/133500>.

association, and to an important degree, to project as a universal model within a universalized Kingdom of God.

* * * * *

In very broad strokes, the Christian reform under discussion here was born of the evangelical revivals that flared up in the Atlantic world at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the first decades of the nineteenth century. As opposed to the Calvinist ethos that had dominated Protestantism before the Great Awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this evangelicalism focused on individual spiritual experience, individual free will, and individual perfectibility. Whereas Calvinism had stressed the inherent sinfulness of man and asserted that salvation was predestined by God and beyond the control of man—that God had predetermined unconditionally who would be saved and who would face eternal damnation—by the Second Great Awakening evangelical revivalists often stressed a loving God and generally preached that God’s grace was universally intended for all—that each individual had been given the grace of free will to find faith and therein be saved. Further, while they did not preach that good works were required for salvation, many revivalists did believe in the necessity of evangelizing and of remedying the evils around them in anticipation of Christ’s return and the millennium. As one important reformer declared, “*Faith without WORKS is dead.*”² This new wave of passionate evangelical spirit produced a number of reform organizations bent on reawakening not just the faith but the moral commitments of men and women as individuals, thereby advancing the millennial Kingdom of God.³

The idea of the millennium, or the prophecy of one thousand years of God’s rule on earth, took on a new urgency during the Second Great Awakening. Previously the dominant interpretation had been that the millennium would follow Christ’s return to earth, but in the early nineteenth century many revivalists came to believe that the millennium must in fact precede the Second Coming—instead of anticipating a perfect world ruled by Christ after his return, they believed that a perfect world must be instituted by humanity before that return, and that in fact the Second Coming would be the culmination of a process of human perfection. In this view, individual perfectibility was not only possible, it was imperative—a theological development that lent incredible intensity to evangelical reform efforts as revivalists sought to bring about this perfection and thus the millennium.⁴

The great revivalist who most directly influenced the founding generation of the YMCA was evangelical minister and reformer Charles Finney, active from the 1820s through the 1860s. Finney began as a revivalist in upstate New York, and in the 1830s moved to New York City and then to Oberlin College in Ohio. While the revivals he led peaked in the 1830s, he continued to travel widely on both sides of the Atlantic, and his published works were widely distributed—including a manual detailing his pioneering

² As quoted in Anne C. Loveland, “Evangelicalism and ‘Immediate Emancipation’ in American Antislavery Thought,” *The Journal of Southern History* 32, no. 2 (1966): 181.

³ For instance: Roger Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*.

⁴ Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*.

techniques on the management and promotion of revivals. Finney, like other evangelical revivalists, stressed free will, the perfection of the individual, the immanence of the millennium, and the importance of works as signs of grace. He believed in social reform as Christian imperative and he was active as an abolitionist.⁵

While the surge in Christian reform intent on perfecting the individual was most immediately born of the Second Great Awakening, both revivalism and reform were part and parcel of a suite of other major societal shifts, and the spiritual intensity of the time must be understood in the context of the social, cultural, political, and economic reordering of life experience that began to characterize the urban centers of the Atlantic world in the first half of the nineteenth century. The new factories that marked the onset of the Industrial Revolution had begun the process of spatially and temporally separating work life from home life. To this point, the work of production typically had been conducted within a household, where all members lived and labored together. Now, workers and managers were increasingly drawn out of the household and into the factory and the work they did became increasingly stratified in its nature and its level of financial recompense. At the same time, the new middle class was formulating a cultural ideal that separated a purportedly male sphere of work and public life from a purportedly female sphere of home and private life.⁶ These newly gendered spheres were superimposed onto changes in political life as well, as white men struggled to gain universal suffrage and broader influence over an expanding democratic process (a struggle more immediately successful for American Jacksonians than for British Chartists in the first half of the nineteenth century).⁷

As incomplete as it was, the democratic ideal of political equality of white men was being more broadly advanced, bolstered not only by an emerging idea of equal opportunity in the market but also by the new evangelical emphasis on the equality of all before God. These interlocking conceptions of political, economic, and even spiritual equality of opportunity were accompanied by an increasing lionization of individual agency in each of these spheres. This impulse toward individualism was coupled with a mounting optimism about human progress that was similarly infusing political, economic, and social life, as it was the realm of Christian thought—the new evangelical promise of individual free will and individual perfectibility and the new emphasis on the imminent Kingdom of God meshed not only with incipient understandings of individual freedom in the market and in the political process, but with a growing faith that through science and reason, humanity would now take great strides toward a more perfect future. Thus, to an important extent, the Christian revivals and ensuing reform of the Second Great Awakening unfolded in conjunction with the conceptual milieu that has become known as classical liberalism, and worked within this milieu to produce a new conception of a free individual who shouldered responsibility not only for his own

⁵ For more on Finney: James H. Moorhead, "Charles Finney and the Modernization of America," *Journal of Presbyterian History* (1962-1985) 62, no. 2 (1984): 95–110.

⁶ On the idea of separate spheres: Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988): 9–39.

⁷ For more on Jacksonian politics: Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990); Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*. Note that some evangelicals were suspicious of electoral politics and the extension of suffrage.

perfection but for his part in creating a more perfect world.⁸

However, although many liberal and evangelical ideas reinforced each other—ideas about individual free will, individual perfectibility, equality of opportunity, and the necessity of active human endeavor to achieve a brighter future—it is important to note that evangelical revivalism was not completely of a piece with all strains of classical liberalism. The highly emotional spiritual intensity of the revivals and the all-encompassing individual conversion experience contrast starkly with liberal rationalism's deliberately cerebral faith in science and reason, and this rationalism tended to define itself against what it deemed to be religious superstition.⁹

Further, Christian reformers shared a persistent anxiety about moral decline, a sensibility that was at odds with the new liberal optimism about human progress. This anxiety seemed to draw as much from a perennial classical republicanism as it did from revivalist theology. As had many of England's radical Whigs and many of the American colonies' revolutionary leaders of the previous century, these reformers worried about moral corruption and the collapse of civic virtue, and their fears were rendered increasingly acute by the seismic nature of the changes being wrought by the Industrial Revolution. As suggested above, the rising prominence of the free individual represented for Christian reformers not just a promise but a problem—in the face of the atomizing, massifying, and democratizing tendencies of the first half of the nineteenth century, these reformers were quite convinced that only the moral guidance of steadfast and upstanding men and women of the better sort could prevent degeneration into licentious disorder and descent into godless anarchy. This persistent moral anxiety about social decline worked in tension with the new liberal optimism about social progress, while the hierarchicalism inherent in these fears offset the egalitarian tendencies of both liberalism and evangelicalism.¹⁰

Both optimism and anxiety hit the nascent urban middle class especially hard, and it was from this class that reformers were primarily drawn. Social, economic, and political developments across the industrializing Atlantic world contributed to this trend, in conjunction with ideological and theological shifts. As middle-class women found

⁸ For an exploration of these developments see, among others: John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*, Reprint edition (University Of Chicago Press, 2015); Michael Zakim, *Ready-Made Democracy: A History of Men's Dress in the American Republic, 1760-1860* (University of Chicago Press, 2006). Charles Taylor and Talal Asad frame the debate about secular selfhood: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1st edition (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, 1 edition (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003).

⁹ Nonetheless, Michael Warner, in a comment on John Lardas Modern's *Secularism in Antebellum America* on the website "The Immanent Frame" notes that "If America was in many important ways secular by the antebellum period...it was so largely because of evangelicals themselves," and he points to "evangelical conceptions of conscience and conversion, together with evangelical practices of the public sphere and the voluntary system" as "the very conditions from which the default secularity of the social is projected." <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tiff/2012/10/02/was-antebellum-america-secular/>

¹⁰ These sets of ideas are explored through the debates over liberalism and republicanism in the American Revolution and Early Republic; see for instance Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*; Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. They are traced into the nineteenth century in such works as Watson, *Liberty and Power*; Zakim, *Ready-Made Democracy*; Richardson, *West from Appomattox*.

themselves facing limits to participation in the work of production and in the public life of politics, many added their energies to church work and reform organizations, which could be construed to be within their newly delineated sphere. Middle-class men also found themselves facing new conditions in their respective gendered sphere, as it became clear that asserting authority over a household workshop of bound apprentices was a very different thing than projecting authority over a larger work force of free wage workers. However, while early efforts of these middle-class reformers were designed to mitigate perceived un-Christian effects of disrupted structures of authority, the prevailing emphasis on individual agency structured both their interpretation of the problem and the range of solutions they imagined.¹¹

In contrast to the Progressive reformers several decades later, reformers of this period were less interested in the broad structural changes that were just then gathering momentum, and they directed their reform efforts at the individual, with little regard for systemic factors. Voluntary organizations such as the prominent reformer Lyman Beecher's Good Morals Society worked against such evils as gambling, profanity, drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking, and prostitution by recruiting influential individuals to the cause and exerting moral pressure on transgressors. Mrs. Lydia A. Finney, wife of the revivalist, headed the Female Moral Reform Society, which reported the names of individuals observed frequenting brothels. The American Bible Society, modeled on a society based in London, printed and distributed almost six million bibles in the first half of the nineteenth century, and put one into the hands of every incoming immigrant to New York City. The American Tract Society was also based on a London equivalent and its volunteers distributed over five million evangelical tracts annually, most formulated as an appeal from one individual to another. Evangelical reformers in urban centers across the Atlantic world also sought to save their fellows through the Sunday School movement, through home and foreign missions, through temperance and charity work, and through reformed asylums and prisons. In accordance with the emerging individualism of the era, these reformers did not call for a reorganization of social relations as a cure for a wayward society. Instead, they felt themselves surrounded by a growing mass of morally wayward individuals, individuals whom they believed could be saved, one by one, through the grace of God.¹²

The evangelical conviction that social reform must be affected through the moral conversion of individuals is perhaps most clearly discernible in the immediatist turn in antislavery reform in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. In contrast to the more careful proposals of the gradualists, the immediatists demanded an immediate end to slavery. White middle-class evangelical abolitionists' aversion to slavery was

¹¹ For more on the social and ideological developments framing antebellum reform, see: Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999); Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*; Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism*; Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*; Griffin, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860"; Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978).

¹² Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order*; Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism*; Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*.

clearly influenced both by liberal ideals of freedom and equality and by a Romanticist identification with the experience of the oppressed individual. More importantly, however, their passionate commitment to abolition was driven by their anxieties about moral collapse, coupled with the new evangelical imperative to work actively and wholeheartedly toward the millennium. Evangelical abolitionists perceived slavery as the ultimate embodiment of sin, corrupting the slaveowners as much as or more than the slaves, and by extension, corrupting the entire nation—even perhaps representing the last barrier to the coming millennium. Although the evangelical idea of equality before God resonated with black abolitionists and some of their white counterparts, egalitarianism was not the primary impetus for the work of most white evangelical abolitionists. If slavery was sin, as they believed, then slaveholders must repent, and repent immediately. For these reformers the essence of immediatism was not so much the immediate abolition of the institution of slavery as it was the individual's absolute acceptance of slavery as sin, immediate repentance, and the immediate decision to work tirelessly for abolition. This immediate decision for abolition was thus conflated with evangelical conversion—the individual's intense and personal decision for Christ. Just as the great suddenness of conversion was followed by the slower process of sanctification, so the individual slaveholder's immediate repentance would be followed by the more involved process of emancipation—an emancipation that often seemed to focus more on the erstwhile slaveholder's freedom from sin than on the erstwhile slave's freedom from bondage. Just as a sense of moral crisis informed by an evangelical worldview that required tireless moral action drove middle-class antislavery reform, so these factors also drove specifically Christian efforts such as missionary, bible, and tract societies, and just as middle-class antislavery immediatism depended on the conversion of individuals through "moral suasion," so did these other mid-nineteenth-century Christian reform efforts.¹³

Despite a pervasive sense of the enormity of the social shifts then in progress, there were several factors preventing middle-class reform from attempting social change on a social rather than an individual level during this period. Of course, reformers had no clear conception of the content or significance of the shifts just then underway, but even if they had, they shared an ideological and theological conviction that any meaningful reform of society must necessarily direct itself toward the moral conversion of the individual. As outlined above, the free individual who was being conceptually empowered with the responsibility to act for himself in the market and at

¹³ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 422–28; Ronald White and Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 10; James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976); David Brion Davis, "The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery Thought," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 49, no. 2 (1962): 209–30; Griffin, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860"; Strong, *Perfectionist Politics*, 4. White and Hopkins quote from the Baptist editor of *The Watchman*: Slavery was "an outrage on the nature which the Son of God was pleased to make the temple of His divinity," and although legislative prohibitions against it were "altogether rightful," the only way to truly end the sin of slavery would be for each individual to come to comprehend the divinity of Christ in each other individual. Thus, fostering holiness, not pushing legislation, would be a more effective approach to reform. For a discussion of conversion in this context see Davis and Strong.

the ballot box was also newly responsible for the condition of his own soul. Neither the social position nor the moral condition of this free individual was considered any longer to be predetermined either by birth or by God. As a free moral agent, this individual had been imbued with the ability to determine both the course of his own life and the eternal fate of his own soul, and he was expected to use this innate moral capacity to govern himself—and by extension, through democratic and benevolent action, his society. The power of this new middle-class conception of the individual was such that it structured Christian approaches to reform throughout this period. In fact, in 1849 a reformer for the Sunday School Union went so far as to declare the idea of reforming society as a whole to be irreligious—it was the individual who sinned, and the individual who must repent. In his view, “instead of making the invisible, intangible and irresponsible composition which we call SOCIETY the scape-goat for the sins and sufferings of the visible, tangible and responsible individuals who compose it, [we must] hold the individuals to answer for the burdens and griefs of society.”¹⁴ This newly free individual, newly burdened with the immense responsibility not only of determining his own destiny, but of fulfilling God’s intended destiny for man, became the emblem of middle-class Christian reform in the Anglo-American world in the first half of the nineteenth century, and in fact, by taking this conception of the individual as a model both for themselves and for their constituencies, Christian reformers contributed to its construction and elaboration.¹⁵

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One of the most prominent, influential, and long-standing Christian reform organizations to take up the task of the perfection of the individual was the Young Men’s Christian Association. The YMCA was established in London in 1844 by clerks at the large dry-goods firm of Hitchcock and Rodgers. These young clerks were experiencing something of the massifying and atomizing process described above—many had left their families and their village communities behind to come to London, they worked twelve- to fifteen-hour days, and most boarded in dormitories supplied by the firm. The evangelical revivals of the Second Great Awakening had hit Britain as they had the United States, and a few of the clerks at Hitchcock and Rodgers had been quite strongly affected. They deplored what they saw as the degenerate moral conditions on the showroom floor and in the dormitories, and they felt compelled to perfect their own moral state and that of those around them by holding bible study and prayer meetings in their rooms after hours. These meetings became popular among their fellow clerks, who had been so recently, in Tocqueville’s words, “isolated and dropped into the common mass.”¹⁶

The young man at the center of these prayer meetings was George Williams. The YMCA would later consider Williams its founder, and the history of his life occupies a prominent place in Association literature as a model to be emulated, and as

¹⁴ As quoted in Griffin, “Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860,” 440.

¹⁵ For the individual as newly free: Political Science lecture on Tocqueville by Wendy Brown at UC Berkeley, Sept. 8, 2009.

¹⁶ This atomization of young men in the city was perhaps more powerfully a middle-class perception than it was a social reality.

“inspiration for the Christian worker.”¹⁷ Williams was born in 1821 to a middling farming family in Somerset. At the age of fifteen he was apprenticed as a draper in Bridgewater, fifty miles from home, and YMCA biographers later made much of the character and abilities he showed there, praising him as “diligent in business” and “remarkably active and especially clever at haberdashery.” While in Bridgewater, Williams experienced conversion, and, having been influenced by a few of his fellow apprentices, by his Congregational pastor, and by the writings of the American revivalist Charles Finney, he in turn became a Christian evangelist. YMCA literature later credited him with the conversion of twenty-seven of his peers, and one of the proprietors of his firm.¹⁸

At the age of twenty, Williams moved to London to take the fore-mentioned position at Hitchcock and Rodgers, two hundred miles from home. There, he was appalled by moral conditions in the emergent urban commercial world—he found that “the language, the immorality, the drunkenness, everything was evil.” In response, he redoubled his evangelizing efforts by holding prayer meetings with his roommates, and in his recollection, “the Spirit of God came down, and we saw conversion after conversion.”¹⁹ As in his previous place of employment, one of the converted was the head of the firm. This was considered significant because, as suggested above, evangelicals of this period believed that the reform of social conditions could only be achieved through the conversion of individuals, and as an individual, the head of a firm was better able to exert the influence of his newfound godliness not only on those in his employ, but on his similarly influential peers. As it was asserted at the first annual YMCA meeting in 1845, “An honorable, upright, intelligent, Christian man of business, moving in the world of men, and exercising the influence of high character, may be as useful as any minister.”²⁰ This cultivation of powerful capitalists remained a consistent strategy of the organization for the following century.

Between 1841 and 1844, the small prayer meetings held by Williams and his roommates began to attract more participants. The converted head of the firm, George Hitchcock, employed a chaplain, established regular worship, and provided a larger room for the use of the group.²¹ On June 6, 1844, twelve of the leaders of this group met in Williams’ room, as one participant noted in his diary, “for the purpose of forming a society the object of which is to influence religious young men to spread the Redeemer’s Kingdom amongst those by whom they are surrounded.”²²

¹⁷ Howard Benjamin Grose, ed., “Making the Most of Oneself,” *Missions: American Baptist International Magazine* 12, no. 10 (November 1921): 600. Published on the centenary of Williams’ birth, which “occasioned world-wide celebration.”

¹⁸ Clarence Prouty Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations* (London: S. P. C. K. for the World’s Committee of Young Men’s Christian Associations, 1955), 18–19; John Ernest Hodder-Williams, *The Life of Sir George Williams: Founder of the Young Men’s Christian Association* (New York: International Committee of Young Men’s Christian Associations, 1906), 22; Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 4; George John Stevenson, *Historical Records of the Young Men’s Christian Association from 1844 to 1884* (London: Christian Commonwealth Office, 1884), 13–22.

¹⁹ As quoted in Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 20.

²⁰ Stevenson, *Historical Records of the Young Men’s Christian Association from 1844 to 1884*, 38.

²¹ Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 20.

²² Stevenson, *Historical Records of the Young Men’s Christian Association from 1844 to 1884*, 18–19.

The first purpose of the new Association was evangelization.²³ The fact that there were twelve young men present at the June 6 meeting contributed to the sense that this was the organization's "first apostolic community,"²⁴ and it is interesting to note an element of a "Macedonian call" included in the earliest known account of the founding, prepared for the Paris Conference of 1855. This account maintains that the June 6 meeting was called in response to this message from a clerk in another London firm: "I have been truly rejoiced to hear this morning that the Lord is doing a great work in your house; . . . I am engaged here in the same work, but stand almost alone; and from what I have heard, am induced to say, 'Come over and help us.'"²⁵ This biblical phrase from Acts 16:9 is a standard element in missionary narratives, and is interpreted as a divine call to evangelize.²⁶ Tellingly, the symbolic Macedonian call would prominently recur in the founding of the Student Volunteer Movement four decades later, when missionary-minded student YMCA members bent on taking their movement overseas formulated the founding narrative of their new organization around a carefully orchestrated performance of such a call.

Also predictive of the future development of the Association was the fact that of the twelve young men present at the June 6 meeting, four denominations were equally represented, with three members each being Church of England, Methodist, Congregational, and Baptist.²⁷ This degree of religious association across Protestant denominations was almost unheard of at that time, and the stubbornly non-denominational nature of the YMCA from the moment of its founding made it a forerunner of the ecumenical movement that emerged a half century later.

Several of the Association's organizational elements were in place at its founding, and this foundational set of characteristics all tended to nudge the organization beyond its first purpose of evangelization and toward more worldly concerns. Firstly, its nondenominational composition made it less insular than other Christian youth groups. Secondly, as American revivalist Charles Finney's vignette makes clear, its influences were always transatlantic, and although the soon-to-be formed North American YMCA maintained a separate organizational structure from the British YMCA, from 1855 they were linked along with other regional and national YMCAs in the World Alliance. Thirdly, as evidenced by its youthful bottom-up organizational impulse, its lay leadership, and even by the gesture of the Macedonian call, the YMCA prided itself on being driven by the needs and interests of its young lay constituency. Finally, it was a solidly middle-class organization, reflecting both the fears of moral decline and the liberal optimism that marked the emergence of this class in the

²³ It must be noted that in contrast to the evangelizing project in Chapter 2, this first project was that of evangelical revival, addressing itself to those who were already at least nominally Christian, in an effort to encourage powerful individual conversion experiences and renewed spiritual commitment to individual perfection and moral reform.

²⁴ Sherwood Eddy, *A Century with Youth: A History of the Y.M.C.A. from 1844 to 1944* (New York: Association Press, 1944), 2.

²⁵ Stevenson, *Historical Records of the Young Men's Christian Association from 1844 to 1884*, 17.

²⁶ American historians might recognize the phrase from the 1629 Massachusetts Bay Colony Seal, which puts these words in the mouth of an American Indian.

²⁷ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 5; Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 23. Shedd says not Baptist but Presbyterian.

industrializing Anglo-American world. Further, in the founding myth that the new Association formulated around the individual life-story of George Williams, we can discern a tension in the YMCA between a focus on perfection of the individual as such and a focus on association as a means to address social problems, a tension which would continue to unfold over time in conjunction with broader social developments.²⁸

The expansion of YMCA activity beyond evangelization began a year after its founding, with a series of educational lectures. One history claims that these soon “constituted *the* lecture platform of London, with popular travel, scientific, and religious lectures,” often attracting more than a thousand attendees per lecture, the texts of which were printed and widely distributed.²⁹ The leaders of the Association felt that “many unconverted young men would assist and feel interested in a Mutual Improvement Society, so would principals of houses, and we shall deem it no unimportant result if in any instance we can lead to the library of useful knowledge, rather than to cards and billiards, to the cigar divan, concert room, or the seductive and polluting retreat.”³⁰ As this statement makes clear, expansion beyond the first purpose of evangelization required justification, and the terms in which it is made are telling. Losing young men to seductive urban vice is the immediate problem, and “useful” lectures are presented as a hook to lure these young men toward the ultimate moral solution to be found in Christian conversion—and again the figure of the “principal of the house” looms strangely large in this statement.³¹

In a statement at the 1855 Paris Conference, London YMCA leader Edwin Shipton argued that “Non-efficient Christian men are a hindrance to the Church, a reproach to their brethren and a stumbling block to the world. It has been far too long the custom to divorce the things of this life from the things that are spiritual—to regard them as separate and distinct.”³² Here, the problem was the “non-efficiency” of young men, a shortcoming that makes sense primarily in terms of a hierarchical business world, and in terms of the interest of that “principal of the house.” This business-world shortcoming, Shipton suggested, should be understood as a spiritual problem as well as a worldly one. In this justification for expansion beyond evangelization, commercial concerns are conflated with moral ones. Anxieties about the corruption of young men in the rapidly commercializing urban environment are addressed by framing as spiritual such commercial virtues as “usefulness” and “efficiency,” and by directing the energies of these young men toward religion. While heartfelt bottom-up religious conviction was probably a greater motive force in the YMCA of this period than any concerted attempt at top-down moral reform for commercial ends, powerful worldly interests cannot be

²⁸ Eddy, *A Century with Youth*, 19; Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 24; Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 6.

²⁹ Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 26; Stevenson, *Historical Records of the Young Men's Christian Association from 1844 to 1884*, 39–45. See Stevenson for more on lectures.

³⁰ R. C. L. Bevan, ed., *The First Annual Report of the Young Men's Christian Association* (W. M. Symons, 1845), 10.

³¹ Also in: Stevenson, *Historical Records of the Young Men's Christian Association from 1844 to 1884*, 39.

³² *Lectures Delivered Before the Young Men's Christian Association* (J. Nisbet & Company, 1869), lii; Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 30.

extricated here from religious purpose. In fact, a combination of top-down and bottom-up involvement and organizational impetus became an enduring feature of the YMCA. Powerful sponsors, “principals of houses” both commercial and religious, hoped to address the perceived moral crisis and exert influence over the young men of the industrializing world in what had all the markings of a campaign for social control. However, the incredible energy of the YMCA came from the young men themselves. In contrast to most Sunday school attendees or recipients of religious tracts or charity, YMCA members were active participants in their local Associations, and shifts in focus of the organization beyond evangelization were not just a response to their interests but a mark of the extent of their influence. The rapid growth of the YMCA in its first years undoubtedly had to do with this distinctive combination of a revivalistic religious energy and an active approach to social and economic concerns that appealed both to the powerful sponsors and to the target population of young middle-class men.

Within five years of its founding, YMCA branches appeared in thirteen major cities across England and Scotland.³³ While its spread across the British Isles was surprisingly swift, still more remarkable is how quickly it became an international organization, catching on particularly rapidly in the United States. Within two years of its first establishment in Boston in 1851, there were 32 branches in 19 states, at least one in almost every major city.³⁴ Of course, the Christian revivals that fostered the Association had a long history of crisscrossing the Atlantic. During the First Great Awakening in the eighteenth century, English revivalist George Whitefield had been at least as influential in the American colonies as he had in England, and these channels of religious communication survived revolutionary war, colonial independence, and divergent denominational development, and brought American Second Great Awakening revivalist Charles Finney to Britain, first in print and later in person. Finney, as mentioned above, was the religious figure most instrumental in George Williams’ conversion and dedication to evangelization.³⁵

Secular ideas crossed political borders as easily, and at an increasingly rapid rate as transportation and communication technologies progressed. Perhaps the most immediate catalyst for the internationalization of the organization was not religious but secular—the rise of the phenomenon of the World’s Fair.³⁶ Seven years after the YMCA was founded, the Great Exhibition of 1851, usually considered the first World’s Fair, brought countless foreign visitors to London to marvel at displays of industrial and technological prowess arrayed in the monumental Crystal Palace. The stated purpose of the exhibition was to present “The Works of Industry of all Nations,” but it was designed to showcase the supposed superiority of the British Empire, not only in the realm of industry but also on social questions—Britain, after all, had avoided revolution in 1848. The members of the YMCA distributed hundreds of thousands of tracts during the exhibition, providing information about their organization and inviting visitors to their

³³ Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 28.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁵ On Whitefield: Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America’s Spiritual Founding Father* (Yale University Press, 2014).

³⁶ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 16.

new and attractive quarters.³⁷ In accordance with the general spirit of the exhibition, they succeeded in introducing their Association as a model to be emulated in other nations, and several reform-minded visitors took the idea home. By the time the Seventh Annual Meeting of the YMCA was held in February 1852—less than six months after the Great Exhibition—YMCA branches had been established in Boston, Montreal, South Australia, Paris, and Geneva. The leading social reformer Lord Ashley, Earl of Shaftesbury, had been invited to serve as the YMCA’s President, and his address at this 1852 meeting reflected the impact of the Great Exhibition on the YMCA’s sense of its own mission:

“Such a spectacle as this [assembly] could not in the present day be exhibited in any capital but that in which, by God’s blessing, we have the happiness to reside. Persevere in your efforts, and some of you may live to see the day when other capitals shall exhibit such a spectacle as this; and I know it will be a great inducement for you to persevere, if you bear in mind that your example will be imitated in other nations, and that you may be erecting a model to be imitated in many of the most civilized nations on earth.”³⁸

The specific circumstances leading to the establishment of the YMCA in the United States indicate the importance not only of the Great Exhibition as catalyst, but also of the integration of a top-down reform agenda with bottom-up religious energy and an appeal to the concrete interests of the target population. A young evangelical student named George Van Derlip planned to travel to London during the Great Exhibition, and was commissioned by a Baptist weekly paper in Boston to write about his experiences abroad. Van Derlip’s glowing report of his visit to the London YMCA caught the attention of Thomas Sullivan, a retired sea captain turned Christian reformer, and Sullivan decided to redirect his own charitable work among young sailors to reproduce the YMCA model. The group of youths already involved in Sullivan’s Christian reform activities formed the core of the new Association, which declared its mission to “meet the young stranger as he enters our city, take him by the hand, direct him to a boarding house where he may find a quiet home pervaded with Christian influences, introduce him to the Church and Sabbath School, bring him to the Rooms of the Association, and in every way throw around him good influences, so that he may feel that he is not a stranger, but that noble and Christian spirits care for his soul.”³⁹ Whereas the London Association had begun by meeting in a bedroom, had moved from there to a public house, then to small rented rooms, and had only moved to the impressive quarters described by Van Derlip after wealthy reformers such as the Earl of Shaftesbury had become involved, the Boston Association was established in attractive rented rooms financed beforehand by interested reformers.⁴⁰ The well-known Christian reformer Lyman Beecher spoke during the opening exercises, and from the beginning, the Boston YMCA offered regularly-scheduled prayer meetings, Bible classes, lectures,

³⁷ Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 31.

³⁸ As quoted in *Ibid.*

³⁹ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 18.

⁴⁰ Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 26–27, 70; Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 18.

social meetings, a well-stocked library, and employment and housing services.⁴¹ It also actively allied itself with the established Congregational, Baptist, Episcopal, and Methodist churches of the city, which the London Association had not done, and it used these church connections to immediately engage in a publicity campaign, sending ten thousand copies of its constitution to evangelical clergyman across the nation.⁴² The publicity campaign of the new Boston Association, together with other direct reports of the London Association from American travelers who had visited the Great Exhibition, inspired many existing young men's groups to reorganize and adopt constitutions modeled on the original London version or its Boston adaptation.⁴³ While a few of these new branches were short-lived, most did quite well even through the Panic of 1857, and by 1860 there was a branch in every major US city.⁴⁴ The popular religious, social, and educational services, supported and advised by local religious leaders and reform-minded businessmen, proved a successful combination.

If the 1851 Great Exhibition in London marked the beginning of the spread of the YMCA as an international organization, the 1855 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris marked its codification as such—the first World Conference of the YMCA was organized to coincide with this second World's Fair.⁴⁵ The conference met in Paris from August 19-24 and hosted almost one hundred delegates from eight countries, with the handful of American delegates serving as representatives of the Confederation of Young Men's Christian Associations of the United States and the British Provinces (Canada) which had been organized the previous year at a convention in Buffalo, New York.⁴⁶ After arranging for an extensive system of worldwide correspondence and for reciprocal membership among all Associations, the convention produced a concise statement that became the basis for all further YMCA activity for almost a century to come. What became known as the "Paris Basis" read as follows:

The Young Men's Christian Associations seek to unite those young men who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Saviour according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be His disciples in their faith and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of His kingdom amongst young men.⁴⁷

This short statement remained the kernel around which the YMCA was organized for the next eighty years, through the height of its global influence. It is essentially an explication of the title of the organization—it stresses *young men* as its object, *Christianization* as its goal, and *association* as its method. The only hint here of a reform agenda is in the stress specifically on young men, who, in this urbanizing era of individuation and massification, were considered as potential threats to the social order if not constrained by Christian morality, and as suggested above, were a particular concern for the "principals of houses" under whom they worked. The fact that this

⁴¹ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 18.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 20–22.

⁴⁴ Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, 4.

⁴⁵ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 75.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 76, 63.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

reform agenda is not mentioned is indicative of the degree to which the founding generation assumed that individual perfection—and not structural adjustment—was the only approach to the reform they desired. The wording of the Paris Basis characterizes this perfection as rooted in Christianity, and evangelization is strongly suggested as the organization’s purpose. References to the Holy Scriptures and to the Kingdom of God both indicate that this Christianity is evangelical in nature, although any specific doctrinal or denominational constraints were carefully omitted. The original wording had in fact included the phrase “in their doctrine and in their life,” but on careful consideration the word “faith” was substituted for the word “doctrine” in an effort to insulate the organization from the encroachment of perennial sectarian conflicts among denominations.⁴⁸ The only hint to be found in this wording that the organization might become something more than a missionary society is also included in this particular phrase—the reference to “life” leaves an opening for a broader interpretation of the agenda. As one YMCA historian argued, this “was to place central emphasis on the duty of Christian young men to witness in practical ways to their faith in the sphere of their daily life, thus making all vocations Christian callings.”⁴⁹ It was this tendency that laid the foundation for the more worldly project that was to follow.

Beyond the prominence given to an unspecified evangelical Christianity, the most significant element of the Paris Basis is couched in the terms “to unite” and “to associate.” Achieving and preserving unity and association were of paramount importance to the delegates of the first World Conference, and the Paris Basis itself was designed to serve as the key to this unity. If association was to be the method by which the Kingdom of God was to be advanced and the social ills of an industrializing society remedied, then accomplishing unity in that association was critical. The careful avoidance of any reference to church doctrine, as mentioned above, was intended to keep the basis as broad as possible in an age of denominational discord. It was the issue of slavery, unsurprisingly, that proved to be the elephant in the room. While many reform-minded evangelicals were passionately anti-slavery, some were not, and feelings were characteristically strong on both sides. American delegates made it very clear that the unity of the Associations required that slavery be banned from discussion.⁵⁰ By 1855, the issue of slavery had already produced more than one inter-Association crisis—in May of 1853, a delegate from Boston had traveled to London for the London YMCA’s Annual Breakfast Meeting, but was prevented at the last moment from “feeling at liberty to attend.” The problem, kept under wraps at the time, was that Harriet Beecher Stowe had been invited as a courtesy to a distinguished guest, and when the London secretary informed the American delegate of this fact, the delegate thought it best for the unity of the American YMCAs to avoid contact with the anti-slavery author.⁵¹ Slavery had also been withheld from discussion at the Buffalo Convention in 1854, and the Toronto delegation, which had proposed that the Convention endorse that “in Christ Jesus there is neither bond nor free,” later withdrew

⁴⁸ Ibid., 78, 79.

⁴⁹ Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 39.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 122.

⁵¹ Ibid., 78.

from the Confederation over the issue.⁵² It was due in no small part to the issue of slavery that the first World Conference issued a Corollary to the Basis, “That any differences of opinion on other subjects, however important in themselves, but not embraced by the specific designs of the Associations, shall not interfere with the harmonious relations of the confederated Societies,”⁵³ and language was included in the constitutions of many Associations that “no controverted subject of a sectarian or political character shall ever be introduced into the discussions of the members at any of their meetings.”⁵⁴ If slavery was the most passionately contested issue, other causes which had for decades fallen under the purview of evangelical reform were also covered by these injunctions—temperance was deemed squarely out of bounds, and even the relatively uncontroversial campaign against vice was usually avoided.⁵⁵ Of course, complete avoidance was, in itself, a political position, and the New York City branch was almost destroyed by the furor caused by its ban of Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.⁵⁶ Navigating these issues was key in forging a remarkably broad basis that would allow for inclusion of violently opposing religious convictions within the same organization, an important step in the direction of the ecumenicism of a later period. However, while *association* was arguably as sacred a concept for the YMCA as it was for the Fourierists of such socialist utopian projects as Brook Farm (1841-1847),⁵⁷ the YMCA’s efforts to achieve such association did not extend to structural change, and in fact the injunction against controversial reform projects had the effect of directing the organization’s energies even more firmly away from structural change and toward the perfection of the individual.

If the basis of association established at the First World Conference in 1855 was remarkably broad, it did have limits. Many YMCA branches included “evangelical tests” for members, and at the North American YMCA Convention of 1869 in Portland, Maine, these tests were standardized. What became known as the Portland Test required full members of North American YMCAs be “members of churches held to be Evangelical.”⁵⁸ However, no list of evangelical churches was permitted, and in fact, there were evangelical wings to most Protestant denominations in the mid-nineteenth century—the Anglican, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, and Baptist churches all had both evangelical and non-evangelical sections, there were even a few evangelical Lutherans, and Unitarians and Quakers shared some evangelical traits including a perfectionist attitude toward morality and its impetus to reform.⁵⁹ To be evangelical during this period was generally more of an ethos than a creed—it involved

⁵² Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 59.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 401.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁷ Carl J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁵⁸ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 364.

⁵⁹ On what it meant to be evangelical in the mid-nineteenth century, see George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990); Daniel Walker Howe, “The Evangelical Movement and Political Culture in the North During the Second Party System,” *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 4 (March 1991): 1216–39.

a powerful individual conversion experience, an individual relationship with God and the Bible which was held to be more critical than church authority or liturgy, and an emphasis on individual moral agency and the capacity for individual perfection. Unitarians and Quakers did not share the evangelical stance toward conversion or toward the Bible, and it was specifically the question of the Unitarian denial of the Trinity that was at the center of the debate at the Portland Convention. Ultimately, the Portland Test consisted only of an affirmation of a short list of New Testament scriptural phrases on the nature of Christ, both as God and as Son of God, and it was left to each branch to judge the evangelical credentials of its members.⁶⁰ While the limitations imposed by the Portland Test would stand until 1931, they proved quite to be open-ended—in the early 20th century, both the Mexico City and the Manila Associations declared Roman Catholicism to be “evangelical.”⁶¹

As is clear in its founding narrative and in its Paris Basis, the YMCA began as an explicitly religious organization, although one whose purpose was always worldly reform. From the beginning, it defined itself as “Christianity put to work.”⁶² In accordance with the millennial project of working toward the Kingdom of God on earth through the cultivation of human perfection, the YMCA considered all earthly doings to be within the realm of religion. As recorded in the 1855 Paris Conference Report, “It is the special mission of the Association to declare that everything is spiritual which God has ordained... Hence, we desire to provide for all, but especially for the members of the Association, all that may tend to the enlargement of the mind, the cultivation of the judgment, and the consecration of the heart, that God in all things may be glorified.”⁶³ The YMCA interpreted the social problems it sought to address through a religious filter, and it addressed them with religious solutions—it sought to Christianize the emerging urban world created by the industrial revolution by Christianizing young white-collar men.

The movement continued to expand over the next decades, and educational and social services were firmly established as features of the Association alongside religious services and evangelism. Frequent regional, national, and international conferences, regular correspondence, and periodicals sharing content and Association news all served to foster a sense of organizational unity and momentum, and the Associations increasingly supported dedicated career administrators, deemed Secretaries. As the movement developed, the original drive to Christianize the city was adapted to other settings, perhaps most importantly to the rapidly expanding world of colleges and universities. American higher education was maturing quickly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, with the number of undergraduates quadrupling to more than one hundred thousand by the end of the century⁶⁴—and colleges, with their fraternal populations of youthful transplants, proved fertile fields for Association work. There had been a handful of YMCAs on American college campuses since the 1850s, but decades passed before was there an organized effort toward collegiate recruitment and

⁶⁰ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 363–67.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 513–14.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶³ As quoted in Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 30.

⁶⁴ Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, 6.

evangelization on a national level. In the early 1870s a YMCA Secretary named Robert Weidensall embarked on a tour of colleges and universities, and by 1874 he had helped to establish or reinvigorate thirty-two collegiate Associations. By 1877, an intercollegiate union had been formed, and Luther D. Wishard was appointed as the first Student Secretary.⁶⁵

The Young Women's Christian Association was also established at this time. The first YWCA had been founded in 1866, the first national conference held in 1871, and in 1873 the first full-time national committee, called the International Board of the YWCA, was formed to represent three dozen independent local city Associations.⁶⁶ Also in 1873, the first campus YWCA was organized. The campus YWCAs were more closely associated with the men's student Associations than with the city YWCAs, and in fact, were often direct offshoots of campus YMCAs—Wishard in his first years as Student Secretary had established dozens of coeducational student Associations and was later directed by the top leadership, known as the International Committee, to separate them. Revealing a typical business-world orientation, Wishard later wrote of this situation, "We all recognized that we were up against a proposition as difficult as one concerning which John Pierpont Morgan once remarked, 'It is difficult to unscramble eggs.'"⁶⁷ To comply with the International Committee's instruction, Wishard and Weidensall proceeded to do everything they could to encourage the formation of separate campus YWCAs, and by 1886 the women's student Associations had developed a national leadership independent of the International Board of the YWCA, and closely modeled on and aligned with the men's organization.⁶⁸

These two parallel national YWCA organizations differed in purpose and tone, and their differences further underscore the tensions and entanglements between a top-down reform agenda and concerns about moral crisis, and a bottom-up religious energy and optimism that marked both the women's and the men's movements. The city YWCAs tended to be organized and controlled by older reform-minded women seeking to provide spiritual, social, and educational services for the growing population of young women making their own way in the cities. These reformers were often aligned with the movement for women's rights, and were more carefully independent of male influence and of centralized control. The campus YWCAs, in contrast, were generally populated by fervently evangelical young women inspired to commit themselves to a life of Christian service, and to recruit others to the same both at home and on the mission field, and on the whole they were happy to work with male leaders to that end. The matrons of the city YWCAs were committed to instilling and protecting "the temporal, moral, and religious welfare of young women who are dependent on their own exertions for support."⁶⁹ Evangelical Christianity provided the frame through which they viewed

⁶⁵ Ibid.; Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 271–83.

⁶⁶ Marion Robinson, *Eight Women of the YWCA* (New York: National Board of the Young Women's Christian Association of the U.S.A., 1966), 6–7.

⁶⁷ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 293.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 292–93.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Wilson, *Fifty Years of Association Work among Young Women, 1866-1916: A History of Young Women's Christian Associations in the United States of America* (New York: National Board of the Young Women's Christian Associations of the United States of America, 1916), 32.

the gender-specific problem of young women on their own in the city, but they did not tend to emphasize evangelization as their first purpose, and they were often more willing than the men's Associations to include Unitarians and Catholics as active members. In 1916, one YWCA leader highlighted the degree to which this state of affairs was the result of the interplay between top-down and bottom-up influences, similar to that which marked the development of the YMCA:

In certain cities, the Young Women's Christian Association expressed the maternal concern which Christian women felt for young women getting a foothold or making their way in unfamiliar surroundings; in other cities the Association resulted from the sense of sisterhood through which a few earnest Christian young women were led to work for the things which they and the others wanted.⁷⁰

The two national women's organizations would not be unified until 1906. Throughout this period, the campus YWCAs largely took their cues from the leadership of the YMCA, with which it often shared family connections as well as spiritual affinity, while the city YWCAs pulled the Association movement in the direction of social service and away from evangelism.⁷¹

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In 1894, the YMCA's jubilee year, George Williams was knighted by Queen Victoria "for his distinguished service to the cause of humanity"—and it is significant that this recognition of the social relevance of the YMCA's work was marked by honoring an individual in this way.⁷² From its first years, the YMCA turned the narrative of its founding to pedagogical purposes, presenting middle-class values in a spiritual frame, and holding the figure of fervently evangelical and commercially successful founder George Williams as a model to be emulated. The imagined "young stranger" who constituted the problem that the YMCA had set itself to solve was modeled in the image of a young George Williams—a young middling Christian man, aspiring to succeed in the new commercial enterprise of the growing city. The tension inherent in the Association between the top-down imposition of moral reform and the bottom-up impulse of spiritual and social energy is contained within the figure of George Williams—he was deeply critical of the moral condition of those around him and committed to achieving their reform, which he recognized as being in the interest of the "principal of the house" (into whose family and business he ultimately married,) but he was also an

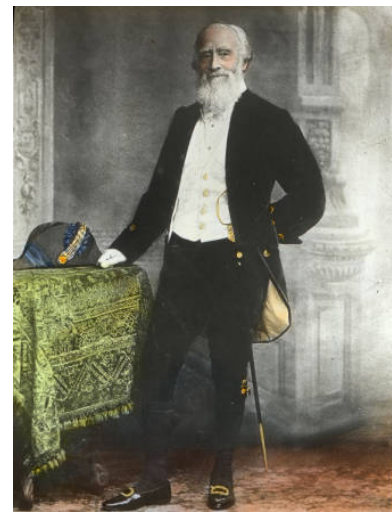


Fig. 3. Lantern slide of George Williams on receiving knighthood, featured in YMCA narratives, Lantern Slide Collection, College Archives Digital Collections, Springfield College Archives and Special Collections. <http://cdm16122.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15370coll2/id/144>

⁷⁰ Ibid., 57.
⁷¹ Ibid., 206.

⁷² Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 24.

equal among equals, banding together in their own interests and bound by a shared spiritual passion.⁷³

By 1894, the YMCA had begun another major expansion of its program. Just as George Williams' original YMCA band had framed its founding as a response to a Macedonian call from a neighboring firm, the rapidly expanding organization that traced itself to that root now set itself to answer such calls from around the world, in response to a perceived moral crisis which was now gaining social and political dimensions as well as worldwide parameters, as will be discussed in the following chapters. In this new expansion, as will be shown in Chapter 4, the YMCA acted on the assumption that its program would be equally applicable in non-Christian nations as it had proven to be in the Anglo-American world. However, if there were universalist implications to this assumption, they would ultimately be limited by the persistence of the model of the young aspiring white-collar Christian man as the imagined universal individual.

⁷³ Hodder-Williams, *The Life of Sir George Williams*, 12; Clyde Binfield, *George Williams and the Y.M.C.A.: A Study in Victorian Social Attitudes* (Heinemann, 1973).

Chapter 2

THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE WORLD IN THIS GENERATION

In the 1880s, the YMCA took a missionary turn which set it on a new path of worldwide expansion. If the young stranger lost in the city had been the problem to this point, now that problem expanded to include the lost state of all humanity. The atomization and massification that had accompanied urbanization and industrialization in Britain and North America were now projected on the entire world, as would-be missionaries connected with the Associations imagined non-Christians the world over as an enumerated mass of souls to be saved. The world itself they imagined not only in terms of the coming Kingdom of God, but in terms of “plastic nations,” soon to set as they were molded, with “open doors” that were soon to be shut. The worldwide crisis now took on the geopolitical urgency of an imperial scramble, as missionary advocates agonized over the narrowness of their perceived millennial window of opportunity to save the souls—and the nations—of the world. This sense of crisis was again accompanied by a tremendous optimism as Christian reformers of the Associations officially launched the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVM) and turned their energy to “the evangelization of the world in this generation,” a phrase adopted by the SVM as its watchword.

The SVM was launched in 1886, at a student YMCA conference hosted by leading revivalist Dwight L. Moody at his retreat at Mt. Hermon, Massachusetts. The force behind this turn to missions was not Moody, however, nor was it the conference organizers, Intercollegiate YMCA Secretaries Luther Wishard and Charles Ober. The movement was driven by students themselves, most notably Robert Wilder and his sister Grace, who had in turn been inspired by such missionary advocates as Arthur T. Pierson and the Cambridge Seven. This chapter tells the story of the Mt. Hermon conference and explores the writings of missionary advocates of the 1880s in order to better understand why the YMCA took this turn to worldwide evangelism.

* * * * *

Evangelical revivals again swept Britain and North America in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, inspiring an upsurge of passionate commitment and organizational expansion which carried the Associations around the world.¹ As it had in George Williams’ generation, this millennialism coincided with a sense of crisis fueled by disrupted structures of authority, upended notions of middle-class masculinity, and an ever-increasing insistence on the individual as absolutely responsible for himself. In the 1880s, young middle-class men faced not only the evangelical imperative to

¹ William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (University of Chicago Press, 1978). McLoughlin has termed this period the Third Great Awakening, and has linked it to an impetus to social reform.

individual perfection, but a growing valorization of the competitive spirit, as illustrated by the contemporary popularity of the ideas of Herbert Spencer. In the context of the boom and bust cycle of emerging industrial capitalism, success or failure was framed in terms of fitness for survival, as each individual was cast as the hero of his own bootstrap narrative. As middle-class men increasingly took clerical and middle-management positions in expanding corporate bureaucracies, they struggled to reinforce their sense of manhood and meaning in light of their precarious economic interdependence and the monotonous, sedentary, desk-bound nature of their work.²

The last decades of the nineteenth century saw the rapid and often violently disruptive rise of industrialism and commercial capitalism, and an attendant expansion of US commercial and industrial interests at home and abroad. Middle-class anxieties about the moral crisis of the urban masses were heightened by vicious clashes between the forces of capital and the increasingly self-conscious forces of labor, who were now attempting to organize in defense of their interests. The 1886 Haymarket bombing in Chicago shocked the nation, and raised the specter of violent radicalism, foreign and domestic. Reconstruction had ended with the brutal reinscription of racial hierarchies, and lynchings were on the rise across the nation. The scramble for land and resources across the North American continent had been accelerated by the completion of the transcontinental railroad and rapid extension of rail networks, and the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887, the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889, and the Massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890 marked the closing of the US frontier. Unease over the recurrent violence of these events was amplified by an awareness of momentous global geopolitical developments, including the Long Depression that began with the Panic of 1873, the nationalist wars for Italian and German Unification, and the unmitigated aggression of European imperialism, as epitomized by the Scramble for Africa which began in 1884.³

This compound sense of crisis among many in the rising middle class existed in conjunction with a grand optimism and a burgeoning middle-class faith in progress, in new technologies, scientific innovation, and rational thought. US business and cultural interests were expanding overseas as they were at home, as rail, steamship, telegraph, and postal networks were extended around the world, facilitating an acceleration of worldwide travel and communication, transport of goods, and resource extraction. The increasing availability of exotic consumer goods and the greater ease of travel fueled a new fascination with the wider world and a great sense of opportunity and adventure. The middle-class Christian reformers of the Associations shared not only in this compound sense of crisis, but in this sense of worldwide opportunity and adventure as well, and they enthusiastically adopted and applied new and modern methods of organizational management, promotion, and fundraising.⁴

² For more on middle class masculinity, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (Yale University Press, 1989); Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

³ For one overview of this period among many, see Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*.

⁴ See for instance, Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*; David W. Noble, *The Progressive Mind, 1890-1917* (Rand McNally, 1970); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society*

Earlier in the nineteenth century, the evangelist Charles Finney had pioneered promotional techniques in his revivals. Now, Association-affiliated revivalist Dwight L. Moody built on his groundwork. If Finney had inspired the first Associations, Moody was the figure at the heart of this next wave of evangelical fervor. In 1854, at the age of 17, Moody—like George Williams two decades earlier—had a conversion experience after leaving his farming community to find work in the city. He joined the Boston YMCA, and although his focus and his fame as an evangelist ranged beyond the Association, Moody worked in and through the YMCA for his full career. As a young man he moved to Chicago, and as president of the Chicago YMCA in the 1860s he was instrumental in obtaining its first Association building.⁵ Despite his fame as a revivalist, Moody was never ordained, and his non-denominational message, like that of the YMCA more broadly, promoted individual dedication to a productive moral life and to a personal relationship with Christ through the Bible. Like Finney, Moody took his evangelism across the Atlantic. With fellow evangelist and gospel singer Ira Sankey, Moody toured Britain several times, most notably from 1873 to 1876, working up revivals and attracting audiences of many thousands. Moody applied organizational and promotional techniques derived from business and advertising to raise unprecedented funds, and he built on Finney’s promotional innovations in “working up” rather than “praying down” revivals. As Charles Ober of the Intercollegiate YMCA would later say of the YMCA, “a new thing had arisen within the general scheme of the Christian ministry that called for the consecration of talents ordinarily relegated to business, engineering and statecraft,”⁶ and Moody was the vanguard of this course. His business-like manner, entrepreneurial methods, and evangelistic message calling for immediate individual decisions for Christ appealed strongly to many in the new urban middle class, who identified not only with his calls for individual commitment to a life of steadfast moral righteousness but also with his embodiment of the ethics of virtuous energy, hard work, and service.⁷ Like the YMCA more generally, Moody spoke both to middle-class concern about the problems of the growing cities, and to a tremendous middle-class optimism about the power of human agency to address these problems.

Having been displaced by the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, Moody returned to Massachusetts in the late 1870s, establishing a rural retreat near his birthplace at Northfield, from which he continued to launch his evangelistic tours. Although he had turned from YMCA administration to devote himself more completely to evangelism, Moody continued to coordinate closely with the YMCA, and in 1886 he hosted a YMCA summer retreat for students that set the Association on a new course. As with the founding of the YMCA itself, the narrative of this seminal meeting was told and retold until it became paradigmatic myth.⁸

The retreat was organized by Luther Wishard and Charles Ober, both secretaries

in the Gilded Age (Macmillan, 2007); Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion 1860-1898*, 35th Anniversary edition (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁵ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 187–88.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁷ Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, 1–6.

⁸ For instance: H. F. Williams, ed., “Editorial: The Student Volunteer Movement,” *Young Men’s Era* 17, no. 14 (April 2, 1891): 210.

of the Intercollegiate YCMA. The previous summer, Wishard and Ober had visited Moody at Northfield, and on an outing to nearby Mt. Hermon the idea was formed to invite some YMCA secretaries to stay in shacks there for a Bible study led by Moody. The following spring, Wishard and Moody met again, this time in Atlanta, and Wishard proposed that they move forward with the retreat but that college students be invited rather than Association Secretaries. Moody was initially skeptical but later consented, and Wishard and Ober spent the next two months visiting college YMCAs and recruiting students for this summer program. Two of these students were John R. Mott and Robert Wilder, who would lead the YMCA and the Student Volunteer Movement respectively, and retellings of the event underscore the importance of individual appeals in drawing men into the work, naming Ober as the “finder” of Mott at Cornell, and Wishard of Wilder at Princeton. In all, close to 250 students from almost 100 colleges made their way to Mt. Hermon for the month of July 1886. The conference was only loosely organized, with lectures and sermons by Moody and other evangelical leaders in the mornings, unscheduled afternoons for recreation or informal meetings, and evenings given to inspirational addresses or entertainment.⁹ A few students, most notably Robert Wilder, took advantage of the many unstructured hours and loose agenda to draw others into their own passions.

Wilder was of a missionary family and had been born and raised in India. His life story as later retold by Association literature and other biographers highlights a moment of dedication when he was ten years old, in which he and his older sister Grace prayed together and pledged their lives to serve God through missionary work.¹⁰ In 1883, Wilder founded the Princeton Foreign Missionary Society, and with forty other members of that group formalized his missionary pledge by signing his name to a covenant: “We the undersigned declare ourselves willing and desirous, God permitting, to go to the unevangelized portions of the world.” Grace Wilder had previously organized a similar student group at Mount Holyoke, and in later retellings designed to underscore the providential nature of the 1886 meeting, Wilder prayed for her brother to go to Mt. Hermon and launch a student missionary movement—even, in Robert Wilder’s own account, prophesying the one hundred volunteers whose pledges defined the conference and whose dedication to missionary service drew the YMCA and related Associations in important new directions.¹¹

Early in the conference, Wilder brought together several other students who were passionate about missions, including John Mott, and the group took advantage of the unstructured hours to promote the missionary ideal with such energy that the issue began to emerge as the centerpiece of the conference. Moody had not planned to

⁹ Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, 8–11; Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 295–96.

¹⁰ Ruth Braisted, *In This Generation: The Story of Robert Wilder* (New York: Friendship Press, 1941), 1–11.

¹¹ Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, 10–11; John R. Mott, “The Beginning of the Student Volunteer Movement,” *The Sabbath Recorder* 74, no. 22–23 (June 1913): 694–97, 722–25; Robert Wilder, *The Great Commission: The Missionary Response of the Student Volunteer Movements in North America and Europe; Some Personal Reminiscences, Etc.* (London, 1937); Robert Wilder, *The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions: Some Personal Reminiscences of Its Origin and Early History* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement, 1935).

address missions at all, but was receptive to this bottom-up student fervor, and welcomed prominent missionary promoter Arthur T. Pierson, who was invited by the students to speak on the theme, “Christ means that all shall go, and shall go to all.”¹² After three weeks of ground work, Wilder asked to organize an evening addressed entirely to missions, and after Wishard and Ober lent their support, Moody consented. Wilder orchestrated the event as a worldwide Macedonian call. Ten students, speaking for the nations of Japan, Persia, Siam, Germany, Armenia, Denmark, Norway, China, India, and the Santee nation of the Dakota Indians, each addressed the conference for three minutes, ending their calls for “help” by proclaiming “God is love” in the language of their nation. Wilder represented India, having been born there to missionaries, and China and Persia were likewise represented by the sons of missionaries.¹³ The members of Wilder’s core group had already signed formal missionary pledges modeled on those of the Princeton group, and in the week after this Meeting of the Ten Nations, as it came to be known in later accounts, the number of pledges snowballed from twenty-one to ninety-nine. At the last prayer meeting of the conference, in a dramatic gesture, a final volunteer joined the group, bringing the number to one hundred. Mott’s later descriptions of these events are passionate, conjuring for his audience the sense of divine influence that inspired these young men to commit themselves to this missionary project.¹⁴ In Mott’s account,

The conference closed, but the next morning those ninety-nine met for a farewell meeting of prayer. ... There were not seats enough and some had to stand. We knelt, however, all of us, and while we were kneeling in that closing period of heart-burning prayer the hundredth man came in and knelt with us.¹⁵

Wishard and Ober, eager to promote this evangelical passion under the auspices of the YMCA, suggested to Wilder and his group that they tour college campuses, collecting missionary pledges and forming bands of recruits who would meet regularly to pray together and to hold each other to their missionary commitments. The idea of the tour was modeled on the recent tours of J.E.K. Studd and of the Cambridge Seven, a British collegiate missionary group formed around Studd’s famous brother, cricketer Charles Studd. In a prime example of the reciprocity of British and American evangelicalism, the Studds had been converted during one of Moody’s revivals in Britain, and Charles Studd and six other British students had committed together to the China Inland Mission. Before they sailed in early 1885, the group toured the colleges and universities of England and Scotland, using their high profile as sportsmen to promote missions. Their testimony, published as *A Missionary Band*,¹⁶ became a best

¹² Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*; *Report of the First International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, Held at Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A., February 26, 27, 28 and March 1, 1891* (Boston, Mass.: Press of T. O. Metcalf, 1891); John R. Mott, “The Student Missionary Uprising,” *The Chinese Recorder* 21, no. 2 (February 1890): 78–84.

¹⁴ Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, 12; Basil Mathews, *John R. Mott: World Citizen* (New York; London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1934).

¹⁵ Mott, “The Beginning of the Student Volunteer Movement,” 723.

¹⁶ B. Broomhall, ed., *The Evangelisation of the World: A Missionary Band: A Record of Consecration, and an Appeal* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1889).

seller and were distributed by the YMCA and YWCA throughout the world. J.E.K. Studd, also a Cambridge cricketer, toured American colleges and universities in 1885-1886 providing further publicity for the Cambridge Seven and the missionary cause, and his visit to Cornell had had a profound influence on Mott. In fact, J.E.K. Studd had been present at Northfield with Moody, Wishard, and Ober in 1885 when the idea of the Mt. Hermon student conference had first been suggested, and his promotion of missions had primed the pump for the movement that began at Mt. Hermon in the summer of 1886.¹⁷

During the academic year of 1886-1887, Wilder and a fellow member of his Princeton missionary band toured more than 150 campuses, working primarily through student YMCAs and YWCAs. Over the course of the year, they collected more than two thousand missionary pledge cards and helped organize more than one hundred missionary bands.¹⁸ In 1888, at a subsequent Northfield student summer conference, these bands were organized into the Student Volunteer Movement of Foreign Missions (SVM), including pledged student volunteers from the college YMCAs, college YWCAs, and the Interseminary Missionary Alliances of the United States and Canada. The organization of the Student Volunteer Movement was formalized in December 1888, under an executive committee composed of John Mott of the YMCA, Nettie Dunn of the YWCA, and Robert Wilder of the Interseminary Missionary Alliances.¹⁹ The missionary bands on each campus would be uniformly treated as branches of these three interdenominational organizations. After the bottom-up fervor had been captured and corralled in the signed pledges and small bands, this top-down organizational push was designed to focus and channel this religious energy into a sustained and cohesive movement, and was quite successful in doing so. By 1890, more than six thousand volunteers had pledged.²⁰

The well-known and widely used watchword of the Student Volunteer Movement was “The Evangelization of the World in this Generation.”²¹ As suggested by the reference to a single generation, this movement was spurred by a tremendous urgency, the result of a tremendous sense of crisis coupled with a tremendous optimism. Arthur T. Pierson, the period’s foremost promoter of missions and featured speaker at the Mt. Hermon student conference of 1886, postulated in his important work, *Crisis of Missions*, “What is a crisis? It is a combination of grand opportunity and great responsibility; the hour when the chance of glorious success and the risk of awful failure

¹⁷ Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, 7–9, 14, 85; Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955*, 19–20; *Report of the First Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement*, 22.

¹⁸ Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16; *Report of the First Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement*.

²⁰ Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, 17; *Report of the First Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement*.

²¹ *Report of the First Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement*.

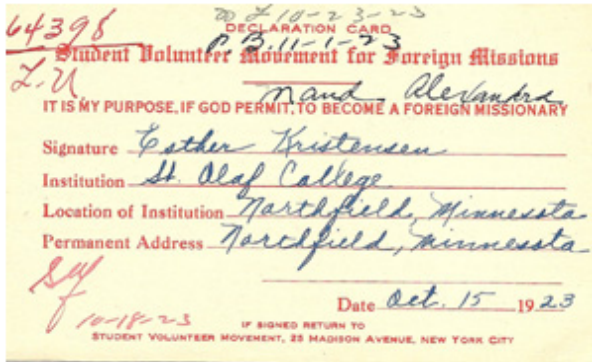


Fig. 4. Student Volunteer Movement Pledge Card, featured in "An Ecumenical Community of Students, Archival Documentation of Worldwide Student Christian Movements," an exhibit at Yale Divinity Library, June-October 2014, <http://divinity-adhoc.library.yale.edu/Exhibits/StudentChristianMovements.html>

confront each other; the turning-point of history and destiny."²² Theologically, this urgency was driven by the same millennialism that drove the evangelical reformers of the Second Great Awakening, the idea that the perfection of humanity through individual human agency was necessary for the foundation of the millennial Kingdom of God. Most pledged missionary volunteers had experienced conversion as an extremely personal and individual rite. The use of pledge cards by the SVM leveraged this sense of life commitment by documenting it as a concrete artifact and submitting it to the accountability of a greater

movement in a record keeping system. Their missionary pledges were now not only rendered as powerful individual pacts with God, but as formalized shared vows submitted to the authority of an earthly movement bureaucracy, an organizational technique that proved quite successful in holding the commitments of volunteers. For the volunteers, their pledge cards represented a vow before witnesses to use their individual powers of suasion to try to literally save the world.

In this context, Studd and the Cambridge Seven represented the possibility of seeking individual evangelical perfection beyond the limits of the staid and constrained atmosphere of the Victorian parlor, beyond the somewhat feminized sphere of domestic reform. The story of these college-athletes-turned-missionaries was especially appealing to young middle class men struggling to reinforce their sense of masculinity within an increasingly commercial and bureaucratic world. The frontispiece for their published testimonies reads thus,

The Missionary appears to me to be the highest type of human excellence in the Nineteenth Century, and his profession to be the noblest. He has the enterprise of the Merchant, without the narrow desire of gain; the dauntlessness of the Soldier, without the necessity of shedding blood; the zeal of the Geographical Explorer, but for a higher motive than Science.²³

Studd and the Cambridge Seven represented the possibility of the pursuit of glory, as in business, war, and world exploration, but all for a higher power—they stood for the proof of manly character through the highest noble cause of the salvation of humanity. Even before the Cambridge Seven, however, the figure of the missionary had begun to emerge as a hero in his own right, a paragon of middle-class strength and character. The most widely publicized instance of the missionary as celebrity may have been the *New York Herald's* orchestration of imperialist explorer Henry Morton Stanley's

²² Arthur T. Pierson, *The Crisis of Missions; Or, The Voice out of the Cloud* (New York: R. Carter, 1886), 273.

²³ Broomhall, *The Evangelisation of the World*, vi.

encounter with the British missionary David Livingstone in Tanzania in 1871. The *Herald* enthusiastically capitalized on the resulting episodic narrative, distilled into the enduringly famous phrase, “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?”²⁴

The imagined figure of the missionary not only represented a vocation conducive to individual perfection for passionate young evangelicals, it also provided middle-class Protestant men more generally with a model for the enactment of strong moral character and authority. If these young men felt insecurities about the performance of masculinity in clerical and middle management positions; insecurities about their ability to provide for dependents during the boom and bust cycles of emerging industrial capitalism; insecurities relating to the perceived disorder of the urban masses; insecurities relating to the process of Reconstruction and the violent reinscription of racial hierarchies; insecurities relating to the expansion of the women’s sphere to encompass the imposition of moral authority over the domestic life of the nation—then for these young men, the figure of the missionary allowed them to dream of a newly opened frontier on which to prove a new and retooled middle-class manhood.²⁵ Regardless of individual positions on imperial conquest, the expanding world of empire represented an atmosphere of competition among nations and of new opportunities to grasp, and in this fruitful field the imagined figure of the missionary allowed for the incorporation of the middle-class business-world values of enterprise, hard work, and useful service into an exciting new narrative of accomplishment and adventure, sacred in purpose.²⁶

The volume of the testimonies of the Cambridge Seven, first published in 1886, had been an instant best-seller on both sides of the Atlantic. By 1889, it was in its third edition, a significantly expanded volume whose new title, *The Evangelization of the World*, proclaimed its connection with the newly established Student Volunteer Movement. Along with the testimonies and correspondence of Studd and his band, the editors drew widely from the writings of famous missionaries, and preachers formulated an acutely urgent call for missionary volunteers. Given the breadth of this work and its seminal nature, it serves as an especially rich source for contemplation of the conceptual landscape of the YMCA’s Student Volunteer Movement and its promoters.²⁷

Particularly revealing, perhaps, is the effort of the editors to present the prospect of foreign evangelism to young middle-class men in terms evoking not only piety, duty,

²⁴ For a consideration of this encounter, see for instance, Clare Pettitt, *Dr. Livingstone, I Presume?: Missionaries, Journalists, Explorers, and Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

²⁵ For various takes on US empire and the frontier, including a review of the ideas of influential missionary advocate and Social Gospeler Josiah Strong, see LaFeber, *The New Empire*.

²⁶ On crisis of masculinity: Lears, *No Place of Grace*; Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992); Tom Lutz, *American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History* (Cornell University Press, 1991); Donna Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936,” *Social Text*, no. 11 (1984): 20–64; Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Salazar, *Bodies of Reform*. Bederman suggests that masculinity is always in crisis, part of the process of reinscription of patriarchy; similarly, Salazar argues that “the rhetoric of character continues to operate through the very lament of its decline.” (9)

²⁷ Broomhall, *The Evangelisation of the World*.

and self-sacrifice, but strength, ability, and courage. They called for “not the meanest, but the mightiest,”²⁸ they figured missionaries as modern-day Samsons, performing “heroic feats of physical courage... and greater feats, too, of moral courage,”²⁹ and they quoted Dr. Livingstone himself in calling for the “ablest and best qualified men...men of education, standing, enterprise, zeal, and piety.” According to Livingstone, it was “a mistake to suppose that any one, so long as he is pious, will do for this office,”³⁰ but far from invoking caution such statements were formulated as a challenge specifically designed to mobilize young middle-class men. “Are we all cravens?”³¹ they demanded, and touted foreign evangelism as the proving ground for those brave enough to rise to this challenge:

It is the missionary spirit that crosses broad seas, that clammers cloud-crowned mountains, that traverses far-distant regions, that sails around the world if it may save but a single soul. It is the missionary spirit that breathes miasmas, that bears heavy burdens, that challenges adversaries, that imperils precious life, that laughs at impossibilities, and cries, “This must and shall be done!”³²

If the Cambridge Seven challenged young men to look beyond the field of sport and to embark on high adventure to prove their manly mettle, they also made the case for missionary work in the quintessential middle-class language of commerce. In an open letter to university students, Studd and his band challenged young graduates to ask themselves, “How can I lay out this life to the greatest advantage? What is the best investment I can make of this life?” The return was greatest, they argued, when a life was dedicated to the glory of God and the good of mankind. For their own parts, they claimed, “If we had a dozen lives each, we would be glad they should be so invested.”³³ Of course, their use of this language was intended in part as a response to the rampant materialism of the day—but if the figure of the missionary could be stood up in contrast to the unbridled selfishness of the capitalist, it did not generally stand as a critique of capitalism itself. The ethic of selfless service epitomized by the figure of the missionary, in fact, had long served as a core element of middle-class morality and market discipline.³⁴ Further, the missionary was often depicted as “opening the door” to commerce. The iconic Dr. Livingstone, in particular, was celebrated for bringing to light the “boundless resources of Central Africa.” In *Modern Heroes of the Mission Field*, a popular Gilded Age account, this appraisal of Dr. Livingstone’s work is clear: “What bright hopes and prospects for commerce, civilization, and Christianity, have sprung up in that benighted land” since Livingstone had “unlocked the door, and opened it wide.”³⁵ Of course, texts such as these were intended not only as recruitment tools directed at zealous young men, but also as fundraising materials addressing the interests of

²⁸ Ibid., 92.

²⁹ Ibid., 62.

³⁰ Ibid., 92.

³¹ Ibid., 90.

³² Ibid., 88.

³³ Ibid., 159–60.

³⁴ For instance, Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium*.

³⁵ W. Pakenham Walsh, *Modern Heroes of the Mission Field*, 4th ed. (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1882), 292–93.

evangelical businessmen, who were also expecting certain returns on their investments.

While the appeal of the Cambridge Seven was explicitly dedicated to “English-speaking young men everywhere,”³⁶ this call extended to young women as well. The middle-class conception of the women’s sphere delegated to women the imposition of moral authority over the household, and by the 1880s, religious education and moral reform had been well established as within this sphere. The great energies that women had dedicated to these projects over the course of the century had contributed to a general sense that Christian work itself had been feminized—and it was for this reason that the narrative of the indisputably manly Cambridge Seven was proving so popular among zealous young evangelical men. But despite the retooled Christian manliness embodied in these missionary figures, the work of the missionary could still be very respectably claimed by middle-class Christian women. One contributor to the volume went so far as to invoke the famous lifeboat heroine Grace Darling to call on women to shame men by proving their own mettle on the missionary field:

The vessel is wrecked, the sailors are perishing; they are clinging to the rigging as best they can; they are being washed off one by one! Good God, they die before our eyes, and yet there is the lifeboat stanch and trim. We want men! Men to man the boat! ... And ye brave women, ye who have hearts like that of Grace Darling, will not ye shame the laggards, and dare the tempest for the love of souls in danger of death and hell?³⁷

Most missionary appeals to women, however, did not call on them to do the work of men but highlighted instead the aspects of the work that ostensibly fell within the woman’s sphere. Even the imagery of opening the closed door to the light, so prevalent in missionary appeals, could imply that missionaries were seeking to enter an enclosed domestic space. The moral authority of women over domestic issues and their established role as nurturers and helpmeets undergirded their work as teachers, nurses, and benevolent reformers. The trope of the dying heathen, in particular, solicited the care of women. Theologically, this trope derived from the conviction that only those who had had the opportunity to accept Jesus could be saved, and all others were automatically damned to an eternity in hell.³⁸ It weighed heavily on the evangelical conscience of the age that so many millions of souls over the course of history had been damned to hell on a technicality, as it were, having had no exposure to the gospel, and that so many millions more were now living out their short existence without hope of such exposure. The shipwreck metaphor quoted above was one of many instances of this imagery included with the testimonies of the Cambridge Seven—one poem primarily cuing women built each of its twelve stanzas around the trope:

Dying? Yes, dying in thousands!
A hopeless despairing death;
Can we not hear them calling—
Pleading with bated breath—
“Will *no* one come over and bring us light?”

³⁶ Broomhall, *The Evangelisation of the World*, v.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁸ Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*.

Must we perish in darkness darker than night”?

Dying! untaught, uncared-for,
While we, in this favoured land,
Who *know* that they are *perishing*,
Lend not a helping hand!³⁹

Another formulation of this trope refers to “multitudes upon multitudes coming out of the unseen, and storming across the ocean of time to break on the shores of eternity...300,000,000 billows in China, half of them women.” The supposedly degraded plight of women in heathen lands was used to mobilize both men and women—“strong men” to come to the rescue, and “sensitive women” to broach domestic spaces and reach cloistered women and children.⁴⁰

While missionary advocates often differentiated the role of the female missionary in this way, it is important to reiterate the extent to which they did not, and to which missionary work could offer a certain freedom to Christian women. The impulse to prove oneself beyond the Victorian parlor was available to these women, as suggested by the reference to Grace Darling, and at the first conference of the Student Volunteer Movement, one female missionary began by declaring that “I am sure that any lady desiring a larger sphere than she has followed in this country will find it in India.”⁴¹ The contributions of Grace Wilder are interesting in this regard. Wilder herself sailed as a missionary in 1887, and from the first she served as a notable advocate for the Volunteer Movement. In fact, in Mott’s later account, the entire Movement originated with Grace Wilder’s vision:

When [the Princeton] band heard of the conference which Mr. Moody was to hold at Mount Hermon, some one had vision enough to see that there might be God’s opportunity...Miss Grace Wilder. She discerned that conditions were going to be furnished at Mount Hermon that might make possible the generation of a great movement, and she laid upon her brother, Robert Wilder, and upon some of the other Princeton men who were to attend the conference, the burden of prayer and expectation, and charged them before God to persevere in prayer and effort that this Mount Hermon gathering might not close without the inauguration of a missionary movement.⁴²

Wilder titled her longest contribution to the volume *The Evangelization of the World*, “Thoughts for Girls by One of Them,” and she began the piece with several scriptural references to women and evangelization, arguing that “The Bible teaches women’s duty and privilege in Christian work,” and pointing out that “it pleased Him to make woman the first herald of resurrection news.”⁴³ The body of her appeal, however, did not differ in approach or in tone from those made by men and addressed to men. Wilder’s case was that *all* were called to evangelize, including women, that half of the unevangelized were women, and that “we 14,000,000 Christian women ought to carry the Gospel to 425

³⁹ Broomhall, *The Evangelisation of the World*, 102.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴¹ *Report of the First Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement*, 63.

⁴² Mott, “The Beginning of the Student Volunteer Movement,” 696–97. First published 1911.

⁴³ Broomhall, *The Evangelisation of the World*, 146, 148.

million heathen women.”⁴⁴ Beyond the assumption that their work would be primarily with women, Wilder did not depict the work of the female missionary as otherwise distinct; the Gospel held the same message for all.⁴⁵

In contrast to the imagined figure of the missionary, the imagined “heathen” was highly abstract. While the work of the missionary was unequivocally to save each individual soul, the mass that populated the mission field was markedly unindividuated. In some cases, this abstraction took the form of metaphorical equation with non-human entities, as with the “breaking billows” above, and in others, it suggested an abstract universalist congruence of all human life: “Bone are they of your bone, flesh of your flesh, conflicting, sighing, bending to the grave, like you...”⁴⁶ Theologically, if the absolute truth of the gospel was a given and its acceptance a prerequisite for the actualization of humanity, then the imagined non-Christian of the mission field was necessarily figured as something of an empty vessel, fundamentally defined by lack of knowledge of God. In the words of another contributor, “What we were without the Gospel, that the heathen are now. What we are now by means of the Gospel, that the heathen may become, will become, when the Gospel is preached to them as it has been to us.”⁴⁷ In his *Crisis of Missions*, Pierson built his case for the urgency of evangelism around the idea that the non-Christian masses were in an historically unprecedented state of blank receptiveness. “A nation ready to be moulded is liable to be marred;” he asserted, “or the plastic clay shaped for dishonor. ... Such another day will never come again for that land, and the door cannot long stand open. It is now or never!”⁴⁸

This abstraction of the heathen into a blank receptor of Gospel truth not only served the theological purpose of setting the stage for the Kingdom of God, it also served to render the work of the missionary more attractive to those men and women who imagined themselves as extending their authority over an infantilized population. Whether the figure of the missionary was conceived as the embodiment of masculine strength or of gentle moral authority, this projection reinforced the conception of the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 148.

⁴⁵ Antoinette Burton argues that middle class British feminists appropriated imperialistic rhetoric to justify their own right to equality, and details a variety of feminisms grounded in notions of moral and racial superiority, enslaved and primitive “oriental womanhood” in need of liberation at the hands of their emancipated British “sisters.” Antoinette M. Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1994).

⁴⁶ Arthur in Broomhall, *The Evangelisation of the World*, 76. That this biblical allusion invokes Adam’s recognition of his common humanity with Eve sets up an interesting parallel between the relationship of male to female and of Christian to non-Christian populations.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 103.

⁴⁸ Pierson, *The Crisis of Missions*, 276.

heathen as an immature or unformed population, unenlightened, “untaught, uncared-for,” and in need of the help of evangelizing Christians. This depiction of the heathen allowed for and naturalized a kind of ventriloquism inherent in the projection of the Macedonian call, as featured repeatedly in *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation*, most prominently in Chinese characters.⁴⁹

The abstraction of the imagined heathen into a mass of individual souls, each worthy of salvation at any cost, did hold universalist possibilities. However, in practice, this abstraction proved quite compatible with notions of racial hierarchy. The middle classes of the English-speaking world had been built on a foundation of centuries of conquest, slave-trade, imperialism, settler colonialism, and genocide, all legitimated through the development of concepts of racial difference. While missionaries often did oppose and challenge the worst depredations of conquest, they remained deeply implicated in these brutal processes, and they often served as the vanguard of what has been called “cultural genocide.”⁵⁰ If, theologically, all souls were of equal value, it did not follow that, socially, they should be awarded equal status, and the middle-class evangelicals who argued so passionately for the salvation of the heathen did not usually question the racial hierarchies that ordered their societies.

Ideas of racial and ethnic difference figured most prominently in depictions of the mission field. Pierson’s *Crisis of Missions*, for example, was largely organized geographically, with chapters dedicated to the conditions and characteristics of various regions and nations. Pierson imagined a hierarchy of races across these regions, as their supposed dispositions would help or hinder the project of evangelization: “Some of the unevangelized races seemed on too low a level to be lifted even by the lever of the gospel; others stood too high, and were too proud to feel the need of its uplifting,” he warned.⁵¹ The population of China he regarded as ranking highest “in the plane of their civilization,” but it being the period of Chinese Exclusion, he assured his readers that “it is quite obvious that the specimens of Chinese character which commonly find their way to our shores are not fair representatives of this ancient and remarkable people.”⁵² On the whole, Pierson seemed to conflate race and “plane of civilization,” and however pejorative, he did not seem to consider either to be completely immutable. For Pierson, and for many other missionary advocates, the relationship of the individual with God

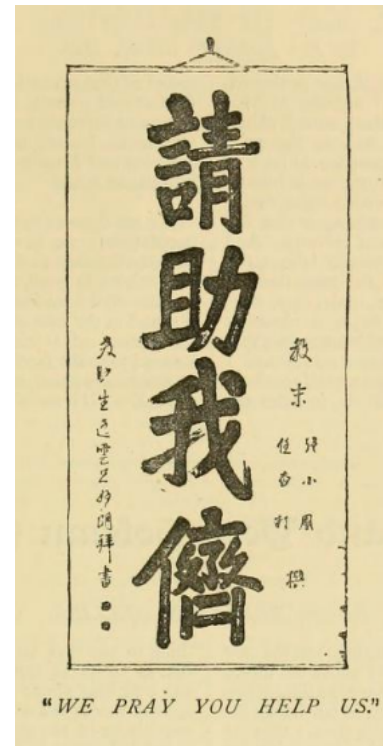


Fig. 5. Macedonian Call illustration in Broomhall, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation*, 99.

⁴⁹ Broomhall, *The Evangelisation of the World*, 99.

⁵⁰ George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁵¹ Pierson, *The Crisis of Missions*, 31.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 81–82.



Fig. 6. Color plate from Broomhall, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation* illustrating the arithmetic of souls, 199.

figured, “We may roughly estimate the souls that in Pagan, Moslem, Papal, and nominally Christian lands still need to be reached with a pure gospel at a thousand millions; and the whole number of missionary laborers, at thirty-five thousand. Could each of these carry on the work of evangelization, independently, each worker would have to care for nearly thirty thousand souls.”⁵⁴ Many more missionaries were desperately needed, but the task was not insurmountable—Pierson listed the total number of Protestants in the world at one hundred million, and “could each of that number somehow reach ten of the unsaved, the whole thousand million would be evangelized.” This, he admitted, was unrealistic, “but,” he continued, “let us suppose that there are *ten millions* of true disciples who can be brought into line... even *with this tenth part of Christendom the world may be evangelized before the twentieth century dawns.*”⁵⁵ Grace Wilder’s arithmetic was even more extensive, pervading the entirety of her contribution to the volume. She used hard numbers to make a case for urgency, quoting “careful statistics” to claim that “heathens are dying at the rate of 100,000 a day!” and warned that “while the church has been gaining some 3,000,000 converts

was the foundational marker of identity.

In figuring the mission field, Pierson and other contributors to *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation* turned most fundamentally to numbers. The volume featured a chart of world population opposite its title page as its only color plate, titled simply, “A Plea for Missions,” letting the raw numbers of souls speak for themselves. In the same vein, the Foreign Secretary of the American Board of Foreign Missions described Africa merely as “200,000,000 souls,” China as 350,000,000, and India as 250,000,000.⁵³

Both Pierson and Grace Wilder, among others, engaged in an arithmetic of souls, not only as an argument for missionary recruitment but to support the case that the entire world could in fact be evangelized in the current generation. As Pierson

⁵³ Ibid., 199.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 321.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 324–25.

from heathendom, the natural increase of heathen has been 200,000,000!”⁵⁶ Her use of numbers to appeal to women followed the same structure as Pierson’s argument, but divided each figure in half to account for gender:

According to the statistics of 1884-1885, the living communicants in the churches of all Christendom number 28,736,647. Fourteen millions, less than one-half of this total, will not be too large an estimate for female communicants. We 14,000,000 Christian women ought to carry the Gospel to 425 million heathen women. The 886 missionaries now supported by the Women’s Boards of England and America give us only one missionary to 15,801 female communicants. If equally distributed these missionaries would each have a parish of 479,683 souls....If but ten million out of our 14,000,000 female communicants would so work as that during the next fourteen years each would reach one hundred souls, the whole unevangelized world would hear of CHRIST before 1900.⁵⁷

While their figures vary to some degree—Pierson calls on one tenth of one hundred million Protestants, while Wilder appeals to more than two thirds of her fourteen million “female communicants”—both refer to their numbers as “facts.” For Pierson, “Facts are the fingers of God. To know the facts of modern missions is the necessary condition of intelligent interest.”⁵⁸ Both quantified the issue in order to invoke the authority of disinterested knowledge to appeal to their middle-class audience.

At base, however, the quantification of heathen souls followed directly from the abstraction inherent in the theological imperative to evangelize.⁵⁹ If God had commanded the evangelization of the world as a prerequisite to his coming, then every soul lost counted against those who failed to spread the Gospel and every soul saved brought the world one soul closer to the Kingdom of God. As Pierson warned, “These millions of unsaved souls we must confront at the bar of God. What can we do for their salvation,—nay, for our own salvation from blood-guiltiness,—before the sun of life shall set?”⁶⁰ In this view, individual responsibility loomed large. Evangelical Christianity was built around an individual relationship with God, and each Christian was responsible not only for the state of his or her own soul but also, through the duty to evangelize, for the state of every other human soul. Pierson stressed the nature of this individual responsibility in asserting,

We are not responsible for *conversion*, but we are responsible for *contact*. We cannot compel any man to decide for Christ, but we may compel every man to decide one way or the other; that is, we may so bring to every human being the gospel message, that the responsibility is transferred from us to him, and that we are delivered from blood guiltiness.⁶¹

The watchword of the missionary movement, “to evangelize the world in this generation,” was not a call to save each soul in spite of itself, but to expose each

⁵⁶ Broomhall, *The Evangelisation of the World*, 148.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Pierson, *The Crisis of Missions*, 6.

⁵⁹ Such as “Go and make disciples of all nations,” Matthew 28:19 Cambridge Seven in: Broomhall, *The Evangelisation of the World*, 159.

⁶⁰ Pierson, *The Crisis of Missions*, 342.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 325.

individually to the gospel in order that each might have the opportunity to make an individual decision, to make his or her own way to salvation. In truth, Pierson seemed much more optimistic about the prospect of achieving the evangelization of the world in one generation than about actually winning converts, and he did not seem to anticipate that evangelization would automatically or immediately lead to mass conversions. “In every age the heathen have had more knowledge of God than they have desired or used,” he asserted, yet, “they ran from the light to their dark holes, like bugs that burrow in the earth.”⁶² This atomization of salvation as a matter of individual souls held both universalizing and dehumanizing possibilities. If the heathen did not decide for Christ, then they became responsible for their own debasement and damnation, a move which could then authorize imperialist conquest. But due to the foundational nature of the relationship of the individual with God, any individual, once converted, could in theory transcend any manner of earthly rank in pursuit of evangelical perfection—and missionary volunteers, as implicated as they were in the workings of imperialism, and as deeply conditioned by ideas of racial hierarchy, would also have access to a more universalist idea of equality of souls before God.

At this point, however, far from touting egalitarianism, missionary advocates trumpeted the enforcement of the nineteenth-century middle-class values inherent in their project. As one prominent minister proclaimed in his work *Christian Missions to Heathen Nations*:

They go to enlighten the ignorant, to civilise the barbarous, to rescue women from a degrading servitude, and children from an early death. They go to educate whole nations, to communicate to them the knowledge of our literature, our laws, our arts, and our institutions. They go to set the slave free, to put an end to all wars of plunder and revenge, to substitute everywhere order for anarchy, law for despotism, benevolence for cruelty, and justice for oppression. They go to let loose men’s imprisoned energies, and to chain up their lawless passions. They go to make property secure, and industry profitable; to secure to the rich man his palace, and to the poor man his cabin; and to spread contentment, domestic affection, and general happiness where penury, vice, and discord make existence a curse. They go to give children the blessing of parental care, and parents the joy of filial gratitude. They go to protect the weak against the strong, to unite in brotherly affection the rich and poor and to make the nations one family. Finally, they go to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God; to teach them how to live and how to die; to show them the way to glory; and to make them know their God; to prepare them for heaven and to guide them safely to its bliss. - Rev. Baptist W. Noel, from *Christian Missions to Heathen Nations*⁶³

Here, the bottom-up religious fervor that drove the idea of the evangelization of the world in anticipation of the millennium is overshadowed by the work of addressing anarchy, despotism, oppression, and vice through education, law and order, property and industry, and domestic affection. Christianity here is a complete guide to “how to live and how to die” according to an Anglo-American middle-class summation of the common good—a summation in which profitable industry is attended by “brotherly affection” between rich and poor. In this view, reform-minded Christian men and women

⁶² Ibid., 295–96; Broomhall, *The Evangelisation of the World*, 101.

⁶³ Baptist W. Noel, *Christian Missions to Heathen Nations* (James Nisbet, 1842).

respond to the world's moral crises by projecting their benevolent authority over ignorant and barbarous nations, a prospect that undoubtedly held an appeal for wealthy financial backers, as well as for imperial governments.

Further, it is significant that while missionary work was fundamentally conceived as an appeal from individual to individual, missionary advocates fully intended "to educate whole nations," and "to make the nations one family." This extrapolation from individual to nation was occasionally made explicit from the beginnings of the movement, and would only gather steam. As stated in *Christian Missions to Heathen Nations*:

A nation which heartily receives the Gospel, must become intelligent, free, orderly, prosperous, and happy. The change which the Gospel, if heartily received, would effect in the condition of nations, may be learned by the change which it has already effected in the condition of individuals.⁶⁴

Behind this imagined world of barbarous nations, populated by imagined multitudes of heathen souls, were fervent young men and women who sought to inhabit the virtues of the imagined figure of the missionary. In their commitment to embark on the errand of world evangelization, not only did they take to heart the call for universal human perfection in millennialist terms, they also strove to personify the ideal of exemplary character as portrayed by late-nineteenth century missionary advocates. A review of recurring terms in these works does not reveal an emphasis on the call to *piety* as such. Instead, missionary volunteers were characterized by such terms as *brave, hearty, dauntless, loyal-hearted, resolute, determined, purposeful, steadfast, consistent, earnest, sober, unselfish, unwearied, cheerful, and useful*, and celebrated for their *zeal, their whole-hearted devotion, their self-denial, their enterprise, their noble service, and their true missionary spirit*.⁶⁵ While some of these terms were certainly gendered—missionary women were not perhaps expected to be enterprising—on the whole they describe a type of character that served as an ideal for both men and women of the late-nineteenth century Anglo-American middle class. For those who found the embodiment of these character traits to be trivial or restrictive when confined to the spheres of salaried office work and domestic management, the imagined figure of the missionary allowed for the enactment of this type of middle-class personhood on a greater stage and for a greater purpose.⁶⁶

As evidenced by the Student Volunteer Movement, young Protestant middle-class men and women responded to this evocation in increasing numbers in the last decades of the nineteenth-century. After the 1886 YMCA student conference at Mt. Hermon, the Student Volunteer Movement was formally organized in 1888 by the leadership of the Intercollegiate YMCA, YWCA, and Interseminary Missionary Alliances. As reported in February 1891 at the SVM's first conference, Robert Wilder's tour during the 1886-1887 school year had brought the number of missionary pledges to 2200, and

⁶⁴ Ibid., 275–76.

⁶⁵ Broomhall, *The Evangelisation of the World*; Pierson, *The Crisis of Missions*.

⁶⁶ On middle class culture and gender, see for instance, Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*; J Mangan, *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*.

this number had grown to 6200 by the end of 1890. Almost a third of the volunteers were women, and almost all were students or recent graduates of colleges, universities, or seminaries. There were volunteers at 350 institutions across the US and Canada, and they were generally affiliated with their campus YMCA or YWCA, as well as with a Protestant church. While the great majority were Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, or Congregational, members of at least twenty denominations attended the first SVM conference, along with representatives of thirty-two different Mission Boards. As reported at the conference, by the end of 1890, at least 320 of those who had taken the SVM pledge had already gone to the field, under various missionary agencies. Of these, 69 had gone to China, 49 to India, 46 to Japan, 32 elsewhere in East Asia, 33 to Africa, 33 to the Near East, 30 to the Americas, and 34 elsewhere, including the South Seas and Catholic Europe. Fifty had been rejected by Mission Boards, but one hundred more were reported to be “ready to go.”⁶⁷ The increase in American missionary presence represented by these 320 young men and women was significant—in 1890, the total number of American missionaries in the field was fewer than one thousand.⁶⁸

Over the next few decades, the movement continued to grow. By 1898, the SVM reported that over a thousand volunteers had been sent as missionaries to more than fifty countries, and by 1906, the number of volunteers in the field had tripled again to almost three thousand, one third of whom were women. Of these, 826 had gone to China, 624 to India, Burma, and Ceylon, 275 to Japan, 117 to Korea, 64 to the Philippines, 104 elsewhere in Asia and Oceania, 121 to the Turkish Empire, 40 to Persia and Arabia, 313 to Africa, 378 to the Americas, and 91 elsewhere, including Europe.⁶⁹ By 1920, the number sent to the field had almost tripled once more, to more than eight thousand. The total number of volunteers by 1920 was 33,726, and roughly a quarter of these had sailed, half of whom were women and almost all of whom were college-educated evangelicals in their twenties. While dozens of denominations were represented, most volunteers were Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, or Congregational, and most had undergone intense and emotional conversion experiences, but few had been ordained. Ultimately, by midcentury, roughly 48,000 had volunteered through the SVM and 12,000 had gone to the field, representing roughly 75% of American missionary presence abroad.⁷⁰ The story told by these numbers is not merely one of fervent young men and women seeking to save the world by imparting the Gospel and middle-class morality, it is also one of sustained and successful organization—for half a century, the bottom-up evangelical passion in evidence at the first YMCA student conference was channeled and cultivated from the top down by an extraordinarily

⁶⁷ *Report of the First Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement*, 23, 3, 29, 30.

⁶⁸ Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, xi.

⁶⁹ *The Student Missionary Appeal: Addresses at the Third International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions* (Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1898), 47; *Students and the Modern Missionary Crusade: Addresses Delivered Before the Fifth International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions*, Nashville, Tennessee, February 28-March 4, 1906 (Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1906), 42–43.

⁷⁰ *North American Students and World Advance: Addresses Delivered at the Eighth International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions*, Des Moines, Iowa, December 31, 1919, to January 4, 1920 (Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1920), 61–62; Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, 23–24.

effective leadership orchestrated primarily through the YMCA and under the guidance of John Mott.

The Student Volunteer Movement, was, in its own worlds, “simply a recruiting agency.” As its leadership pronounced in 1898, “it never has sent out a missionary and never will.”⁷¹ Working primarily through the college YMCAs and YWCAs, it advocated for missions, collected missionary pledges from students, and organized its volunteers into bands to study and pray together, and its success is probably in large part due to this limited mission. In a religious atmosphere long characterized by interdenominational strife and territorialism, the SVM inherited from the YMCA a particular care not to encroach in any way on the domain of the churches or their missionary agencies, and the majority of the volunteers who sailed were sent and supported by the missionary agencies of their evangelical denominations. Some, however, did serve directly under the auspices of the YMCA and YWCA—in 1889 the YMCA began the process of establishing Association branches across the foreign field, and the YWCA soon followed suit.

* * * * *

In the 1880s, young middle-class men and women affiliated with the Associations lifted their gaze to the world. Turning their attention to the newly opened doors of ostensibly plastic nations, they imagined a crisis of millennial proportions, a do-or-die, now-or-never crisis involving not only the eternal life of all of humanity, but the moral condition of the geopolitical realms of the earth. They ascribed to themselves a grand moral authority based in the universal truth of the gospel, and they sought to project this authority over the nations of the world, to mold the nations after a Christian image. As they launched themselves on this great adventure of noble service, they relied heavily upon emerging middle-class techniques of the organization and representation of knowledge. The universalizing conception of the equivalence of souls was not only rooted in evangelicalism—as several scholars have shown, such a conception of equivalence also characterized the production of knowledge that underlay all modern systems of law and governance and the very conception of the liberal individual himself.⁷² To the degree that the Associations were responding to the problems of the atomization and massification of the industrializing world, their techniques of the arithmetic of souls, their habits of thinking in terms of commerce and of numerically ordering and rationalizing knowledge of humanity even in its most spiritual aspect, tended to globally project the very dehumanizing and stultifying effects of individuation that they sought to counter. To the degree that their universalizing tendency to think in terms of human semblance would in time allow for friendships on the basis of equality with local Christian leaders of non-Christian lands, and allow for the assumption of democratic nationhood as a universal norm, these would-be missionaries did not yet assume such an organization of their world-field, and the unindividuated masses of

⁷¹ *The Student Missionary Appeal*, 43.

⁷² For instance, Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*; Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton University Press, 1998); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1991).

souls that they imagined as populating the mission lands were yet to be encountered as flesh of their flesh and bone of their bone.

Chapter 3

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL RELATIONS FOR THE WHOLE MAN AND THE WHOLE WORLD

While the Student Movement was intent on evangelizing the world, the Associations more generally were increasingly turning from their first purpose of evangelization toward a more worldly program informed by a new consciousness of human interconnectedness. Beginning in the 1890s, the Christian reformers of the Association movement increasingly aligned themselves with the Social Gospel and with liberal theology, and increasingly adopted the social and political approaches to reform that characterized the Progressive Era. If the evangelical ethos of the Second Great Awakening had arisen in conjunction with broader social and political developments of that period, so too did the theological shift represented by the rise of the Social Gospel and of liberal theology. At the heart of this theological shift was a growing perception of the Kingdom of God as immanent instead of transcendent—as a movement in and of the world instead of as fundamentally a realm of the spirit.¹ As Christian reformers came to accept the interpretation of the Kingdom of God as an earthly realm as well as a spiritual one, as universally relevant to all social interaction no matter how worldly, this theological development spurred—and was reinforced by—their mounting involvement in the putatively secular social and political projects of the Progressive Era. In this period, the Associations began to base their programs not only on the idea of human interconnectedness but also on the idea of the unified nature of the individual—intellectual, spiritual, and physical. Increasingly, their Christianizing efforts moved beyond evangelization and toward training the “whole man,” with programs designed to teach what they considered to be universal Christian principles, both in their guise as sportsmanship and as “Christian citizenship.”

Progressive Era reform was animated both by a growing spirit of liberal optimism about human progress and by a mounting sense of crisis about moral order in the industrializing world. Even more so than in the previous era, Christian reform movements—and the contrasting moods of energetic confidence and of hand-wringing concern that animated them—were quintessentially characteristic of the middle class. The theological shift represented by the Social Gospel, in conjunction with the Progressive pivot toward social and political approaches to reform, provided an impulse and a justification for middle-class Christian reformers to embark on an ambitious project of setting a universal standard for world political and social action based on what they called “Christian social relations”—the idea that relations between individuals, between groups, and between nations should be structured by Christian principle. In the 1840s, the Christian reformers of the Association movement had perceived a moral crisis of “young strangers” in the city, and in the 1880s, their perception of crisis had

¹ Martti Muukkonen, *Ecumenism of the Laity: Continuity and Change in the Mission View of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations, 1855-1955* (Joensuu: University of Joensuu, 2002), iii.

begun to widen to encompass the humanity of the entire planet. Beginning in the 1890s, they began to perceive the social dimensions of the crisis, and their proposed solutions, which to this point had emphasized the perfection of the individual, began to include the moral reform not only of individuals but of social and political systems as well. The 1910 commencement address at Springfield College, the training school for YMCA secretaries, took the theme, “How Shall the Kingdom Come?” Reflecting this turn toward active social and political involvement, the speaker asserted,

“The Kingdom of God will surely come, yet it will not come down upon us ... but up through us ... Christian associations and institutions of all kinds will gain in effectiveness because they will duly subordinate immediate and lesser ends to the large end of Christianizing civilization at its sources.”²

Between 1890 and 1920, Christian reformers organized around these new currents of thought, in a significant and sustained effort to achieve “the large end of Christianizing civilization at its sources”—sources which, they came to believe, were not only rooted in the character of individual citizens, but also in the character of the social relations and political arrangements of cities, of nations, and of the world.

This chapter first examines these ideas as they were expressed by proponents of the Social Gospel and of liberal theology, beginning at the 1885 “Interdenominational Congress in the Interest of City Evangelization” organized by Josiah Strong, and continuing with Walter Rauschenbusch’s writings on the Kingdom of God, Theodore Munger’s text on the liberal “New Theology,” and the views of Samuel Zane Batten and Elisha Mulford on the need to Christianize the nation as a political body. The chapter then turns to Association developments during this period, describing new approaches to the “whole man” as represented in Luther Gulick’s triangle logo and Robert McBurney’s “fourfold work” integrating physical, intellectual, social, and religious programs. It goes on to detail the mounting importance of ideals of social Christianity and civic engagement for the Associations, through study guides, conference reports, and contributions to the journals of both the YMCA and the YWCA, culminating with the 1907 YMCA Convention in Washington, D.C., which took “The Christian Citizen and the Nation” as its theme and concluded with an appeal by prominent YMCA missionary advocate Robert E. Speer to carry these ideals to the non-Christian world.

* * * * *

If the reform movements of the mid-nineteenth century had been driven by both a tremendous optimism and a persistent sense of crisis, both were magnified in the Progressive Era. Progressive reformers, as they began to assimilate ideas about the power of social forces, maintained their faith in the capacity for human progress. Their work was marked by confidence—a confidence in the good in human nature if correctly disciplined, a confidence in elite expertise serving the public interest, a confidence in the power of science and organization to achieve their goals, and, increasingly, a confidence in the power of political systems to affect reform. While a notion of civic

² As quoted in Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 509.

virtue had been an element in some reform projects of the previous era, now it became an important focus, as Progressive reformers sought to reorganize government at various levels to promote fairness and efficiency, and as they took on the project of educating various sectors of society for political involvement (while simultaneously attempting to limit political involvement to the properly educated).³ This expansive confidence worked alongside a deepening sense of crisis. Whereas in the previous era, this crisis had been framed around the morality of individuals in the new cities, it was now increasingly understood as a *social* crisis, often framed as a centrifugal problem of the excesses of corrupt power-holders on the one hand, against the excesses of anarchic masses on the other. Progressive reform—now more than ever, a work of a self-conscious and politically ascendant middle class—positioned itself in the center of this centrifugal world, and framed its projects against these corrupt excesses as a disinterested effort in service of the common good.⁴

In the United States, this sense of crisis evolved in relation to a series of historical events and developments: the crises of the city which had first motivated the founders of the YMCA had only intensified with the acceleration of urbanization and immigration; the sectional crises of the earlier period had not been fully resolved by the carnage of the Civil War, and emancipation and Reconstruction had been countered with a violence that Progressive reformers often characterized as “the Negro Problem;” the Haymarket bombing of 1886 had amplified fears of anarchy and further spurred brutal nativist reaction; the industrializing free-market economy was plagued by recurrent Panics, by horrifically inhumane working conditions, and by deadly response to organized labor and to the promotion of socialist ideas, all increasingly referenced as the “Class War.” In particular, the violent labor unrest of 1892-1894 and the Panic of 1893-1897 brought the sense of social crisis into sharp relief. For many, these events discredited the idea that economic success or failure could be purely a mark of individual morality, and lent strength to the idea that government should regulate industry in the interest of the greater good.⁵ However, even as they increasingly acknowledged the social nature of these problems, middle-class reformers both Christian and secular sought compromise rooted in the moral reform of individuals of both groups. Further, the interest in fighting corruption in politics linked the exercise of democracy to moral behavior, as did a revived interest in promoting civic virtue in service of the common good. Overall, even as Progressive reform became increasingly aware of the social aspects of social problems, its solutions remained largely focused on moral character, whether or not this moral character was explicitly identified as

³ Progressive reformer Lyman Abbott, for example, in the pages of *The Outlook*, defended the principle of literacy tests as qualification for voting on the grounds that the duties of citizenship could only responsibly be performed by thoughtful and well-informed individuals. See for instance, on “Negro Disfranchisement,” Abbott’s statement that “the Outlook is in sympathy with honest attempts to exclude vice and ignorance from the polls; but the law must not exclude vicious and ignorant blacks and admit vicious and ignorant whites.” Lyman Abbott, ed., “Negro Disfranchisement,” *The Outlook* 61, no. 9 (March 4, 1899): 486–87.

⁴ See for instance Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*; Noble, *The Progressive Mind, 1890-1917*; McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*.

⁵ Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 174; Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*; Henry May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper, 1949), 91.

Christian. The Progressive case for women's suffrage, for example, was frequently made on the basis of the moral authority of women, and while such causes as temperance, anti-corruption, and anti-lynching all had their social efficiency aspects, they were usually framed as moral issues.

The evangelical reformers of the Second Great Awakening had been moved to perfect the individual. Progressive reformers, evangelical and otherwise, expanded on this project, resolving to reform the individual in his or her social context. This turn toward the social occurred in part as a reaction to the lionization of the individual in the second half of the nineteenth century, as represented most prominently in arguments that society benefited from a *laissez-faire* approach, allowing for "the survival of the fittest" and rewarding moral individuals in the exercise of their free will.⁶ Toward the close of the century, reformers began to rethink these convictions, and to rework what Pierson had lauded as the "principle of individual responsibility."⁷ The theological turn toward the social occurred in conjunction with developments of fields such as sociology, psychology, education, and scientific management, all underscoring the power of social forces in the lives of individuals and groups,⁸ and this new emphasis pervaded the wave of reform projects which characterized the Progressive Era. To an important extent, the development of these fields of study contributed to a new appreciation on various levels of the ways in which moral free will was tempered by social constraints. While there was not, perhaps, a coherent or cohesive ideology of Progressivism driving these projects, at heart, they all incorporated these new understandings of the social. As historian Daniel Rodgers has argued, across exceedingly diverse Progressive reform campaigns— ranging from anti-vice to anti-monopoly, from settlement houses to municipal administration, from income tax to labor reform—it is possible to discern a set of "languages" emphasizing various aspects of the social. Rodgers identifies a language of "social bonds" and one of "social efficiency" as characteristic of Progressive reform.⁹

Both Progressive confidence in the capacity for human progress and Progressive anxieties about social crisis were evident in approaches to questions of race and ethnicity, and specifically to the question of assimilation or exclusion of groups marked primarily by race. Progressive reformers perceived racial and ethnic strife to be a growing crisis, and, as was also the case with industrial violence, they tended to position themselves as the reasonable parties caught between extremes. Not surprisingly, their approach to solutions tended toward pedagogical paternalism. While they held a range of positions on such questions as Asian exclusion, Native American education, racial segregation, disenfranchisement, assimilation of Southern and Eastern European immigrants, and the fitness of Filipinos for self-rule, their discussions on these topics tended to be framed by questions of who could and should fulfill the duties and responsibilities of national citizenship. Some argued against integration in terms of essential and timeless difference—Chinese Exclusion had been justified in these terms in the 1880s, and for the most part, Progressives tended to be more interested in

⁶ See Herbert Spencer, William Graham Sumner, John Stuart Mill, etc.

⁷ Pierson, *The Crisis of Missions*, 328.

⁸ See John Dewey, Max Weber, William James, etc.

⁹ Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (1982): 113–32.

decrying the corruption of contract labor than in integrating Chinese immigrants and their descendants as citizens. (Their attempt to position themselves as the reasonable center between the interests of labor and the interests of capital perhaps inclined them to forefront labor's arguments against contract labor even as they distanced themselves from the virulence of nativism). For the most part, however, Progressives tended to consider such questions in terms of a teleology of progress—all of humanity was considered to be progressing from a primitive state through successive degrees of civilization, and while Anglo-Saxons were further along in this process, all racial groups were following a similar trajectory. Progressives associated the moral character and integrity required to responsibly fulfill the duties of democratic citizenship with an advanced degree of civilization, which they fretted that other racial and ethnic groups had not yet achieved, a state of affairs that they considered to underlie what they termed “the Race Problem.” The solution, then, became one of education.¹⁰ They founded boarding schools for Native Americans, technical institutes for African Americans, settlement houses in cities, all under the assumption that given time and guidance, these groups could be more fully integrated into the citizenry—and they sent teachers to the Philippines in order to prepare Filipinos for eventual nationhood.¹¹ In general, the Progressive response to the racial dimensions of the perceived social crisis involved a pedagogical project of character formation—a reform approach addressing the individual in social context.

The Christian reformers of the Association movement did not all consider themselves Progressive, and they did not all engage with the reform projects associated with Progressivism. The YMCA as an organization held itself aloof from any and all legislative causes, and while it encouraged civic engagement in its secretaries and its membership, the Associations themselves took no public position on any social issue. The Associations were, however, deeply marked by the Progressive milieu. They shared in the tremendous optimism and the mounting sense of crisis which drove Progressive reform, they shared the tendency to position themselves as the reasonable center, and they shared in the middle-class values of social efficiency and moral character. Most centrally, because they were a Christian organization, they shared in the theological developments loosely associated with many Progressive campaigns. Beginning in the 1880s and gaining prominence in the 1890s, theologians of the Social Gospel and of the liberal New Theology began to place more emphasis on the social aspects of Christianity and on Christianity's work in the world. As with social and political issues, the Association movement carefully eschewed the endorsement of any doctrine or creed, but between 1890 and 1920, these shifts in theological emphasis came to structure the work of Christian reformers at every level of the Association.

A key moment in the rise of the Social Gospel occurred in 1885. Josiah Strong, a Congregationalist clergyman who would become a prominent Social Gospel leader,

¹⁰ On the Progressive tendency to frame social issues as “problems” with “solutions” see Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Harvard University Press, 1998). Rodgers suggests that to some degree, the solutions imagined worked to define the problems to be solved. (6)

¹¹ Adrienne Francisco, *From Subjects to Citizens: American Colonial Education and Philippine Nation-Making, 1900-1934* (University of California, Berkeley, 2015).

called an “Interdenominational Congress in the Interest of City Evangelization,” held in Cincinnati in December of that year, and attracting nearly fifteen hundred attendees.¹² Strong’s influential and widely read 1885 work, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Present Crisis*, on “the perils which threaten our Christian and American civilization,” had contributed to a recurrence in the sense of crisis motivating Christian reformers. The Congress brought together a number of future Social Gospel leaders, including Washington Gladden, Richard Ely, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Lyman Abbott, as well as YMCA leader Richard Morse. The call to this Congress began thus:

The city, as a menace to our civilization, has begun to arouse thought and call forth discussion. Of the perils which threaten our future, such as socialism, skepticism, the liquor power, the criminal classes, the congestion of wealth and political corruption, each is enhanced and all are focalized in the city. And here, where moral and Christian influences need to be the strongest, they are the weakest... [This Congress] is designed to bring together for discussion and suggestion those who have given the deepest study to the various perils with which the cities threaten our civilization, and those who have been most successful in reaching the masses with Christian influence.¹³

In this call, a link can be seen with the approaches to Christian reform from the earlier period. The focus on the city as the site of moral crisis is unchanged from the days of George Williams and corresponds closely to the original rationale for the founding of the YMCA—the moral failings of the city are to be countered through Christian influence and evangelization, a continuity that Richard Morse makes clear in his pitch for the YMCA as a proven approach to reform. However, the beginnings of a shift toward an appreciation of the social nature of the crisis can be discerned in the consciousness of class in the framing of the problems themselves. On the bottom rungs of society, the “criminal classes” are the peril, while at the top, it is “the congestion of wealth and political corruption;” both are moral failings, but of entire classes not merely of individuals. Temperance, a longstanding issue, is presented not as a problem of individual self-control but as the problem of a conglomeration explicitly exerting “power,” and the highlighted focus on the problems represented by socialism and skepticism as shared systems of thought is relatively new. Finally, the prominent attention given to political corruption and bad government anticipate the turn to political solutions and political governance which would become an important aspect of Christian reform in the decades to come. A further indication of the beginnings of a turn by Christian reformers away from the ideals of middle-class political economy and towards an emerging conception of Social Christianity can be found in the assertion of Washington Gladden in his address to the Congress, that “Jesus Christ knew a great deal more about organizing society than David Ricardo ever dreamed of knowing.”¹⁴

These shifts in the framing of the problems to be addressed by Christian reform

¹² On number of attendees and on presence of Rauschenbusch, Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 90.

¹³ *Discussions of the Interdenominational Congress in the Interest of City Evangelization, Held in Cincinnati, December 7-11, 1885* (The Congress, 1886), 3. For more on Josiah Strong, see: LaFeber, *The New Empire*.

¹⁴ *Discussions of the Interdenominational Congress in the Interest of City Evangelization*, 136.

were accompanied by a corresponding shift in theological emphasis onto the idea of the millennial Kingdom of God. The Second Great Awakening and the earlier period of reform it had inspired had also been marked by a millennialist turn, in the idea that the Second Coming of Christ and the prophesied millennium of His rule would be the result of a process of human perfection—many Christian reformers of that era had turned to a belief that the millennium would in fact precede the Second Coming and that it may indeed have already begun, as signaled by the advance of Christian reform. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the growing emphasis on the idea of the millennial Kingdom of God as immanent and earthly, rather than as an essentially transcendent and spiritual realm, corresponded with a continued and expanded focus on works, especially on social service and, ultimately, on political involvement—if the Kingdom of God was to be an earthly realm rather than a heavenly one, then a focus on earthly works was essential for its establishment. Previously, during the Second Great Awakening, great emphasis had been placed upon the individual’s spiritual relationship with God and on the process of individual perfection as a millennial condition. Now, in the era of the Social Gospel, this new emphasis on God’s Kingdom as earthly contributed to the idea that individual salvation must be accompanied by social salvation, to the idea that God was an immanent presence in all aspects of human life, including the relations between humans and nations, and that all aspects of human life must be encompassed in the project of advancing His Kingdom. To this extent, good works and ethical action along Christian lines became as important as mere confession of Christian faith. Ultimately, the broader emphasis on the advancement of the Kingdom of God as a whole, rather than a sole emphasis on the evangelization and conversion of the individual, allowed for Christian reformers to turn their attention to “Christianizing” societies and nations as well as individuals—the closer they could bring the world to an approximation of the Kingdom, the better, and if they could induce individuals, societies, and nations to act as if Christian, that was a work as necessary to the advancement of the Kingdom as was the work of guiding the inner spiritual life of individuals toward Christ.¹⁵

A group of Christian leaders who would become important figures in elaborating the Social Gospel revealed the centrality of the idea of the Kingdom of God to their thinking when, in 1892, they formed a study circle under the name, “The Brotherhood of the Kingdom.” Original members of the group included Walter Rauschenbusch and Samuel Zane Batten, and the group continued its annual conferences and regular meetings through 1915, producing some of the most influential Social Gospel texts, including Rauschenbusch’s *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907), *Christianizing the Social Order* (1912), and Batten’s *The New Citizenship* (1898), *The Christian State* (1909), and *The Social Task of Christianity* (1911). At their first meeting, they produced a mission statement, stating in part that,

The Spirit of God is moving men in our generation toward a better understanding of the idea of the Kingdom of God on earth. Obeying the thought of our Master, and

¹⁵ Muukkonen, *Ecumenism of the Laity*; Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*; Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*; White and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel*; May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*.

trusting in the power and guidance of the Spirit, we form ourselves into a Brotherhood of the Kingdom, in order to re-establish this idea in the thought of the church, and to assist in its practical realization in the world.¹⁶

The Social Gospel, then, was formulated from the start as the effort to further the “practical realization” of the “Kingdom of God on earth.” In his leaflet “The Brotherhood of the Kingdom,” written as an announcement and promotion of the group and its aims, Rauschenbusch further expounded on this idea, stressing the extent to which the emphasis on the Kingdom of God signaled an explicit and self-conscious shift from a focus on the individual and on a transcendent “future life” to a focus on the social and the “here and now.” In Rauschenbusch’s view, the focus on the personal salvation of the individual had been a relatively recent development, and he characterized his turn toward the more socially-minded construction of the Kingdom of God as somewhat of a restoration. As he wrote in 1894,

Because the Kingdom of God has been dropped as the primary and comprehensive aim of Christianity, and personal salvation has been substituted for it, therefore men seek to save their own souls and are selfishly indifferent to the evangelization of the world. Because the individualistic conception of personal salvation has pushed out of sight the collective idea of a Kingdom of God on earth, Christian men seek for the salvation of individuals and are comparatively indifferent to the spread of the Spirit of Christ in the political, industrial, social, scientific and artistic life of humanity.¹⁷

For Rauschenbusch and the other members of the group, the Kingdom of God was “the great synthesis,” re-integrating the “Spirit of Christ” into every aspect of human life. This synthesis allowed them to stand against the rampant individualism that they saw contributing to the social crises as elaborated at Strong’s conference a few years before, and authorized the extension of Christian interest into political and industrial life. By 1907, Rauschenbusch had come to the conclusion, as he stated in his highly influential text, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, that it was a “fundamental truth that religion and ethics are inseparable, and that ethical conduct is the supreme and sufficient religious act.”¹⁸ This statement represents a radical departure from the theological bases for the earlier wave of Christian reform, in which works were certainly a necessary marker of inner faith but could never have been “supreme and sufficient,” when considered in relation to that faith. The primacy of the Kingdom of God as a theological concept enabled this move—Rauschenbusch’s emphasis on advancing the Kingdom in the “here and now” of the world placed a new value in worldly markers of the approach to human perfection, over signs of individual salvation as revealed through the inner spiritual struggles and intense conversion experiences which still remained a prominent feature in the lives of evangelical Christian reformers throughout this period. As Rauschenbusch further concluded in *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, “the kingdom of God is always but coming. But every approximation to it is worth while.”¹⁹

This increased emphasis on the Kingdom of God marked an emerging theological

¹⁶ As quoted in White and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel*, 73.

¹⁷ Walter Rauschenbusch, “Brotherhood of The Kingdom,” *Record of Christian Work* 13 (July 1894): 207.

¹⁸ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 421.

appreciation for the impact of societal structure on individuals. This new appreciation of the social was also evident in a second emerging theological strand, known at the time as “the New Theology” and later as theological liberalism. Along with the new emphasis on the social nature of humanity and the de-emphasis of its sinfulness, this liberal turn in theology moved toward a reconciliation of Christianity with natural and social science, ultimately entailing for many Christian reformers a step back from religious dogma and from the doctrine of biblical infallibility and toward a new pragmatism. Moved by such ideas as Darwin’s theory of evolution, William James’ reflections in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and Dewey’s approach to pragmatic inquiry, as well as by the emerging academic fields of sociology, anthropology, and psychology more generally, many Christian reformers moved toward a conception of truth as process, not essence.²⁰ Seminaries placed increasing emphasis on the sociology of religion, teaching, as stated in a common textbook on *Christian Ethics*, published in 1892, that “virtue, as a moral health, must have some fitness to its social conditions.”²¹

In an 1883 essay, a New Haven Congregational pastor named Theodore Munger mapped out the “New Theology” in relation to what he called the “Old Theology,” placing much stress on the new importance of the social, or, in his preferred terms, “solidarity” and the “corporate.” Even as he demarcated this shift toward the social, however, he was careful to leave space for the free will of the individual. In Munger’s analysis, then, the Old Theology “holds to an absolute solidarity in evil, relieved by a doctrine of election of individuals; [whereas the New Theology] holds to a solidarity running throughout the whole life of humanity in the world, —not an absolute solidarity, but one modified by human freedom.”²² In his estimation, the New Theology

does not deny a real individuality, it does not predicate an absolute solidarity, but simply removes the emphasis from one to the other. It holds that every man must live a life of his own, build himself up into a full personality, and give an account of himself to God: but it also recognizes the blurred truth that man’s life lies in its relations; that it is a derived and shared life; that it is carried on and perfected under laws of heredity and of the family and the nation; that while he is ‘himself alone’ he is also a son, a parent, a citizen, and an inseparable part of the human race; that in origin and character and destiny he cannot be regarded as standing in a sharp and utter individuality.²³

Especially notable in Munger’s analysis is the degree to which this New Theology represented further steps away from an emphasis on the sinfulness of human nature and from an emphasis on eternal hellfire and damnation. In his words, the New Theology

does not consign mankind as a mass to a pit of common depravity, and leave it to emerge as individuals under some notion of election, or by solitary choice, each one escaping as he can and according to his ‘chance,’ but the greater part not escaping at

²⁰ For instance, Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, 151–52.

²¹ May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, 194–96; Newman Smyth, *Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s sons, 1892).

²² Theodore Munger, “The New Theology,” in *The Freedom of Faith* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), 23.

²³ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

all. It does not so read revelation and history and life, finding in them all a corporate element, 'a moving together when it moves at all,' —an interweaving of life with life that renders it impossible wholly to extricate the individual.²⁴

The recurring imagery that Munger finds in the Old Theology of a mass of individual souls lost in a pit, damned by a solidarity in evil, escaping only by “solitary choice,” is easy to recognize in the writings of the missionary advocates of the same period. The New Theology as Munger describes it would not be widely adopted for several years, and his work was controversial in its time. In fact, in *Crisis of Missions*, published three years after Munger’s essay, Pierson reacts to the New Theology by name, condemning it as “the Devil’s master-piece of strategy” for its introduction of “practical doubt, if not denial, of [the heathen’s] lost condition.” For Pierson, this step back from the assured damnation of entire nations of unconverted individuals represented a threat to the recognition of the drastic urgency of the crisis at hand, and in response, he delves into his most harsh estimation of the extent of the sinfulness of the heathen, whereas in other sections his overall emphasis is on the heathen as redeemable.²⁵ Munger, however, did not repudiate the idea of sin altogether—he characterized the New Theology as merely a shift in emphasis and reassures his readers, that it “is not disposed wholly to part company with the Old in respect to the 'fall in Adam' ... [however] it does not admit that Christ is less to the race than Adam, that the Gospel is smaller than evil.”²⁶ The key to the New Theology, for Munger, was a recognition of a balance between “individuality” and “solidarity” in human life. In his judgment, the New Theology “does not submerge the individual in the common life, nor free him from personal ill desert, nor take from him the crown of personal achievement and victory. It simply strives to recognize the duality of truth, and hold it well poised.”²⁷ For Munger, and for the Christian reformers who would come to profess Social Christianity in its guise as the Social Gospel or the New Theology, this recognition and elaboration of the social was not the threat to the impetus for action that Pierson had feared, but instead it represented a new and expanded basis for Christian reform.

Evident in this theological development is the tremendous optimism that continued to characterize the development of liberalism more generally during this period. On the eve of the Progressive Era, Christian reform, even as it began to account for structural restraints on the individual, tended to perceive of human perfectibility as just then at its cusp, if only religion and morality could gain control of social forces.²⁸ Echoing the watchword of the Student Volunteer Movement, Josiah Strong proclaimed in 1893 that,

Such is my confidence in the saving power of the complete Gospel, that in my very soul I believe a single generation will suffice to solve the problem of pauperism, to

²⁴ Ibid., 24.

²⁵ Pierson, *The Crisis of Missions*, 291, 294.

²⁶ Munger, “The New Theology,” 23–24.

²⁷ Ibid., 24–25.

²⁸ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 786.

wipe out the saloon, to inaugurate a thousand needed reforms, and really change the face of society, provided only the churches generally enter into this movement.²⁹

Similarly, another Social Gospel reformer later recollected that “it seemed to many of us who were studying theology and beginning our ministry in the eighties and nineties as if humanity were on the eve of the golden age... The Kingdom of God appeared to be at hand... As the dawn of the twentieth century approached we felt sure that it meant the ushering in of the reign of universal brotherhood.”³⁰ This optimism in both the Social Gospel and the New Theology underlay much Christian reform of the period.

While both the Social Gospel and the New Theology were characterized by a decided turn toward the idea of humans as social beings, and many Christian reformers who subscribed to the Social Gospel also took the liberal turn theologically, there were many who did not, committing instead to social reform rooted in the Bible as literal truth, and rejecting any moves toward pragmatism. There were also Christians who took this liberal turn without embracing the new emphasis on the social, or on social reform on a Christian basis—while the overlaps were great, not all theologically liberal Christians subscribed to the Social Gospel, and not all Social Gospel was theologically liberal.³¹ These distinctions did not break down cleanly along denominational lines. The Second Great Awakening had provided an evangelical impetus to reform, primarily among Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians, although there were non-evangelical wings of each of these denominations. Unitarians and Quakers had also been very involved in reform on the basis of the perfection of the individual, but did not share the evangelical attitude toward conversion or the Bible, and were generally excluded from evangelical reform associations of all kinds. Then, with the advent of the Social Gospel and theological liberalism, many evangelical churches with strong reform traditions across these denominations now adopted the Social Gospel and many also took the liberal turn—actually combining elements of evangelicalism and liberal theology.³² Later, in the era of the Fundamentalist-Modernist disputes in the 1920s, this combination would fade, but in the 1890s and 1910s evangelicalism and liberalism shared in the de-emphasis of sin, in a generally postmillennial view of the immanence of God on Earth, and in an optimism about human perfection as a social project. Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians all shared in these trends, although neither the Social Gospel nor the New Theology was universally adopted across any of these denominations, and the latter denominations were somewhat later in taking the turn.³³ Some Lutheran churches which had never been evangelical now became more liberal, and Episcopalian churches which had had no previous reform tradition now became early adopters of the Social Gospel, following a tradition of Christian socialism in the Church of England and a new paternalistic attitude toward reform by some leading Episcopalians.³⁴ Unitarians and Quakers, still excluded by

²⁹ Josiah Strong, *The New Era; Or, The Coming Kingdom* (New York: Baker & Taylor Company, 1893), 270.

³⁰ Quoted in May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, 232–33.

³¹ White and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel*, xvii.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, 182–93.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 182–86; White and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel*, 4.

many non-denominational Christian reform organizations, continued their reform efforts, Unitarians being exceptionally theologically liberal. On the whole, while evangelicalism generally remained an important impetus to reform at the turn of the twentieth century, these movements were now just as rooted in a new theological liberalism.

Both the Social Gospel and the New Theology represented sets of ideas that first spread across the Protestant world in a capillary fashion, from person to person, via sermons and texts and informal meetings, rather than as any organized change in policy or creed on the part of the denominations. The non-denominational nature of these shifts, as well as the pragmatism and the turn away from dogma that they represented, fostered an important new ecumenicism as well as a new and broader support for existing non-denominational organizations like the YMCA and related Associations—both turns, toward the liberal and the social, strengthened the support for these non-denominational organizations solely based on their ecumenical nature, even as the leadership of these organizations were generally just as piecemeal in their formal adoption of these new ideas as were the denominations themselves.³⁵ As had been the case during the Second Great Awakening, these ideas moved in a transatlantic Anglo-American world, and again, a World's Fair factored into their spread, as Social Gospel speakers were featured at the 1893 Parliament of Religions at the Chicago World's Fair—an event which corresponded also to a series of mass meetings for the YMCA.³⁶ The new ecumenism they represented would be formalized in 1908 with the establishment of the Federal Council of Churches, consisting of thirty-two denominations, primarily Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Episcopal, and Presbyterian, and organized specifically around the idea of Christian social service.

Some Christian reformers would follow the social turn farther into the realm of socialism, including, eventually, the YMCA evangelist Sherwood Eddy. Rauschenbusch himself ultimately became a Christian socialist, envisioning the Christian nations of the United States and Europe as cooperative socialist commonwealths.³⁷ However, even for Rauschenbusch, the heart of the Social Gospel remained in the individual—he still believed that “the powers of the kingdom of God well up in the individual soul; that is where they are born, and that is where the starting point necessarily must be.”³⁸

This persistent focus on the individual in social Christianity is easy to discern in the influential 1896 novel, *In His Steps, or “What Would Jesus Do?”*³⁹ Written by a Congregational minister as an elaboration of the imagined process of social reform, as inspired by conversion and adherence to Christian principles, the novel tells the story of a city transformed when its leading citizens begin to ask of themselves in every situation, “What would Jesus do?” This moral self-regulation becomes the key to social reform, as philanthropists voluntarily redistribute their wealth and the token

³⁵ See: May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, 193–94; Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 784.

³⁶ On the Parliament of Religions: May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, 194; Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 180.

³⁷ Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 81.

³⁸ As quoted in *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁹ Charles Monroe Sheldon, *In His Steps: “What Would Jesus Do?”* (Chicago: Advance Publishing Company, 1897).

manufacturer converts his business into a trust dedicated to the welfare of his employees. When socialists and unionists are given a forum to make their case, their solutions to the problems of the city are shown to be weak and partial in the face of mass conversion to Christian principle. At this level, social problems are acknowledged, but the solution remains based in scores of individual changes of heart. This attitude toward socialists and unionists on the one hand, and capitalists and philanthropists on the other, was broadly representative of Christian reform, even as reformers turned increasingly to legislative solutions to social problems, after the turn of the century. In fact, as Christian reform moved into the social realm, it became if anything more middle-class, precisely because its solutions remained so deeply rooted in the moral character of the individual, and because with the advent of the liberalism of the New Theology the impetus to reform was no longer rooted so deeply in the cross-class passion of evangelical awakening and revivalism.

As discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the missionary movement, these theological developments were accompanied by continuing anxieties around middle-class masculinity. The problems of the city as featured at Josiah Strong's 1885 conference were interpreted in no small part as crises of traditional authority, encompassing both faltering paternal authority over young men and the faltering authority of the feminized church in a freewheeling urban setting. At the same time, white-collar middle-class men worried about the emasculation implied both by the desk-bound nature of their work and by its subordinate position in the world of commercial capitalism—in contrast to the craftsmanship of the artisan, salaried work could denote lack of independence, lack of physical prowess, and lack of the meaningfulness associated with skilled material production. In this context, the movement for “muscular Christianity” and for the “strenuous life” as advocated by Teddy Roosevelt, found its mark.⁴⁰ Perhaps more than any other figure, Roosevelt embodied the middle-class construction of a masculinity that could be squared with Christian reform. A dedicated “Progressive,” he championed social reform projects, even as he glorified the development of manly character through individual strength and will. Further, he moved easily between the building of manly character on the level of the individual and the building of a strong nation. For Roosevelt it was patently manifest that, “as it is with the individual, so it is with the nation;”⁴¹ just as individuals must assert their manhood through the strenuous life, nations must assert their strength through military might and active involvement in world affairs. As exemplified in his address on “The Strenuous Life,” Roosevelt championed a turn toward paternalistic imperialism on the part of the US, as a mark of national strength and manly character—an imperial turn which coincided closely with the missionary turn described in the previous chapter.

The views of Christian reformers on US imperialism ran the gamut, but were increasingly framed in terms of the Social Gospel. In general, these reformers were very

⁴⁰ On Roosevelt see the respective fifth chapters in Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization* and Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*.

⁴¹ Theodore Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life,” April 10, 1899, <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/roosevelt-strenuous-life-1899-speech-text/>. First line of fourth paragraph.

much in favor of the new treaties and legal developments opening the world to missionaries, regardless of how unequal those treaties might be, and they appreciated the technologies of communication and travel instituted by imperial forces.⁴² There was a general sense that these newly “opened doors” would not stay so, lending urgency to the missionary project, and impetus to missionary support for imperialist paternalism as a civilizational project—at the turn of the century, with US forces in Cuba and the Philippines, a majority of missionary advocates certainly hoped that US imperialism could function as an paternalistic instrument of Christianity and civilization. At the very core of their project was the idea that Christianity represented a fundamentally universal truth. Their commitment to world evangelization was inherently imperialist—but their attitudes toward imperialist force and toward colonialism varied. A growing number recognized and decried the brutal rapacity and decidedly “unchristian” conduct of imperialist forces. Increasingly, missionary advocates echoed the Social Gospel language of Progressive reformers calling for the “christianizing” of rapacious industrialists, in their exhortations that imperialist forces model Christian behavior in foreign lands. On the whole, missionaries in the field tended to become more progressive in their views as they navigated their imperial context, and for many, their experiences prompted a political turn that coincided with the political turn taken by Christian reform more generally in the Progressive Era.⁴³

The idea of foreign lands being open to Christian influence for a limited time was accompanied by an idea of these newly opened nations as “plastic,” but soon to be set. In a statement from 1913 that illustrates the development of a dominant strain in missionary attitudes about the non-Christian world, the Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions laid out this idea, framing the non-Christian lands as “plastic nations” to be molded by the West, either for good or ill:

As we study these awakening nations, we are more and more profoundly impressed both by the transforming power of the Spirit of God and by the large ability and promise of many peoples whom we have hitherto, in our ignorance, characterized as inferior to ourselves. We are realizing anew the truth of the sublime declaration of the Apostle Paul that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men,” and we are going to them not as superiors who condescendingly offer something to those who are beneath them, but as men who are going to their brother-men with that which has helped us and which we are sure can help them in like and even perhaps greater degree. Who took this spirit to Asia? The foreign missionary. He it was who opened the Scriptures to the peoples of the non-Christian world, who told them of the power of the new life, who founded the schools which quickened them to new activity, who built the hospitals which brought healing in the name and in the Spirit of the Great Physician, and who preached everywhere the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God. Unfortunately, this regenerating force is not the only influence which is operating upon Asia. The vices as well as the virtues of the West are pouring into the Far East. The agents of greed and lust swarm in the treaty ports, and there are not wanting men in

⁴² For list of treaties and developments “opening” the world to missionaries: Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, 86–87. These included India, China, Japan, Korea, Burma, Siam, Ottoman Empire, Africa, Mexico.

⁴³ Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 175–97. On missionaries as progressive, “American Protestant missions were thus an international extension of the Social Gospel, itself a faith-based wing of the Progressive movement.” (177)

Europe and America as well as in Asia who interpret the present opportunity in terms of commercial exploitation or political aggrandizement. Which force shall dominate? Which shall mould these now plastic nations?⁴⁴

The development of missionary attitudes described here was generally on the mark. Between the 1880s and the 1910s, missionaries who had initially imagined “the heathen” in terms of an arithmetic of souls, or of a blank slate on which to inscribe the Word of God (as described in the previous chapter,) now after an experience of the mission field, had a better appreciation for the humanity of their non-Christian “brothermen,” who were perhaps not as inferior as previously thought. Further, missionaries who had initially been concerned solely with evangelizing had now expanded that mission into Progressive social projects such as schools and hospitals, and into countering the imperialist “agents of greed and lust” in order to “mould these now plastic nations.” The idea of “the heathen” as an empty vessel awaiting evangelization had been largely overtaken by the idea of the “plastic nation” awaiting the imprint of Christian civilization—the highest form of which was increasingly considered to be a democratic republic like the United States.

This is clear in the writings of influential SVM evangelist and traveling YMCA foreign secretary Sherwood Eddy, who in his 1915 work, *The Students of Asia*, called on American students to serve as “missionary statesmen” in order to “raise up indigenous leaders for national regeneration, to mold a nation’s life, to guide the waking Orient.”⁴⁵ For Eddy, the problems of imperialism went beyond the greed and lust of the treaty ports; in his view, they were inherent to the civilizational project, which was “not only a constructive but also a revolutionary and destructive force.” Like many of his fellow missionaries, Eddy spoke explicitly of the adoption of the “new ideas, of liberty, of democracy, of the worth and rights of the individual,” and of “new national consciousness and a desire for self-government” as the outcome of missionary influence. While he, like many other missionaries, had mixed feelings about these aspirations as premature, he nonetheless considered them to be an integral part of the Christian mission to “these plastic nations.”⁴⁶

This conflation of the missionary project with the molding of the public life of “plastic nations” extended as well to the work of missionary women, who, at home, had not yet won the right to vote and were largely excluded from the political sphere. The 50th Jubilee issue of the YWCA Association Monthly in 1916 featured an article titled, “To What the King Has Called Us?” which reiterated the idea of the newly opened doors to the “great plastic nations” and asked, “What does [this] mean to us as a nation?” The article went on to quote Association leader John Mott as saying, “*Any idea or ideal that you wish to have dominate your nation, must first dominate the colleges of your nation,*” and then to extended that idea into the acceptable female sphere of work in education:

We who have been trained to teach cannot let opportunities to mold the entire educational system for women in a great plastic Eastern nation go unmet... We who

⁴⁴ Arthur J. Brown, “Extract from Address,” *Yale University Divinity News* 10, no. 2 (November 1913): 6.

⁴⁵ Sherwood Eddy, *The Students of Asia* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1915), 201.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 49–51.

have been learning how to face and grapple with great social problems, cannot stand idly by while mighty Oriental nations throw off their old non-Christian social systems and grope blindly to find something to put in their place.⁴⁷

By the 1910s, the YWCA, like the YMCA, was proposing to shape “plastic nations” in a Christian mold inspired by the Social Gospel.

Missionary interest in molding “plastic nations” was accompanied by a growing interest among Christian reformers in Christianizing the nation as such. The Social Gospel offered solid conceptual bases for the linking of Christian values and political democracy at the level of the nation. Samuel Zane Batten, a Baptist minister and founding member of Rauschenbusch’s “Brotherhood of the Kingdom” circle, offered one of the most thorough explorations of this link in his extensive 1909 work, *The Christian State: The State, Democracy, and Christianity*. In this work he argued that, “There are three great outstanding facts and phenomena of our modern world which overtop all others and are most potent in life; ... The State is a universal phenomenon, democracy is a universal drift, and Christianity, its followers believe, is the universal religion.”⁴⁸ For Batten, as for many other Progressive proponents of the Social Gospel, it was imperative for “the State to become Christian, and for Christianity to become political, and for both the State and Christianity to become democratic in spirit and form.”⁴⁹ Over a study of hundreds of pages, Batten elaborated the idea that “democracy is a product of the Christian spirit, that it is a confession in social and political relations of the great fact of brotherhood, and that in the fundamental truths of Christianity it has both its validity and its vitality.”⁵⁰ Given this assessment, it was clear to Batten that “democracy must become real as Christianity becomes regnant,”⁵¹ an assumption mirrored by the YMCA’s Sherwood Eddy in his above statement from *The Students of Asia*. For Batten, this conclusion followed logically from the theology of the Social Gospel. Like others who dedicated their lives to the establishment of the immanent Kingdom of God, he believed that “the supreme interest of mankind is the progress and perfection of the human race,”⁵² and that “in these times it has become very evident that not the individual, but society is the true unit, and that one must construe morality and progress in terms of social life.”⁵³ In a classic distillation of the core of the Social Gospel, Batten argued that,

The time has gone by when we can think of the extrication of the individual from all human relations and his perfection in isolation from his fellows. The time has come when the one who would think of salvation in any real and Christian sense must think of it as the salvation of the whole man with the perfection of the relations that are

⁴⁷ Margaret Burton, “To What the King Has Called Us?,” *The Association Monthly* 10, no. 1 (February 1916): 22–24.

⁴⁸ Samuel Zane Batten, *The Christian State: The State, Democracy and Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Griffith & Rowland Press, 1909), 9–10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 402.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 403.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 402.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 412.

inwrought into his very being. The salvation of the person in all the length and breadth of the term involves the salvation of the society of which he is a part.⁵⁴

If the Social Gospel showed that society was the “true unit” and, as Batten argued, the State was the “universal” system organizing society, then it was the State that must be Christianized. Batten was very clear that “the Christian State” did not depend on ecclesiastical identification but on a theologically liberal conception of Christian life, which he links to liberal Christianity on the level of the individual. He argued that, just as “a man is not a Christian because he subscribes to a certain creed or belongs to a certain church” but because he “has the spirit of Christ,” so, in scaling up,

a State does not become Christian when it incorporates the name of Christ in its constitution or opens the sessions of Congress with prayer; neither is a State Christian when certain theological ideas are embodied in its legislation and certain ecclesiastical functionaries dictate the policy of cabinets. In any real sense a State is Christian when it possesses the spirit of Christ and seeks certain great Christian ends in and through its life and service.⁵⁵

In *The Christian State*, Batten, as a prominent Social Gospel leader, called on Christian reformers to turn to the democratic state as “the medium through which the people shall co-operate in their search after the kingdom of God and its righteousness.”⁵⁶

Batten was not the only Christian reformer to devote extended treatises to the links between Christian principle and the nation as a political body. One erudite and influential work on the subject was produced by Episcopalian minister Elisha Mulford, in response to the crisis of nationhood that played out in the Civil War. *The Nation: The Foundations of Civil Order and Political Life in the United States* was first published in 1870, with regular reprints into the twentieth century and, significantly, a translation into Chinese for use by missionaries in 1914. After hundreds of pages of exposition of theories of the nation, Mulford arrived at the conclusion that “the nation ... is a moral organism... It consists in the moral order of the world, and its vocation is in the fulfillment of the divine purpose in humanity in history.”⁵⁷ This purpose he described as “the redemption of humanity, for the rights of humanity, —rights given to it by Him whose image it bears.”⁵⁸ Although the idea of the immanent Kingdom of God does not structure Mulford’s work as it does the works of later Social Gospel writers, he did specify repeatedly that the divine purpose of the nation is “the realization of the redemptive kingdom of the Christ.”⁵⁹ In support of this idea, Mulford turned to scripture; he argued that the Bible “has been and is the book of the life of nations.”⁶⁰ Of the nation of Judea,

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 408.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 12. After the First World War Batten would expand his ideas about the necessary intersection of Christianity and the democratic State into the international sphere in his work *The New World Order* (1919) a call for global governance on a Christian basis of social democracy and federation of nation-states. The title phrase would later suggest this work to 20th- and 21st-century conspiracy theorists who warned of the dangers to individual freedom and national sovereignty posed by global government.

⁵⁷ Elisha Mulford, *The Nation: The Foundations of Civil Order & Political Life in the United States* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1886), 382.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 381.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 418.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 382.

he wrote that it “lived although its walls were leveled to the ground, and the stones of its temple were scattered and broken,” because, as a nation, it “was formed in the relationships of life, and in the recognition of a relation to an invisible one; it did not exist simply as an accumulation of men and in the construction of an external order.”⁶¹ Although he did not rely on the term ‘social,’ Mulford anticipates the Social Gospel in placing great importance on the idea of relationships and of moral action in relation to others. While he did not introduce the idea of democracy as central to the nation as a Christian conception, he stressed the importance of rights and of equality before the law. “The law and the principle which are presented are universal....[and] show the ground of the life of every nation,”⁶² he asserted, and drew extensively from the scriptures in support of this idea. “One law shall be to him that is home-born, and to the stranger that sojourneth among you,” he quoted, and argued that in the Word of God,

The universality of law is affirmed—the requisition of all men to a judgment by the law, and the equality of all men before the law. It is repeated from page to page, and there is warning against its denial.⁶³

Mulford repeatedly stressed the idea of equality and inclusion in relation to the nation, perhaps not surprising given the context of Reconstruction. He argued that,

The nation is inclusive of the whole people in its divine foundation and its divine end. There is no difference of wealth, or race, or physical condition, that can be made the ground of exclusion from it. There is none in it that can be isolated from the privileges and the duties of the covenant in which it is formed.⁶⁴

In explicitly tying the political order of the nation as expressed through liberal ideals to the advancement of the divine purpose of God on earth, Mulford perhaps more than any other thinker paved the way for the political turn of later Christian reformers.

Domestically, this political turn ranged from anti-corruption and the establishment of “good government” policies at all levels, to the movement for municipal utilities, to campaigns for legislation against child labor, alcohol, and vice, as Progressive reformers framed their political projects in terms of Christian values and Social Gospelers turned to Christianizing the state. In the mission field, this political turn often translated to more or less indirect contributions to nationalist movements, as missionaries sought to educate and inspire the rising leaders of “plastic nations” with the “Christian spirit” and promote its manifestation around the globe. In China, an entire generation of Chinese revolutionaries was educated by Christian reformers—in fact, Sun Yat-Sen, founder of the Republic of China in 1912, had converted to Christianity. In the Ottoman Empire, Christian colleges in Constantinople and in Syria introduced the ideals of modern republican politics and government not only to young Turks but to Armenian nationalists and other ethnic minorities.⁶⁵ Of course, missionaries in the field

⁶¹ Ibid., 395.

⁶² Ibid., 410.

⁶³ Ibid., 395-396.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 397.

⁶⁵ See for instance: Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 195–97; Eleanor H. Tejirian and Reeva Spector Simon, *Conflict, Conquest, and Conversion: Two Thousand Years of Christian Missions in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 150–54.

held as wide a range of positions on nationalist movements as they did on imperialism more generally—but increasingly, as will be explored in the following chapter, they tended to consider such liberal ideals as equality before the law and democratic self-government to be, at some level, fundamentally Christian values, and however conflicted they might be, they tended to sympathize with the nationalist students in their classrooms and meeting halls.

It goes without saying that not all missionaries took this political turn—let alone the liberal turn or the turn toward the Social Gospel. The ideas of social sin and social salvation represented not only a significant break from the evangelicalism of the Second Great Awakening but from the Calvinism of the Reformation before it, and they generated a strong reaction among conservatives. Against the Social Gospel, some missionaries continued to preach the inherent sinfulness of man and the wrath of an angry God, and some Christian reformers held to the longstanding individualist conviction that wealth was the reward of virtue and poverty the punishment for sin.⁶⁶ As one conservative critic grumbled, Social Gospel writings would “lead people into the delusive hope that it is the machinery that is out of joint and not human nature.”⁶⁷ Against the New Theology, many held to their faith in the Bible as literal and absolute truth, and maintained their focus on winning souls to God through conversion, and not through pragmatic social service. As announced by one conservative Presbyterian missionary, “Gentlemen, I have not time to take the superintendence of your schools. I have given myself to the preaching of the Gospel.”⁶⁸ Between 1910 and 1915, at the height of the movement for the Social Gospel, conservatives—including missionary advocate Arthur Pierson, Charles Studd of the Cambridge Seven, and YMCA leader Robert Speer—produced a series of essays confirming conservative Christian beliefs, published as *The Fundamentals* and ultimately laying the foundation for what would become Christian fundamentalism.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, between 1890 and 1920, the trend was away from such conservatism, and Christian reformers were at the forefront of this movement. Christian reform now focused not only on perfecting individuals but increasingly on bringing them into more perfect association. Liberal theologian Shailer Mathews defined the Social Gospel as “the application of the teaching of Jesus and the total message of the Christian salvation to society, the economic life, and social institutions... as well as to individuals.”⁷⁰ Mathews, in his studies of Christian sociology, devoted considerable thought to the idea of the social in relation to the individual. In his work, *The Social Teachings of Jesus*, which was used as a study text by the YMCA, Mathews addressed this question as it applied to the process of reform:

Is this process to be institutional and national, or is it to be individualistic? Is society or are men first to be regenerate? It is a thought that finds frequent expression that Christianity introduced individualism. So indeed did Christianity, if by individualism is

⁶⁶ See for instance: May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, 197–200.

⁶⁷ As quoted in *Ibid.*, 197.

⁶⁸ As quoted in Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 179.

⁶⁹ See Dana Robert, *Occupy until I Come: A.T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003); Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*.

⁷⁰ Shailer Mathews as quoted in White and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel*, xi.

not meant atomism. For the Christian doctrine of society is not that of an aggregation of individuals made repellent through uncompromising demands for rights. The only sense in which Christianity can claim to be individualistic is in its elevation of the worth of each human life. But the real worth of every life consists not in separate existence, but rather in the identification of its interests with the interests of others in the exercise of that fraternal love which was both the ideal and the practice of Jesus himself. Yet a society must be composed of individuals, and therefore it was that Jesus devoted himself so largely to the individual. Reformations do not proceed *en masse*. There must be the successive winning of one man after another until there be developed something like a nucleus of a more perfect social life.⁷¹

While views of various Social Gospel thinkers varied somewhat on this subject, most aligned fairly closely with Mathews that while the end of reform must be the perfection of society as a whole, the means of reform still involved the individual. However, the focus of Christian work with the individual had shifted from the nurturing of a personal relationship with God to include the nurturing of Christian social relations between individuals. As Josiah Strong insisted, “modern civilization” had made “the whole world a neighborhood and every man a neighbor; ...God in his providence is making human relations so intimate and complex that they will become simply intolerable unless they are *right* relations, adjusted in harmony with the laws of the kingdom of God.”⁷² This was a new call for Christian social relations to be applied universally in everyday life, worldwide.

* * * * *

Between 1890 and 1920, the Christian reformers of the YMCA placed growing emphasis on the social and political aspects of their work. While they were slow to publicly associate themselves with the Social Gospel, with liberal theology, or with Progressive reform campaigns, by the turn of the twentieth century the idea of the immanent Kingdom of God had become central to their increasingly global project, and in the years before the First World War their program at home and in other nations was marked by the Progressive emphasis on the political. Further, the Christian reformers of the YMCA shared the assessment of the age that a social crisis was mounting, and that this crisis was the result of excessive individualism on one hand and of the corruption of the masses on the other. The response of the YMCA to this perceived crisis centered on bringing individuals into Christian association and on the inculcation of moral character, both fully in line with the approaches most common among Progressive and Social Gospel reformers.⁷³

About the YMCA, Sherwood Eddy wrote that, “there was much in that name, for there were three values, three mighty motivations, at the very heart of it. It was for *young men*; it was *Christian*; and it was an *association*. It had the dynamic of youth; it centered in Christ; and it sought to find all the potency that lay in union, in co-operation,

⁷¹ Shailer Mathews, *The Social Teaching of Jesus: An Essay in Christian Sociology* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897), 210–11. On the fact that it was used as a study text: White and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel*, 43.

⁷² Strong, *The New Era*, 345.

⁷³ For Progressives and the idea of association as a middle way between individualism and socialism, see McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*.

in association.”⁷⁴ For the YMCA at the turn of the twentieth century, the core problem remained the moral grounding of young men in the modern world—but as reformers became more aware of the structural impact of the social, their means and ends began to shift. During the Second Great Awakening, the perfection of the individual had been the end, and Christian association the means. In the age of the Social Gospel, both individual perfection *and* Christian association became ends. Association, the third motivation as highlighted by Eddy, gained the spotlight.

The YMCA had, from the first, considered itself to be a religious organization serving worldly social needs, and despite a good deal of conservative inertia at the top levels, its pragmatic and self-consciously practical approach to the work of Christian association inevitably brought it around toward the new idea of Christianizing all social relations as an end in itself. The organization still believed in the cultivation of Christian character as the solution to the crises of the city, the nation, and the world; but growing consciousness of social concerns drove its attention concurrently toward the “whole man” and the “whole world.” As the individual was increasingly conceived as an integrated system of body, mind, spirit, and social being, so was society being conceived as an integrated system as well—social, political, and spiritual. As an organization, the YMCA had been at the forefront of the propagation of these conceptions and their application to approaches to reform. Beginning in the late 1860s, Robert McBurney, a longstanding and powerful member of the International Committee (the directing body of the YMCA of the US and Canada), began to develop an idea of “a fourfold ministration to young men for the development of the physical, intellectual, social, and religious life,” and in doing so, in the estimation of later YMCA leaders, “became one of the pioneers of modern applied Christianity.”⁷⁵

By 1891, the idea of the integration of mind, body, and spirit was so central to the YMCA’s approach to work with young men that a symbol representing this integration was proposed and then adopted as the logo for the organization as a whole. The existing logo, adopted in 1881 by the World Alliance, had emphasized the idea of Christian Association for the “whole world”; it featured a ring inscribed with the names of the five parts of the globe and small monograms representing the name of the Association in various languages, encircling the Greek symbol for the name of Christ, overlaid by an image of the Bible open to the passage John 17:21, “That they may all be one.” In this passage, Jesus is referring to his disciples; the organization used the passage to refer first to the unity of the Associations and then to the unity of the world under God. Tellingly, Africa, Asia, and Oceania were prominently featured in the first logo before there was any Association presence in these regions to speak of.

⁷⁴ Eddy, *A Century with Youth*, 7.

⁷⁵ Lawrence Doggett, *Life of Robert R. McBurney* (Cleveland: F.M. Barton, 1902), 2–3.



Fig. 7. 1881 World Alliance logo and 1891 Triangle logo.
<http://www.ymca.net/sites/default/files/pdf/y-logo-history.pdf>

In 1891, Luther Gulick, the International Committee's Secretary for Physical Work under McBurney, introduced a new idea for a logo, a simple inverted equilateral triangle, with the words SPIRIT, MIND, and BODY inscribed on the respective sides, with SPIRIT at the top. Of this symbol, Gulick wrote, "The triangle stands, not for body or mind or spirit, but for the man as a whole. It does not aim to express these distinct divisions, but to indicate that the individual, while he may have different aspects, is a unit....Second, the triangle stands...for the symmetrical man, each part developed with reference to the whole, and not merely with reference to itself. ...This conception of unity and symmetry we believe to be the most fundamental and distinctive fact of the Young Men's Christian Association."⁷⁶ In support of this idea of the "whole man" Gulick referred first to the scriptures, listing multiple passages along the lines of Luke 10:27, "And He answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." He argued that the scriptures repeatedly referenced man as a unity of body, mind, and soul—in Gulick's words, "eternally approaching the model of perfection that is before us" in Christ, intellectually and physically as well as spiritually. Presumably in light of the traditional idea of the flesh as sinful and in opposition to the soul, Gulick defended the inclusion of the body as an essential and positive aspect in the unity of the "whole man" by again turning to scriptural references, first to the body as "a temple of the Holy Ghost," and then to the idea of the resurrection of the body as detailed in Corinthians. Gulick went on to reinforce the idea of the unity of the "whole man" with reference to science, and interestingly, to "the history of nations":

The scientific grounds for this belief are as certain and well formed as the scriptural. The modern psychology is all in the line of showing that body and mind are not two separate and individual essences, but that each is so wedded to the other that it is impossible for us to see where one begins or the other ends, or for us to trace anything which, affecting the one, does not also affect the other. The history of nations proves that physical welfare is always connected with the welfare of mind and spirit.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Luther H. Gulick, "What the Triangle Means," *Young Men's Era* 20, no. 3 (January 18, 1894): 14.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Gulick's "history of nations" assertion was probably a reference to the supposed physical weakness and effeminacy of educated men in China, and possibly also to the supposed weakness of 'mind and spirit' of conquered peoples subject to colonial rule. In either case, Gulick was suggesting the applicability of the YMCA's work with the "whole man" to the fate of nations.

Importantly, in explicating the symbol of the triangle, Gulick repeatedly used the term “character” interchangeably with “spirit” as the uppermost aspect of the “whole man.” For him, and increasingly for the organization as a whole, Christian spirit was no longer solely a matter of an individual relationship with God. Christian spirit was a matter of character, as character was a matter of Christian spirit—the term implies a performance of Christian values in relation to others more than it does a reverent inner life.

By the 1890s, McBurney’s “fourfold work,” physical, intellectual, social, and religious, was well established in Associations across the country. However, while the organization as a whole was increasingly turning toward the idea of the advancement of the Kingdom of God through the perfection of Christian character and ultimately through the cultivation of Christian social relations, the focus was still on the individual as the first approach to reform, and the social was not generally considered to represent a constituent aspect of the individual. For Gulick, the approaches to work did not necessarily correspond to tripartite nature of man, as he had formulated it. As he explained it, “Sometimes the triangle is criticised in that it does not stand for the social and economic lines of work of the Young Men's Christian Association. The answer is that the triangle does not stand for lines of work at all, but simply for the complete man. Under each department of his nature there may be as many lines of work as are desired.” The physical man could be socially engaged in sport, the intellectual man socially engaged in lecture and discussion, and the spiritual man in prayer groups and Bible study classes. In the early years of the Social Gospel, Gulick and many of his contemporaries in the organization were slow to apprehend the full implications of the idea of man as a social being, even as, in practice, their approach to the work had already begun to make that turn.

A suggestion of the social was reintroduced to the logo to an extent with the merging of the triangle and the World Alliance logo in 1896, creating the official logo that would be used by the YMCA of North America for the next century and more. The two rings which framed the regions of the world in the World Alliance logo were added around the triangle, to stand for the unity of the Association in love and brotherhood, and for the “whole world” as the sphere of Christian association, respectively. The organization’s representative symbol now encompassed the “whole man” and the “whole world,” as well as a reference to Christ and to the Biblical passage, “That they may all be one.”

It was not controversial to claim, as Gulick did, that the YMCA was at the forefront of the application of the idea of the “whole man” to the project of reform. As he asserted,

The Young Men's Christian Association is the only great institution of the world which, in a large way, is putting this belief into actual practice. It aims at the salvation and up-building of the whole man to a greater extent than does any other institution in the world, both in respect to unity and symmetry. The triangle, in symbolizing the man, also symbolizes the association. Our work cannot be represented by the physical, plus the intellectual, plus the social, plus the spiritual, each one standing alone: for the



Fig. 8. Longstanding official logo of the YMCA of North America. <http://www.ymca.net/sites/default/files/pdf/y-logo-history.pdf>

relations that exist between them render each far more valuable than it would be by itself. ... And so we have our gymnasiums and our educational classes, our libraries, reading-rooms, and our religious work, a unit in conception, a complete rounded whole.⁷⁸

The organization had long valued practical application over doctrine or theory, and to an extent, as Gulick suggests here, the triangle as an idea was formulated to represent the work as it was already being conducted in practice. Further, the triangle had practical value as a promotional device; as Gulick later reflected, “We wanted something that would work well in designs on sweaters, on letterheads, on signs of buildings, and it seems as if the Triangle met these conditions pretty well.”⁷⁹

The structure and composition of the YMCA, as it had developed over the previous half-century, tended to allow for and promote an approach to reform that involved the “whole man” and the “whole world.” It had always been transatlantic, non-denominational, and built around lay professionals, and from the beginning, it had embraced new and pragmatic organizational and promotional techniques, and responded with sensitivity to the interests and desires of its constituency. Each of these factors encouraged a broadening of its original focus, from the evangelization of the individual toward a ministrations to the “whole man” as an approach to the reform of the “whole world.” The transatlantic roots of the organization in the revivals of Finney and Moody and through the series of World’s Fairs on both sides of the Atlantic were further cultivated in ongoing international correspondence and regular international conferences of the World Alliance. The aim of the Student Volunteer Movement, as an offshoot of the YMCA, to “evangelize the world in this generation,” was an extension of this international consciousness, as was the turn toward the expansive concept of the Kingdom of God as extending over the Earth as a whole.⁸⁰ Secondly, the self-consciously non-denominational orientation of the organization, and its strict disavowal of sectarianism and careful internal proscription of doctrinal disputes, allowed it to aspire to a greater Christian unity and to lay down a broader and more solid foundation for Christian association. The YMCA was not the first nor the only non-denominational reform organization but it became perhaps the most influential, an important forerunner and contributor to the ecumenical movement, which itself sought a universal extension of Christian association.⁸¹

The fact that the YMCA was built around lay professionals instead of volunteers or clergy was key, both to developing top-down organizational strength, and to incorporating and channeling bottom-up passions and interests. In both cases, this structural factor stimulated an expansion beyond the original narrow focus on religious

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Luther H. Gulick, “What the Red Triangle Stands For,” *Association Men* 43, no. 10 (June 1918): 774, 809.

⁸⁰ *International, transnational, transatlantic, global...* I use international and transatlantic because I believe the first best represents the way these Christian reformers ultimately conceived of their alliances as rooted in nations and not merely transcending them, and the second best describes where these roots had been put down and where they were most fully developed at this point; the YMCA movement would later become global as it developed indigenous leadership.

⁸¹ See for instance: Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 134.

work to a broader work with the “whole man.” Lay leadership allowed for flexibility in organizational structure and specialization. It resulted in closer ties to the business world with its abundant funds and its innovative organizational and promotional techniques, and in an appreciation for the practical and the efficient. The YMCA’s system of paid professional secretaries made possible the construction of grand buildings that in turn structured the work with the “whole man;” it made possible the extensive promotion necessary for the funding of its expanding work; it made possible rigorous fact-finding and record-keeping, a relentless cycle of meetings and conferences, and countless publications, all of which supported an extension of its mission. At the same time, as the organization built this powerful and expansive structure, it continued to capitalize on the active involvement of its constituency. Its careful avoidance of controversy allowed it to cater simultaneously to the desires of its funders and of its members, advancing on one hand a response to the perceived social crisis through the fostering of Christian character, and on the other, spiritual fellowship, high-quality education, and the shared discipline and recreation of sport. The work with the “whole man” was both a result of this structural framework, and its *raison d’être*.

This structural framework and practical approach to an expanded mission tended to make the organization progressive in spite of itself. While its most prominent leaders were often somewhat conservative and resisted the turn toward the Social Gospel, toward theological liberalism, and toward Progressive causes more generally, the organizational disposition of the YMCA placed it squarely in the realm of middle-class Progressive reform. For the most part, it shared with other Progressive agencies a confidence in the good of human nature if correctly disciplined; a confidence in elite expertise as serving the public interest; and a confidence in the power of efficiency, scientific advancement, and organization. Further, it shared in the Progressive cause of educating for political involvement, as well as a certain impulse to limit such involvement to the properly educated.⁸² Like Progressive reform projects more generally, the YMCA retained its focus on the city, and in 1908 Social Gospel leader Josiah Strong, in an address titled “The Problem of the City,” clearly apprehended the implications for political education in the project of the YMCA, calling its work “statesmanlike,” and celebrating its success in meeting newcomers “in a Christian spirit,” and making them “acquainted with our free institutions.” In a piece published in the YMCA’s official periodical, Strong asserted,

“The only way to make the city capable of self-government is to make the citizen capable of self-government. I congratulate the Young Men’s Christian Association that its work is chiefly in the city—precisely the place of crisis, and that its mission is to young men and boys—precisely the classes which a generation hence will make the city fit or unfit to dominate the nation. ...The city is to be saved, for otherwise the Kingdom cannot come.”⁸³

While it was slow in registering the full implications for social reform inherent in the Social Gospel, the YMCA was generally aligned with most of its tendencies. From

⁸² On civic involvement and limiting citizenship, Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 393–94.

⁸³ Josiah Strong, “The Problem of the City,” *Association Men* 33, no. 10 (July 1908): 462–63.

the 1890s, it used Social Gospel texts as study materials in standardized courses, including Shailer Mathews' *The Social Teachings of Jesus*, Washington Gladden's *Who Wrote the Bible?* and Walter Rauschenbusch's *Social Problems and the Teachings of Jesus*.⁸⁴ Richard Morse, a longstanding member of the International Committee, had been a featured presenter at Josiah Strong's 1885 "Interdenominational Congress in the Interest of City Evangelization," positioning the YMCA in the forefront of Christian reform efforts addressing the social crisis of the city, (and making a case for the support of YMCA building campaigns by Social Gospel reformers). The YMCA's core ideas of the "whole man" and "whole world" were also prominent in the thought of the Social Gospel. For Rauschenbusch, the Kingdom of God clearly encompassed the "whole world;" it also represented "the great synthesis in which the regeneration of the spirit, the enlightenment of the intellect, the development of the body, the reform of political life, the sanctification of industrial life, and all that concerns the redemption of humanity shall be embraced."⁸⁵ Shailer Mathews also subscribed to this idea; he believed that "in the thought of Jesus, the individual man is a unity, which is the outcome of the organic combination of two complementary elements, body and soul. Humanity in its unit is thus a union."⁸⁶

One of the more prominent voices pushing the YMCA in the direction of the Social Gospel was that of Graham Taylor, a Social Gospel leader and professor of Christian Sociology at the Chicago YMCA Training School. His series of outlines for study and discussion of social problems were published in the organization's official periodical, in successive issues from 1894 through 1895, and he regularly presented at conventions and conferences on such topics as "What Must Society Do to be Saved?" and "Sociological Aspects of the Work." At the International Convention of 1895 in Springfield, Taylor offered what has been called an "epochal address" on "The Relations of the Y.M.C.A.'S to the Social-Economic Questions of the Day," later published and distributed by the International Committee.⁸⁷ In the address, he credited the "four-fold work" of the YMCA as "one of the earliest recognitions of the unity of the whole man" as a Social Gospel principle, and then went on to explicitly link the value that the YMCA had always placed on *association* with the emerging focus on Christian social relations, as represented in the Social Gospel. He used that link to call on the YMCA to further engage in the Christianizing of social relations worldwide:

The fundamental principle that underlies this great movement of the common heart and mind is the associative principle. The organization of young men is one of the first products of this age of association. Brethren, I want you to magnify your birthright...In associating young men together you only began the associative progress which was to broaden until you have given the church the only widely recognized, interdenominational representative of common Christianity constantly at work on the world-field. ...You are furnishing a common ground for the co-operative effort of

⁸⁴ White and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel*, 43; Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 377; Galen M. Fisher, *Public Affairs and the Y.M.C.A.: 1844-1944* (New York: Association Press, 1948), 82.

⁸⁵ Rauschenbusch, "Brotherhood of The Kingdom."

⁸⁶ Mathews, *The Social Teaching of Jesus: An Essay in Christian Sociology*, 27.

⁸⁷ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 396, 398.

common Christianity for the common humanity, on the city, home and foreign fields. It is a superb and splendid mission.⁸⁸

He went on to make clear the extent to which he saw this mission not only in terms of bringing the Kingdom of God, but also specifically in terms of educating for national citizenship:

For such a time as this...the Young Men's Christian Association has come to its kingdom to do all it has been so grandly doing, and these things besides: To make of ourselves and our buildings centers for the social unification of the mixed and disunited hosts of young men;... to make of some of our meetings and educational classes schools in which the young men of the nation may study and learn their social and civic rights and duties as a part of their citizenship and religion; to raise up an intelligent body of young men who will know too much to take partisan sides and who will be too loyal to the commonwealth both of our country and of the Kingdom of God to engage the fratricidal strife of class warfare.⁸⁹

Taylor's call for citizenship training here was structured as an appeal to the higher moral ground of the center, and he went on to make this idea explicit:

Only by taking a stand in between the divisive lines of caste and class and partisanship; by leading into the middle of the road; by making of our buildings common ground for all, and of ourselves middlemen—so only can we fulfill our supreme duty and opportunity in the 'present crisis' to become 'peace makers' and leaders of our common Christianity in saving the soul and the social relations of America's young manhood.⁹⁰

This idea of the middle-class reformer as the "middleman," as mediating the crisis from the measured and responsible center, was a core aspect of Christian reform, and was elaborated in YCMA policy as the policy of the "Zone of Agreement."⁹¹ As a corollary to the injunction on controversial topics, this policy tended to allow reformers to avoid the application of Christian principles to problems of social injustice, on the basis of a forced equivalency between two sides of a conflict.

While YMCA would, over the long term, follow Taylor in professing the Social Gospel, and the International Committee repeatedly gave him a platform and shared and amplified his voice, the immediate response of the Association leadership was conservative. Taking the stage immediately after Taylor at the 1895 International Convention, Cephas Brainerd, the third member of the International Committee's core triumvirate with McBurney and Morse, began by asserting that "there does not seem to be anything in the present conditions to justify the Associations in going beyond the limits of the well-defined work in which they are now engaged." While it was known that Brainerd himself was conservative, in representing the International Committee his argument was based not on principle but on practical considerations; he contended that "there is no occasion for haste" and that further study was needed, and he warned that "It is hardly wise for the Associations to employ as a teacher upon these complicated

⁸⁸ *Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth International Convention of Young Men's Christian Associations* (The International Committee of Young Men's Christian Associations, 1889), 120–21.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 125–26.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Fisher, *Public Affairs and the Y.M.C.A.*, 93.

subjects—as to which agitation is sometimes thought to threaten the stability of the Government—men who are not even masters of the primers which treat them, or men who, according to the best Association judgment, are not capable of taking the broadest Christian view of the subjects involved.”⁹² The following week, Taylor spoke at length on the Social Gospel at the Secretaries’ Conference at Hartford, and McBurney, representing the International Committee, responded by echoing Brainerd’s argument against any immediate expansion beyond the work with young men. There followed an exchange of papers and positions that ran the gamut from one secretary’s defense of the individualist position that “If a man’s heart is changed he will change his own conditions,” to the more or less measured support for social action by several other secretaries.⁹³ Given the broader context of the Panic and accompanying industrial violence, feelings on these topics ran high, and in such cases the official response was to refer to its strict prohibition on Association involvement in controversial issues, a position inherited from the age of abolition. The outcome of the debate on direct involvement in social reform was inconclusive, and did not produce any change in official policy. The organization continued, for the next two decades, to make space for its Social Gospel adherents, but to offer no official extension of the work along such lines. This gave individual Christian reformers within the organization a fair amount of leeway in their work—and local secretaries and especially those involved in the YMCA training schools tended to be less conservative than the leadership. The rule against involvement in controversy allowed for unity of the Association despite disagreement on these issues, and it allowed for the organization to continue to capitalize on the energy of the Social Gospel without endorsing its positions. It also produced a certain amount of confusion about the disposition of the organization. In the 1910s, in fact, philanthropist Edward S. Harkness withdrew his support on the grounds that the Association was too conservative, while James Stokes did the same on the grounds that it was too theologically liberal.⁹⁴

While it was slow to officially take the turn toward the Social Gospel, the YMCA was certainly involved in the political turn taken by Progressive reform more generally. Again, it did not necessarily publicize this stance, and, as noted by politically active YMCA leader Galen Fisher in his book on the subject, “No specific pronouncement on policy as to public affairs was adopted by any International Convention between 1880 and 1915.”⁹⁵ However, in 1893, the official YMCA periodical had declared, “Practical interest in public affairs is practical Christianity,” and while the editors warned against endorsement of any specific party or candidate, they clearly advocated working against political corruption and for good government and morality in politics—and such involvement became widespread and was less controversial than engagement in social reform.⁹⁶ Beginning in the 1890s, the International Committee’s Educational Department, under George B. Hodge, published and distributed course outlines and

⁹² *Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth International Convention of Young Men’s Christian Associations.*, 126-128. For significance of Taylor-Brainerd debate see Fisher, *Public Affairs and the Y.M.C.A.*, 56-61.

⁹³ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 400.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 512.

⁹⁵ Fisher, *Public Affairs and the Y.M.C.A.*, 71.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 393-94.

study guides, including those by Graham Taylor described above. The 1894 introduction to a course titled “Political and Social Science” stated that, “The Associations...should not fail in affording to the thousands of young men in their membership the best possible instruction in all matters pertaining to good citizenship.”⁹⁷ From the 1890s, such training was broadly adopted as integral to the “fourfold work.” The Educational Department offered course outlines for training in “Good Citizenship,” for involvement in “Municipal Government,” and for an “Association City Council,” whose aims were listed as,

1. To gain a theoretical knowledge of civil and municipal administration.
2. To gain practice in the rules of parliamentary usage and public speaking.
3. To gain knowledge of the city sociologically.⁹⁸

Many Associations established clubs devoted to good citizenship, as well as mock City Councils and mock Congresses designed to familiarize members with the workings of government and to encourage their civic involvement. The Educational Department’s 1901 introduction to the course outline on “Municipal Betterment” stated that,

There is a growing conviction that young men should become intelligently acquainted with both the practical workings and the underlying principles of civic affairs—national, state and municipal. There is also need that they learn the moral fact that a vital relation should exist between civic righteousness and political life and business.⁹⁹

Further, in its introduction to the course on “Social Economics and Political Science” that year, it asserted that, “In fact, the very safety and prosperity of our country demand that our young men shall ... really understand the great social and economic questions of the day...and so be able to use their influence, whether in business or in society or at the polls, wisely, effectively, and safely.”¹⁰⁰

Even more telling, Chicago Secretary L. Wilbur Messer (deemed “somewhat conservative” by Galen Fisher¹⁰¹) offered a report on “The Present Standing of the American Young Men’s Christian Associations” to the 1898 World Conference in Basel, stressing that, “the associations have become normal centers for training in civic and social questions. Partisanship we ignore, but the great fundamentals, which must be considered in the redemption of society as a whole, are taught in our associations, thus promoting pure and true citizenship.”¹⁰² He emphasized that civic leaders readily appreciated the value of the YMCA to this end, and noted that “in America many of the leaders in national, state and city life are members and participants in association work. The last three presidents of the republic have warmly and cordially endorsed and approved the work while in office, and two of them have served as presidents of associations.” He went on to quote then-President McKinley as stating that, “The

⁹⁷ Quoted in Fisher, *Public Affairs and the Y.M.C.A.*, 52.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

⁹⁹ George B. Hodge and Young Men’s Christian Associations International Committee Educational Department, eds., *Information, Statistics and Suggestions: Annual Report 1901* (New York: International Committee, 1901), 53.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

¹⁰¹ Fisher, *Public Affairs and the Y.M.C.A.*, 60.

¹⁰² *Festbericht der XIV. Internationalen Konferenz der Christlichen Jünglingsvereine vom 6. bis 10. Juli 1898 in Basel* (Basler Druck- und Verlags-Anstalt, 1898), 110.

demand of the time and the need of the hour is the young man securely grounded in honesty; the man of pure character. This is the highest thing we can have... [Due to the YMCA,] religion and morality are no longer scoffed at; no longer the badge of weaklings and enthusiasts, but of distinction, enforcing respect even from those who do not believe in the Christian religion."¹⁰³ Like President Roosevelt after him, McKinley linked a specifically masculine Christian strength to national character and recognized the YMCA for its success in inculcating both.¹⁰⁴

As in the case of gendered appeals to prospective missionaries, such appeals to civic engagement on the basis of masculine strength did not preclude the women of the Associations from engaging with and promoting ideals of "Christian citizenship." Until 1906, the Young Women's Christian Association was still effectively two separate organizations—a Student YWCA based on college campuses and closely aligned with the Student YMCA and with the SVM, and the City YWCA, focused on the problems of young women in the city, and more closely aligned with other Christian reform groups organized by and for women. These two organizations had somewhat different orientations toward social questions and toward reform more generally.¹⁰⁵ The Student YWCA did not effectively differ on these matters from the Student YMCA, with whom it participated in the SVM, and it took the turn toward the Social Gospel slowly, maintaining a focus on world evangelization and individual spiritual development. The city-based YWCA, with its old ties to longstanding reform causes and new ties to the settlement house movement, was more focused on the details of practical everyday service to women, and was better attuned to the social forces affecting them. These YWCA leaders were also in some ways more openly conscious of women's issues and of class differences, as middle-class women struggled to live up to their ideal of a "democratic spirit" within the organization while serving all classes of young women in the cities.¹⁰⁶ Through the 1906 merger of the city and campus organizations into a single national YWCA, most discussion of "democracy" as an ideal referenced internal organizational politics and not national citizenship. A 1914 YWCA study guide for a class on "Christian Citizenship for Girls" asked,

"Men and women are to be kingdom-builders together always, but somehow in this home-part, which is at the very beginnings of all life, we find our special heritage. Many of the girls and women you know may be living outside of a home, in the surface sense of the word, but when you come to think your way into their lives, if they are womanly, can you ever think of them apart from that world?"¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ For more on "muscular Christianity," see: Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁵ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46*, 16–18.

¹⁰⁶ On "Christian Citizenship" in the YWCA and ways in which black leaders of the YWCA pressed their white counterparts to be true to these ideals, see Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46*. On ideals of industrial democracy, see Dorothea Browder, "A 'Christian Solution of the Labor Situation': How Workingwomen Reshaped the YWCA's Religious Mission and Politics," *Journal of Women's History* 19, no. 2 (June 25, 2007): 85–110.

¹⁰⁷ Helen Thoburn, *Christian Citizenship for Girls* (New York: National Board of the Young Women's Christian Associations of the United States of America, 1914), 59–60.

Such a stance on women's citizenship was widely held, but still contested, in the YWCA, as revealed in the report in the organization's official periodical by YWCA leader Edith Terry Bremer on a 1916 National Conference on Immigration and Americanization, involving civic, religious, and educational leaders from across the nation. Bremer, herself actively involved with such work and considered by one historian to be moderately socially progressive, criticized the YWCA delegates at the conference for being overly "concerned with 'citizenship and naturalization,' together with 'giving the immigrant our American ideals'" instead of serving women immigrants as "*women*, [with] their own particular needs of protection, of help in their tragically complicated home problems, and of a type of a type of education that will recognize their prejudices and limitations." She added snidely that "the fact of there being women immigrants who, until there is a universal suffrage, could not possibly be reached on those grounds...seemed forgotten."¹⁰⁸

Not all YWCA Secretaries drew such a distinction between the problems of women and the problems of citizenship. Among those eloquently arguing for women's civic interest in the nation despite lack of suffrage rights was Anna Estelle Paddock, who served as a YWCA secretary in China from 1905 to 1913. In 1916, in a long essay in the official YWCA periodical, she made the case that the YWCA had a duty "to train its membership to daily service to the nation" through civic education, and to encourage women to re-work the ideal of patriotism in the Christian spirit to emphasize peace and friendship between nations rather than warlike nationalism, which she associated with men. "Our very cradle songs are attuned to the militaristic and non-social organization of the world," she lamented, and proposed that women might "re-write the hymns of the nation." She carefully skirted the idea of suffrage, arguing that those who wanted the vote should educate themselves in public affairs now, and that those who were content to be represented by their fathers, husbands, and sons, still "must, in order to train men to rule the nation, be [themselves] conversant with the affairs of that nation." Such education, she suggested, "would seem a reasonable effort for any patriotic citizen, man or woman."¹⁰⁹ With the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, the YWCA finally took the political turn with gusto. Beginning in 1920 it published and distributed a series of pamphlets on citizenship training for women, arguing for active involvement in public affairs and the development of "a democratic spirit and a social consciousness."¹¹⁰ It asserted that, "There is no other work more useful than this promotion of the individual worth and civic ability of the members of a democracy," and that "all women who have any opportunity should interest themselves for the next few years in training the younger women and girls through the schools, through clubs, and all sorts organizations, to be

¹⁰⁸ Edith Terry Bremer, "National Conference on Immigration and Americanization," *The Association Monthly* 10, no. 2 (March 1916): 65–66; Raymond Mohl, "Cultural Pluralism in Immigrant Education: The YWCA's International Institutes, 1910–1940," in *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, ed. Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt (New York; London: New York University Press, 1997). See Mohl on Bremer.

¹⁰⁹ Anna Estelle Paddock, "A Woman's Patriotism," *The Association Monthly* 10, no. 7 (August 1916): 292–94.

¹¹⁰ See also, Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906–46*, 79.

more interested, intelligent, clear-thinking and socially-minded voters.”¹¹¹ While the YWCA fully embraced the project of training women as Christian citizens, this project remained haunted by the gendered ideals of citizenship as advanced by the YMCA, and through the 1920s Association women continued to make the case for their programs for civic education not in terms of universals but in terms of their special mission to women.

While it had not necessarily been at the forefront of the broader political turn in Progressive reform, by 1907 the YMCA had fully committed itself to the cause of educating for civic involvement. The speakers at the 1907 Convention in Washington, D.C., included many civic dignitaries and celebrated this particular cause as fundamental to the work of the YMCA. The British ambassador opened with an address on “The Christian Citizen and the Nation,” exhorting young men to serve their nations in their “public capacity as Christians.” Like many advocates of YMCA civic involvement, he began by scaling up from the individual to the social, and then to the political, arguing that, “You have banded yourselves together in your Association to apply not only the precepts but also the spirit of Christianity to life. You want to show, by your example, that there are no principles so fertile, so vivifying, so universal, so unerring, as the principles delivered to us in the Gospel. If that is true of individual life and of social life, so it is also true of public life and public work.” He continued by linking the political back to the social, and ultimately back to the individual, asking, “What is the state except the greatest of all organizations created for the promotion of the common welfare?” Finally, he contended, “Your Christian faith bids you [to public work] because it bids you help your neighbor, and because it gives you a standard of truth and of duty which [applies] equally to politics as to every other part of your life.”¹¹² This call to public work on the basis of the universal applicability of Christian principle, scaling up from the individual to the nation, had by 1907 become standard in YMCA language, and was a note struck repeatedly at the Convention. The US Secretary of the Department of Commerce and Labor, Oscar Straus, similarly called on the YMCA to “teach the principles of Democracy,” as founded in “Divine Law;”

America is the land of opportunity. Democracy has opened the door of opportunity to every man and woman. But because of this it is necessary to teach the principles of Democracy to all men. The Association, founded on the broad principles of religion, is qualified to do this....The principle, laid down in the Declaration of Independence, that all men are free and equal, is more than a glittering generality. It is founded upon the bedrock of ethical laws and upon the highest conception of the Divine Law. And no better work can be done by the Young Men’s Christian Association than to teach young men, aliens and native born, the basic principles of our government.¹¹³

William Jennings Bryan, as keynote speaker, linked Christian involvement in public service to the theological shift from transcendence to immanence, stating that, “Ministers for many years took the text: ‘Christ brought life and immortality to light’ and

¹¹¹ L.C. Staples, “Training for Citizenship,” *The Association Monthly* 14, no. 7 (July 1920): 323.

¹¹² James Bryce, “The Christian Citizen and the Nation,” *Association Men* 33, no. 3 (December 1907): 114.

¹¹³ Oscar Straus, “Secretary of Commerce and Labor Oscar Straus on the Association and the Workingman,” *Association Men* 33, no. 3 (December 1907): 120–21.

emphasized ‘immortality.’ Today they emphasize ‘life.’ Formerly men studied the Bible to learn about Heaven; now they wish to know how to live in this world.” He affirmed that, “Christ shows that if we would be helped we must help others; if we would be strong we must strengthen our brethren; if we would be lifted up, we must strive to elevate our fellows.” Scaling up, he asserted that this was true of nations as it was of individuals, and must be furthered by Christian example. Bryan concluded with a statement of faith and belief that “more and more Christ’s teachings are to be applied to the great problems of the world.”¹¹⁴

The 1907 Convention also featured an address on “The Call of the Nation.”

If ... you would judge aright the power and the worth of the Young Men’s Christian Association movement you must set it against the democratic background of your national life. You must estimate its influence as a force in the making of the nation

In a moral world, the first things in life are moral. It must be made plain that moral distinctions, obligations, retributions obtain in all the relations of life and as well for cities and states and nations as for individuals. ...

This Association can answer the call of the nation by making stronger than cords of feel those bonds of inter-nationhood that hold together in one brotherhood the nations represented in this convention. Let this international Association be an instrument in the hand of the Prince of Peace ... [to] teach the world the meaning and the beauty of international peace and good will.

The nation calls to you to believe, and to teach it to all your fellows...the indefeasible moral right of worldwide human service. Having taught the Orient our science and our arts and the secrets of our military power, we must teach them also the moral sanctions, the ideals, the inner springs of our life...Missions are an obligation we owe to the peoples of the East, not only that they may come to know the Lord whom we serve, but also as a high duty to the nations and lands we call our own.¹¹⁵

This speaker, like the ambassador, scaled his argument up from the individual, to the city, the nation, and ultimately to the world, linking Christian morality to political duty, to democratic idealism. Increasingly, as in this address, YMCA members were being called to “worldwide human service” through political engagement on a Christian basis nationally and internationally, and especially on the mission field.

The concluding address of the convention was on “The Outreach of the Associations to Non-Christian Lands,” by Robert E. Speer, a prominent leader and missionary advocate in both the YMCA and the SVM since the 1880s. Speer, a speaker so popular that he ranked with John Mott and Sherwood Eddy in appeal, brought together in his address the call for public service with the old tropes of the missionary advocates. He began by harkening back to the arithmetic of souls that had been so widespread in the 1880s, and then continued with the language of universal brotherhood, referencing the more recent idea of the “organic whole:”

There are as many men in Africa as there are men, women, and children in the United States. There are as many men in India as there are people in North and South America with Great Britain thrown in. These and others have never heard of Christ.

¹¹⁴ Bryan, “Christ in the Life of Men.”

¹¹⁵ John A. Macdonald, “The Call of the Nation,” *Association Men* 33, no. 3 (December 1907): 115–16.

They are not strangers. They are our brothers in very fact. They have different speech, skins and traditions. But we shall all stand together as men and brethren before a common Father at the last. Humanity is one great organic whole. If one part suffers all suffer.

He then itemized three approaches to “reach these men,” first echoing the call for Christian example in terms similar to Bryan’s, and finishing with a statement about the universal nature of the field, and the universal need for the same Christian-inspired political institutions, calling for Christian reformers to “render aid by projecting in non-Christian lands those institutions which accomplish desired results here. The field in these lands is much the same as our own,” he asserted. Speer ended with the language of “plastic nations,” and with another echo of Bryan in the idea that “if we would be lifted up, we must strive to elevate our fellows;” and finally, he scaled the universal “law of Christ” up from the individual—as had almost every other speaker:

We live in a plastic world. ... The East is changing more rapidly than any other part of the world. In her second youth we must gather her men up at the feet of the Son of God. Our own Christian life will depend on our outreach for these men. It is the law of Christ. ... This law applies to institutions no less inflexibly than to individuals.¹¹⁶

The 1907 YMCA Convention, with its roster of national and international political leaders as speakers recognizing and promoting the YMCA’s approach to “the call of the nation,” proved the extent to which the Association movement had thrown itself into educating for “Christian citizenship.” On the basis of ideas about the immanence of the Kingdom of God, about the need to minister to the “whole man,” and about the importance of “Christian social relations” among individuals, groups, and nations, the Associations set themselves the task of training their constituencies at home and around the world in the application of Christian principle to their duties and responsibilities in the political life of the nation.

* * * * *

Looking back from the vantage point of 1948, Galen Fisher, a prominent YMCA secretary who served in Japan and later worked to improve race relations in Berkeley, California, reflected on the early work of the YMCA and was struck by how completely the work emphasized the individual. Of the first generations of his organization, he noted:

They were obsessed by the conviction that if men were only saved—that is, freed from the bondage of sin—then they would naturally live in harmony with others, and society would be rid of its evils. They seem never to have realized the truism of today, that unjust or dishonest institutions may make it practically impossible for the individuals caught in their meshes to be consistent Christians. They were still under the spell of the excessive individualism of the Protestant tradition.¹¹⁷

As Fisher suggested, his own generation had begun to turn away from this “excessive

¹¹⁶ Robert E. Speer, “The Outreach of the Associations to Non-Christian Lands,” *Association Men* 33, no. 3 (December 1907): 126–27.

¹¹⁷ Fisher, *Public Affairs and the Y.M.C.A.*, 35.

individualism.” As the turn of the twentieth century approached, Christian reformers increasingly engaged with ideas of the social. The sense of moral crisis that had pervaded Christian reform movements was superseded by a sense of social crisis, in conjunction with a theological shift in Christian reform toward the Social Gospel. To this point, these reformers had seen social problems through a religious lens and addressed them through religious solutions emphasizing the conversion of the individual, and while these approaches persisted into the twentieth century, Christian reformers increasingly turned to social and political solutions as well.

However, even as these reformers became more conscious of the social nature of the problems they sought to address, the solutions they imagined for the most part remained rooted in the moral character of the individual. The call for “Christian social relations” was a call for individuals, groups, and nations all to relate to each other on the basis of Christian principle—but the rhetorical habit of scaling up, as described above, tended to conflate the nature of the individual, the group, and the nation, belying the need to treat problems of a social character differently from those of individual character. In scaling up the application of Christian principle, reformers tended to collapse the social back into the individual, allowing them to continue to frame social problems primarily as moral ones, with solutions centered on Christianizing individuals. This tendency is evident in attempts to project their moral authority as disinterested mediators between two sides in a conflict—a formulation they sought to apply in very similar ways at the individual, national, and international levels. So, too, did they tend to consider their work with “plastic nations,” as detailed in the following chapters, to be a scaled-up version of their work with “young strangers” who had “come to have their characters formed.”

Christian reform had been—and would remain—a response to the perceived dangers of the individuated mass, an ostensibly disinterested effort of the better sort in service of the common good. The YMCA and associated organizations had been founded, in essence, to Christianize the atomizing urban world of the market revolution, and as their horizons broadened, they extrapolated this work to encompass the entire globe. To some extent, this tendency had been latent in the project from the beginning. Sherwood Eddy, a major figure in the YMCA and the student movement, recalled that

From the first, the Movement gave evidence of an evangelistic and missionary spirit. George Williams zealously collected twopence a week from each member for the initial Missionary Society. There was no provincial ‘home’ or ‘foreign’ field, but one gospel for one world and one universal obligation and privilege.¹¹⁸

For evangelical reformers, the Gospel had always represented universal truth, and as they turned toward the Social Gospel, these echoes of universalism would continue, in significant and significantly limited ways, to inform their work across the globe.

¹¹⁸ Eddy, *A Century with Youth*, 7.

Chapter 4

THE RED TRIANGLE IN THE PLASTIC NATIONS

The YMCA took its project into the foreign field beginning officially in 1889. In that year, the North American YMCA created the Foreign Division of the International Committee and sent out its first secretaries to establish what it called its Foreign Work. By that year, most Associations had begun the turn toward the idea of work for the “whole man” and the “whole world,” and most had been energized by the idea of the “evangelization of the world in this generation” as trumpeted by the Student Volunteer Movement in its watchword. Over the following three decades, as the idea of instilling “Christian citizenship” became ever more central to the Associations’ project, the North American YMCA placed important emphasis on its Foreign Work, establishing Associations in non-Christian nations around the world.

This chapter begins in 1889, with Luther Wishard’s world tour to assess the foreign field for the YMCA, and with the approaches of the first foreign secretaries, John T. Swift in Japan, and David McConaughy in India. From the first, the YMCA sought to launch its project in other nations along exactly the same lines as those at home. Just as the Gospel was assumed to be universally applicable, the YMCA assumed that young Christian men in every nation would have the same needs and interests, and would benefit from the same program. Also, from the first, the YMCA framed its project as a pedagogical one, working to train local leaders, with the goal of leaving the new national organizations to be self-governing as soon as possible. This chapter considers these ideas in light of the importance to the Associations of the “Macedonian call” as solicited by Wishard on his tour, of Swift’s characterization of the North American program as a “perfected machine,” and of McConaughy’s insistence on the need for “real equality and fraternity” among members, regardless of race or caste. Such positions were articulated in part against an unauthorized missionary project to the Sudan by the YMCA of Kansas, and then against an air of conservatism at the 1894 Jubilee Conference in London, at which McConaughy declared that there was “no such thing as the foreign field.” This emerging idea of a unified world-field became the basis for the founding of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) in 1895, and this chapter follows John Mott on his world tour to launch this new organization. Under Mott’s leadership, both the WSCF and the YMCA centered their work in colleges and universities, on the grounds that the elite students of all nations represented “strategic points” in the evangelization of the world, given that from the ranks of the students would come the next national leaders. To mold “plastic nations” into a form accordant with the advancement of the Kingdom of God, the Associations believed, it would be necessary to mold the character of their students. These ideals manifested slightly differently in the projects of the YMCA than of the WSCF, and somewhat differently again in the YWCA’s foreign work, also launched in 1895. Overall, in the context of social approaches to reform, and of a rising spirit of nationalism in all quarters of the globe, the Christian character that the Associations sought to inculcate increasingly became defined in terms of the ideals of democratic national citizenship. This tendency

is particularly marked in Helen Barrett Montgomery's view of Christian citizenship as not only explicitly democratic but entailing the political involvement of women of all nations, and the chapter closes by tracing her involvement with Mott in the emerging ecumenical movement at the International Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, and finally, with a consideration of Mott's views on the imminence of world crisis as related to the spirit of nationalism in the so-called "plastic nations."

* * * * *

In 1889, Luther Wishard, formally designated as the "College and Foreign Secretary" of the World's YMCA, began his world tour, accompanied by his wife Jane, who informally represented the YWCA. Originally from Indiana, Luther Wishard had attended Hanover College where he had first joined the YMCA, and then Princeton where in 1876 he had reorganized the existing student Christian group as a YMCA affiliate. In 1877, with the blessing of the International Committee, he had been the driving force behind the organization of the Intercollegiate YMCA, and, as noted in earlier chapters, had become its first Secretary.¹ After almost a decade of intensive student work, he had been the primary organizer of the 1886 Mt. Hermon conference that had given rise to the Student Volunteer Movement. His world tour was to be the first of several such tours by YMCA leaders.

The Wishards' tour extended over four years, and began with nine months in Japan. From there, they traveled through China, India, Egypt, Syria, and Palestine, then to the Conference of the World's Alliance in Amsterdam, and then continued on through Russia, Persia, Greece, and Turkey, returning to New York via Germany.² Wishard had been authorized to conduct this tour at the 1888 World's Conference in Stockholm, and, officially, he proceeded under the auspices of the World's Committee of the YMCA, the international administrative body based in Geneva. In practice, however, he remained primarily a representative of the North American YMCA, and the tour was funded by US philanthropists, most notably John Wanamaker, who maintained an active interest in its progress, even reporting on it to President Harrison in the White House.³

During their nine months in Japan, Luther Wishard laid the ground work for the first YMCA Foreign Work there, focusing his attention primarily on Western-style educational institutions, and following "exactly the same course which we had followed so often in the American colleges"—an important precedent in what became a principled practice of transferring the Association's project to the foreign field with minimal adjustment. He bought a city lot for the construction of a central YMCA building in Tokyo, and organized a Student Conference coordinated with Moody's fourth YMCA student gathering, then taking place at Northfield. Together, the Wishards visited all the major cities in Japan and dozens of schools and universities, organizing Associations among Japanese Christians and conducting "over two hundred public meetings attended by tens of thousands of students and business men and women" as was later

¹ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 276–80.

² Also Siam, Ceylon, Burma, Kurdistan, Bulgaria.

³ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 302, 329–47.

reported.⁴

At every point, they coordinated carefully with the Christian missionaries already established in the field. The YMCA and YWCA were always scrupulous in differentiating their own sphere of work, both at home and abroad, as distinct from but “in strict harmony with” that of the churches and their ministers and missionaries.⁵ The Student Volunteer Movement, as well, made a point of presenting itself as no more than a recruiting agency for the Church Mission Boards, explicitly denying any intent to intrude onto territory claimed by the churches. Thus, as the Wishards moved to establish an Association presence in the foreign field, they orchestrated at every point on the tour a sort of Macedonian call from other Christians already active in the field, organizing for formal appeals to be sent to the International Committee of the YMCA and the World’s YWCA to “come over and help us.” This call from the Christians in the field was considered to be vital, and without it, the Associations would refuse to proceed. For many decades, it remained strict Association policy never to enter a field to which they had not been formally “called” by some legitimate Christian group, however small.⁶

In the case of Japan, the first nation to which the YMCA sent a Foreign Secretary, the Association framed its project as responding to a series of “calls.” The first of these was a letter from Christian students in Sapporo, addressed to the students in Amherst, Massachusetts, and formulated as a “call,” which Wishard would later identify as “the point from which began to be traced to completion the circle of worldwide student Christian brotherhood.”⁷ The second “call” was for teachers of English for government schools, ostensibly from the Japanese government, but passed on to Wishard in 1887 via missionary contacts. Wishard then began recruiting YMCA secretaries who could fill these teaching spots, with an eye to establishing YMCA work at some future date. Thus John T. Swift, who would become the first YMCA secretary for Japan, had already been working in that nation for a year as an English teacher when Wishard arrived on his tour. As he began his work as a teacher, Swift was already reporting to the International Committee of the YMCA, and his first letter in 1888 referred to a “Japanese National Committee” which might extend him a “call” (although it was not clear what sort of Committee this was). Finally, the missionaries’ formal “call” to the YMCA from Japan was sent to the International Committee in New York in April of 1888.⁸

The earnestness with which the Associations regarded these “calls” is telling in several ways. It speaks not only to how these Christian reformers conceived of their project, but to how they imagined the world and its populations more generally, and to the ways in which these conceptions represented both inherent cultural violence and,

⁴ As quoted in *Ibid.*, 329, 330.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 319. From the constitution of the original committee on foreign work, “This object shall be carried out in strict harmony with the views and methods of the various Mission Boards and Evangelical Churches.”

⁶ On the “call,” see Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*, 90. SVM volunteers in the field were often called upon to write pamphlets about the need for more missionaries: “An Appeal from China,” “An Appeal from India,” “An Appeal from Japan.” ... “‘come over and help us,’ and come now.”

⁷ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 281.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 316, 320.

simultaneously, a cultural receptiveness based in universalist tendencies. Broadly, the Christian reformers who initiated the Foreign Work of the Associations imagined the world within an evangelical Christian frame, a world structured by the advancement of the Kingdom of God. In this evangelical frame, the idea of the “call” resonated with theological ideas about the personal relationship of the individual with God, and the social relationships of individuals (and nations) with each other before God. Evangelicalism, with its emphasis on free will, accentuated active spiritual engagement by the individual, especially around decisions for God. With the rise of the Social Gospel, this spiritual engagement increasingly came to be understood in social context, lending greater significance to the social dimension of a “call” from one community to another. In the evangelical frame, these relationships were imbued with great emotional intensity, especially around moments of connection—the emotional intensity of the individual conversion experience was reflected in the “call,” as a moment of connection that defined the social relationship among individuals (and nations) before God. The receipt by the Associations of a “call” from the foreign field was thus freighted with great spiritual intensity.

This spiritual intensity of the “call” was further enhanced by the overwhelming urgency with which these Christian reformers regarded the advancement of the Kingdom of God as an imagined world-historical process. In their socially-inflected evangelical frame, these Christian reformers believed that small groups of Christians, often converts, would be key to this imagined world-historical process—just as the “call” of the Macedonians to Paul had marked the initial rise of Christianity, “calls” from small and far-flung Christian outposts for “help” from those supposedly farther along in this world-historical process represented not only divine portents, but crucial points of initiation for the nuts-and-bolts process of the advancement of the immanent Kingdom of God.

This conception of the “call” as an appeal from those who were supposedly delayed in a world-historical process to those who were further advanced sheds light on the would-be pedagogical aspects of the Associations’ project—the Christian reformers who responded to such “calls” imagined themselves as educators, bringing God’s truth to the newly receptive, but as yet unenlightened. This pedagogical stance lent the Associations’ project the inherent hierarchicalism of the teacher-student relationship. It is important to note, however, that this hierarchicalism was tempered by an expectation of ultimate equality, a belief not only that all souls would be equal before God, but that the students could eventually become teachers. In effect, the Associations’ pedagogical view of world populations represented a sort of deferred universalism, an equality contingent on the pedagogical process itself. Further, in the evangelical frame, this pedagogical relationship required active recipients, who through their own free will would become spiritually and socially engaged in God’s Kingdom. Christian reformers placed great significance on this sort of active engagement—they anticipated it in the “call,” they sought it out and enthusiastically cultivated it wherever they found it. In this way, the “call” as anticipated by the Associations was not only a mark of pedagogical paternalism but also of genuine individual and social engagement, and of the broadly democratic tendencies of evangelical Christianity itself.

In a geopolitical context structured by the hierarchies of empire and racial violence, it is not surprising that the Christian reformers of the Associations would imagine themselves as more advanced than other world populations. In important ways, their projection of the “call” was an act of ventriloquism, a projection of the reformers’ own voices over those of others, a projection with the potential for justifying forcible entry and cultural erasure. There is no question that the “call” functioned in this way for many missionary endeavors.⁹ However, since its founding, the Associations’ top-down insistence on usefulness and service had been predicated on bottom-up involvement and initiative. As they moved to respond to the anticipated “calls” from the foreign field, this tension was only amplified—the Associations’ commitment to replicate their model without predetermined adjustment was informed by a socially-inflected evangelical frame that further reinforced this expectation of bottom-up involvement and initiative. Thus, even as the “call” represented a gesture of cultural domination and erasure, for the Associations, the earnestness with which they regarded this gesture actually seemed to reinforce a certain tone of receptiveness to the needs and interests of the local membership—a receptiveness with universalist tendencies not yet characteristic of the broader geopolitical context.

John T. Swift, like so many Association Secretaries, took the idea of the “call” very much to heart. Swift had graduated from Yale in 1884, and had practiced law before being convinced by David McConaughy, who would head the North American Association’s project in India, to dedicate himself to the YMCA. He had worked under McBurney at the prototypical Twenty-third Street YMCA in New York City, and in 1886 in the context of the launching of the Student Movement had pledged himself to foreign service. Before sailing for Tokyo, he had served as a YMCA General Secretary in New Jersey.¹⁰ After a year of teaching and familiarizing himself with Tokyo, Swift returned to the United States to marry, and to solicit support for the launching of the YMCA in Japan. Together with Elbert Monroe, the member of the International Committee who had been charged with organizing expansion into the foreign field, Swift presented at the 1889 YMCA International Convention in Philadelphia. In an appeal titled “Responsibilities of Members of American Associations to Young Men in Foreign Mission Lands,” Monroe and Swift introduced several points which would continue to characterize the YMCA’s Foreign Work for decades to come. Both men stressed the idea of the “call,” Monroe insisting that the “young men of Japan, China, Turkey and India...call to us for help,” and referring to “the young men whose Macedonian cry from another continent, reaches our ears to-day—young men with sorrows, temptations and needs like our own.”¹¹ As Monroe’s insistence suggests, the YMCA tended to emphasize this basic semblance of all men, as an extension of the idea of Christian brotherhood. Swift, especially, felt it important to explicitly make the case that the YMCA should approach young men of other nations as equals:

⁹ See also Jill Lepore on the Macedonian call in relation to the Massachusetts seal in *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (Knopf Doubleday, 2009).

¹⁰ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 318.

¹¹ *Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth International Convention of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 45, 47.

They are young men of like mettle with ourselves. ... We are in a position to disabuse both our Japanese brethren and ourselves of the impression that we seek them as an ignorant, degraded class of men. Rather do we know we are going to some of the brightest and proudest men on the face of the earth.¹²

The fact that he felt the need to place such emphasis on equality regardless of race or nationality underlines the degree to which this was a contested idea. Swift qualified his case—the young men he considered to be equals were of a particular class: “educated men who are civilized, and who have sat at the feet of the great teachers of modern thought.” Still, given the global context of increasingly rapacious imperialism underpinned by the codification of racial oppression on increasingly “scientific” grounds, the hope that the YMCA could take its project into the field on the basis of an intrinsic equality, however limited in scope, was noteworthy.¹³

In their appeals, both Swift and Monroe were careful to distinguish the specific project of the YMCA in the foreign field from that of the missionaries already there, and to specify how they hoped the Association’s Foreign Work would develop. As they presented it, the first purpose of the YMCA in the field would not be to evangelize—that was the project of the missionaries. The project of the YMCA would be to promote brotherhood among the young Christian men of the educated classes, and to support these men in organizing local Associations to serve their communities and their nations, on the presumption that what worked at home would work as well in the foreign field—a presumption, again, rooted in the idea of the basic semblance of all men. As both Swift and Monroe made clear, the intention of the YMCA in moving onto the foreign field was to send a few well-chosen secretaries to train the young men of non-Christian nations and to coach them in organizing Associations along precisely the same lines as those at home. Monroe applied a business-world metaphor, referencing the new technology of electricity, to present this idea:

We have perfected the machine. Shall we take out a patent, warn off all infringements, sit down by ourselves, and let the machine to its work within the limits of our own continent? Rather let us reach out a helping hand to our brethren in the Orient. ... The time is not far distant when that wonderful electric power of one young man over another shall encircle this globe, for its benefit and salvation.¹⁴

Behind this metaphor was the idea that, given the universality of the Kingdom of God and the fundamental brotherhood of man, approaches that worked in one nation would work in all nations, regardless of race or religion. The “machine” had been “perfected,” and neither Swift nor Monroe entertained the possibility of adjusting it to fit local circumstances. The YMCA, as an embodiment of middle-class values funded primarily by business-sourced philanthropy, often employed business-world language, especially, as in this instance, when such metaphors could be linked to the idea of business innovation as unselfish and promoting the common good.

Swift went on to reiterate that what was to be exported in the Foreign Work was primarily the *idea* of the Association and not its men—a handful of select experts would

¹² Ibid., 47. He extended this argument to include young Christian men in India as well.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 46.

carry the “machine” to other nations in order to train the locals to run it themselves. As Swift insisted,

We are simply inviting our fellow Christian young men in these distant lands to join us in systematic work for other young men. The workers must be native young men. From them will soon come the leaders needed.¹⁵

Both this strong insistence on “native” leadership and the assumption that this local leadership would require enlightened foreign tutelage are significant, and would continue to define the YMCA’s Foreign Work for decades to come. The tension between American secretaries “inviting our fellows” to join the work as equals, and these secretaries serving as God’s “stewards,” as Swift later phrased it, bearing a pedagogical “responsibility” for these men in other nations and thus by implication projecting authority over them—a tension between a nascent universalist tendency and a middle-class paternalism—was inherent in the YMCA’s Foreign Work even before the first Foreign Secretary was fully established.¹⁶

Finally, and importantly, Monroe tied the YMCA’s project explicitly to the realm of national political leadership in his framing of the critical importance of the Foreign Work. He made this argument in terms of the salvation not of individual souls but—first and foremost—of nations:

You may say, our missionary boards are sending out men. The gospel is being preached. Why should we send young men to form Associations there? Because...the young men are to-day coming into power in the old world. It is surprising in Japan and in Corea to see how young are the officials who are stirring and controlling the empire. It will be so in China. The salvation of these lands largely depends upon the salvation of these young men.¹⁷

This point—this ultimate project of instilling the values of Christian brotherhood in the rising political leaders of these non-Christian nations—was at the core of the YMCA’s Foreign Work from its inception in 1889.

The idea that a few well-chosen men would catalyze a worldwide movement for Christian brotherhood among young men as the dynamic force of nations was an extension of the widely-held idea of the “leaven” of the Kingdom of God. This idea is rooted in Matthew 13:33, “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened.” Like leavening, Association leaders believed, a small-scale introduction of a powerful thing would, given time, pervade the whole and cause it to rise. This idea, also inherent in the Student Volunteer Movement’s “evangelization of the world in this generation,” was the basis for YMCA’s faith in the power of a few foreign secretaries to launch a worldwide movement. In 1891, Morse (of the International Committee) wrote to Wishard in the midst of his tour, hailing the

general tendency throughout the world toward the adoption of American ideas in Association work. It is a sort of leaven that is working, and your visit helps it to ferment

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 47–48.

¹⁷ Ibid., 45–46.

a little more; and I hope we may be able to put enough more leaven into the foreign mission field to keep the process of fermentation in vigorous operation.¹⁸

This metaphor, while associated with the rising idea of the Kingdom of God, was not new for the organization. In fact, it had long been featured in retellings of the narrative of the founding. The 1884 publication of the YMCA's "Historical Records" quotes a message received by George Williams in 1844, highlighting the original "call" to found the YMCA. In a letter, very possibly reconstructed after the fact, a clerk from a nearby firm wrote:

I have been truly rejoiced to hear that the Lord is doing a great work in your house, and I hope that the leaven thus set will go on increasing abundantly. I am engaged here in the same work, but stand almost alone—and from what I have heard am induced to say, "Come over and help us."¹⁹

The idea of YMCA work as "leavening" was appealing for a few reasons. First, like other metaphors employed by missionary advocates, it had a sort of inherent teleology—just as flour is produced in order to make bread, so humanity was created for the Kingdom of God. But it wasn't quite as dehumanizing as such tropes as the arithmetic of souls or the heathen "in the darkness." Second, it described a process by which the introduction of a small but powerful force would catalyze the great transformation, and, importantly, the powerful results of the initial introduction would not necessarily be immediately evident—the "process of fermentation" as Morse called it, would require some time. The idea of Association work as "a sort of leaven" underwrote the idea that the YMCA should send a limited number of skilled secretaries to the foreign field, and should expect great results that would not be immediately apparent.

The argument that the YMCA should limit its Foreign Secretaries to highly-qualified candidates also represented an effort by the International Committee to ensure top-down uniformity of program—to guarantee the proliferation of the "perfected machine," and nothing less. The year 1889 also marked the beginning of a test to the YMCA in this regard. In that year, George S. Fisher, the State YMCA Secretary for Kansas, launched the "Kansas-Sudan Missionary Movement." This project, unauthorized by the International Committee, was based on fervent premillennialism and a conservative strain of evangelicalism which would later become fundamentalism. Fisher dismissed the idea of a "call" from the field, and he ignored the regular process of diplomatic arrangements. Between 1889 and 1891, he recruited and sent missionaries to Sudan for the sole purpose of evangelization, disregarding strict YMCA policy against such action. The YMCA, while endorsing and capitalizing on the passionate missionary sentiments coming out of Mt. Hermon, had carefully distanced itself even from recruitment for the church mission boards, having spun off the Student Volunteer Movement as a distinct organization, despite shared leadership. Now as the International Committee painstakingly began the process of surveying the mission field, making contact with groups already there in anticipation of the requisite "call," raising the necessary funds, and carefully orienting its chosen personnel to serve, *not* as

¹⁸ As quoted in Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 341.

¹⁹ Stevenson, *Historical Records of the Young Men's Christian Association from 1844 to 1884*, 17.

missionaries, but as national secretaries to organize indigenous YMCA movements to replicate the “perfected machine”—now, the State YMCA of Kansas was circumventing this process, sending missionaries purportedly under the auspices of the YMCA, unprepared, unfunded, and without contacts, declaring that “divine providence would protect them.” On the same grounds, these would-be evangelists chose to forgo medical precautions; half of them promptly died of fever, and the British colonial government deemed them a “health hazard.” Wishard, on his tour, wrote from China, condemning the Kansas-Sudan Movement and insisting that the YMCA must never enter the field unless “called to it by a large majority of the missionaries residing in the city where the association is [to be] organized,” and McBurney, of the International Committee, asserted that a continuation of the Kansas-Sudan Movement would be “suicidal to the association cause in America.”²⁰

The matter came to a head at the 1891 International Convention in Kansas City. A speaker representing the position of the International Committee framed the issue in terms of the paramount importance of the “call,” and used the authority of that idea to adjudicate the proper role of the Association on the mission field. As he argued,

The call has come from the Church through its missionary agents to this organization as such, for the precise work that it is organized to do.... But that call, is not ... to disorganize our Associations and alienate our churches by impulsively assuming that because God has filled our hearts with a love for souls, therefore he calls us to send out others, or go ourselves, before we are sent by the agencies that have proved themselves God appointed...It is time every Association, and every professional Association man, took heed to the injunction of the Apostle to ‘abide in the same calling wherein he was called.’²¹

The speaker expounded on this idea at length, contending that, “Whatever we do abroad as well as at home, must be as Associations. Why? Because it is as Associations we are called.” Without specifying the Kansas-Sudan enthusiasts, he censured Associations that failed to work “through the recognized and established agencies,” and thus failed to “secure the wisest administration.”²² He reiterated the International Committee’s position that

Our foreign work must be: (1) as Associations; (2) as subordinate to the Church; (3) by and for young men; (4) done through organized and established agencies; (5) so done as not to impair local organizations; (6) so done as not to weaken the Churches about us; and (7) so done as to wisely discriminate between individual and Association obligations to it.²³

This last point was a reference to the idea that any individual who felt so called

²⁰ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*. 352. While Swift, McConaughy, and Clark are celebrated in institutional histories with photo plates hailing them as “pioneers,” the names and stories of these unprepared and overzealous missionaries are not to be found in the historical narratives of the YMCA. Hopkins, 327.

²¹ *Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth International Convention of Young Men’s Christian Associations Held in Kansas City, Mo., May 6-10, 1891* (New York: International Committee of Young Men’s Christian Associations, 1891), 104-105.

²² *Ibid.*, 106.

²³ *Ibid.*, 107.

was encouraged to fulfill his individual obligation to that call as authorized by an established church mission board, but that missionary evangelization as such did not fall within the scope of Association obligations to foreign work.

As far as what *did* constitute Association obligations to this work, the speaker asserted that “manifestly, ... our obligation is to teach and train as we have been taught and trained.” He reiterated several times that the work must be conducted “upon the same lines abroad as at home.” He addressed head on

the objection that some raise, that the Young Men’s Christian Association is peculiarly an institution belonging to the English speaking countries, and is owned of God as a special conserving and saving influence to save these young men and use them in the more directly evangelistic work of carrying the gospel to lands where the people are without its light.²⁴

To this objection, he asserted, “The answer is, no.” The grounds for his response was, again, the basic semblance of all men, as encompassed in the brotherhood of man. “As we become acquainted with men of other countries, and even of other colors,” he argued, “we find the same human nature with them as with us, with its ... susceptibilities and its avenues of approach and influence.” Thus, the established Association methods that had served at home would serve as well in the foreign work. Ultimately, he insisted, “God has taught us that the divine good in an organization, any more than in an individual, is not limited by the boundaries of any country.”²⁵ Given this universal applicability of its methods, then, the Association’s obligation was “for the men, and the means to support them, as they may be called, to inaugurate the Association work in each of the different foreign lands.” Finally, it was the Association’s obligation “to develop native young men into secretaries, the foreign secretary to do the work of an organizer in the nation to which he is sent.”²⁶ In support of his arguments, the speaker quoted letters from Wishard, who had by then reached Delhi, and from Swift in Japan.

Immediately after this address, Myron Clark, about to sail as the National Secretary for Brazil, followed up on the trope of “newly open doors,” and suggested the special relevance of the Association to the realm of national politics in the foreign field, claiming that the fact that Brazil had just been established as a newly democratic republic made this a “most opportune time to inaugurate such a movement.” A Kansas City businessman reiterated this importance of the movement in fostering the political leadership of democratic nations, commending the Association for its work with young men in that “it is upon their shoulders that the duties of controlling the affairs of state will soon fall. Your organization is doing a magnificent work ... in making of them better citizens and nobler men.”²⁷

Swift, meanwhile, was working out the details of how to conduct his work in Japan. When missionary advocates spoke of newly open doors they often referred specifically to the developments in Japan. For centuries, Japan had had a policy of *sakoku*, or “closed country.” Christianity had been outlawed in the fifteenth century, and

²⁴ Ibid., 104.

²⁵ Ibid., 104.

²⁶ Ibid., 108.

²⁷ Ibid., 109, 78-79.

most foreign travel and trade was forbidden. Japan had been ruled by a clan-based shogunate, or military dictatorship, and the policy of *sakoku* was accompanied by a longstanding nationalist ideology with a strong anti-foreign element, termed *kokugaku*. In 1853-1854, the United States had used military force to challenge this policy, and a fleet commanded by Commodore Perry had forced Japan to allow the US to trade in Japanese ports. Following this act, so called “unequal treaties” were forced upon Japan by the US, Britain, and other imperial powers. In the face of this diminishing legal and economic sovereignty, the shogunate had fallen, and the succeeding Meiji period, from 1868 to 1912, was a period of self-conscious modernization, industrialization, and urbanization. Political power had been held regionally under the shoguns, but was now concentrated nationally in an oligarchy ruling under the Emperor, who was proclaimed a living god. The new era saw a turn away from Buddhism and toward Shinto, with accompanying religious disruptions, and the ban on Christianity was lifted. In 1868, the oligarchs announced intentions to broaden participation in government, to loosen class restrictions, and to learn from other nations. Japan drew selectively from Western ideas and technologies, building railways and telegraph networks, practicing Western medicine, donning Western-style clothing, and adopting the Gregorian calendar. The oligarchs turned to Prussia as a constitutional model, deeming the US system too liberal, and extending limitations on the press and on the right to assemble. Japanese military and government leaders also turned to the Western model of aggressive colonial imperialism, and in 1895, Japan would provoke war with China and claim Taiwan. On the strength of growing military might, Japan would renegotiate the “unequal treaties” and after the turn of the century it would enter a military alliance with Britain. Against this backdrop of self-conscious and selective Westernization, commitment to higher education, rapid industrialization, religious upheaval, and a growing strain of nationalism, the Japanese government’s invitation to American teachers, relayed via missionaries, seemed to hold great promise for the foreign project of the YMCA.²⁸ By the date of Swift’s arrival, there were 250 Protestant churches in Japan with more than 25,000 members, 14 theological seminaries, and 100 mission schools with at least 10,000 students, and the educated classes seemed to be turning rapidly toward Christianity.²⁹

Swift was committed to conducting the Association’s project “upon the same lines abroad as at home.” He acted as the Secretary for the entire nation of Japan, founding and coordinating dozens of college and city Associations, and recruiting and training Japanese Secretaries to lead them, beginning with Seijiro Niwa of Kyoto as General Secretary of the Tokyo Associations.³⁰ He organized the National Committee for Japan, and insisted that it must be “entirely Japanese and have entire control.”³¹ Already in 1888, Swift had written to Morse that the Japanese were “grieving deeply at the oppression of their country by the extraterritorial powers of the so called Christian

²⁸ Conrad Schirokauer and Donald Clark, *Modern East Asia*, 2nd edition (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2007).

²⁹ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 322.

³⁰ Luther Wishard, “A Thanksgiving Letter; The Work of Two Years and a Half Briefly Reviewed,” *Young Men’s Era* 17, no. 2 (January 8, 1891): 20–21.

³¹ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 334–35.

nations,” and that “after much thought on the subject,” he had come to the conclusion that the Association should follow the model of the Doshisha missionary school and be “managed on the plan of Japanese control and foreign advice.” He recognized that this insistence on local control was not in alignment with the stance of the missionaries currently working in Japan, and commented to Morse, “You will I think appreciate ... the necessity which rests upon me in this work of being perhaps more philo-Japanese than most missionaries are or try to be.” Swift was sensitive to the power of language to this end; he insisted that Association work must be conducted “under some other name than that of ‘missionary,’”³² and in 1891, from the pages of the official YMCA periodical, he argued strongly against the use of the terms *native* and *heathen*. “It is not Christ-like to so speak or write as to imply that we consider our brethren in other lands inferior to us,” he admonished, and insisted that true brotherhood “can only be established on the basis of true Christian courtesy” and “a deep and intelligent sympathy.” Further, he contended, this was not merely courtesy but fairmindedness—of the Japanese students in question, Swift asserted, “I cannot find one, who, on account of Christian zeal and intellectual ability, does not considerably surpass the average American citizen, who might possibly feel insulted should the expression referred to, be applied to him by a foreigner.” This admonition by a Secretary of the Foreign Work to American men to put themselves into the shoes of their counterparts in other nations was the first of many such appeals from Foreign Work Secretaries, and Swift, like many later Secretaries, acknowledged a learning curve for his own part; “Almost every mistake which I made during my first year here arose out of a sort of sophomoric national pride and conceit of which I am now heartily ashamed,” he acknowledged. On the use of words such as *heathen*, Swift broke with the practices of more conservative YMCA missionary advocates such as Wilder and Speer in declaring that “it would be a great step towards the more rapid evangelization of the world could it and similar words be dropped from all Christian literature. May they at least be banished from the vocabularies of our associations.”³³ Given the importance of the imagined heathen to the thinking of conservative evangelists influencing the organization, such terms were not banished from YMCA vocabularies, and the International Committee continued to use the term *heathen* in its minutes.³⁴ However, in response to appeals like Swift’s, the usage of this term did drop significantly, from dozens of instances in the official YMCA periodical in the year 1891 to a half dozen or less a decade later.³⁵

Over the course of his first years in Japan, Swift struggled with his commitment to local control. He fretted when the Japanese College YMCAs proposed an 1891 Summer Conference program that was, in his estimation, “of the wildest character, embracing subjects all the way from Political Economy to the latest German materialistic Sociology.” He hated to dictate to them, but leaned on them to the point that in the end they included nothing more controversial than the “New Theology.” He also halted work

³² As quoted in *Ibid.*, 325–27.

³³ John T. Swift, “Mistakes in Foreign Work to Be Avoided,” *Young Men’s Era* 17, no. 3 (January 15, 1891): 35.

³⁴ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 355.

³⁵ See Google *ngram* search and Google Books search of *Association Men* and *Young Men*.

on the new university YMCA building when the students suspended the evangelical test for membership. This struggle conveyed the inherent tension in YMCA work, present from the first but heightened now on the foreign field, between the impulse to ensure that the program was uniformly replicated from the top down, and the impulse to harness and cultivate the kind of bottom-up enthusiasm and engagement that allowed the YMCA to consider itself a movement. This tension was particularly acute for Swift, whose strong commitment to local control was often hard to reconcile with his equally strong commitment to authorizing only the methods and practices of the “perfected machine,” and in 1893 Swift wrote to Morse lamenting “the lack of men of national repute who clearly understand Association work.”³⁶ Smith, like many Christian reformers, found his preconceived ideas both reinforced and challenged by his work abroad. His expectation that the Association’s “perfected machine” would work in precisely the same way in Japan as it had in the United States was not fully met, even as his respect for young Japanese men “of like mettle with ourselves” deepened.

The second YMCA Secretary on the foreign field was David McConaughy, for India. McConaughy was from a family of ministers and missionaries. He had begun work with the YMCA before graduating from college, and in 1883 at the age of 23 he had taken the position of General Secretary of the Philadelphia YMCA, and had been recognized for his inspired leadership there. McConaughy had first volunteered for foreign service after Wishard had visited Philadelphia in 1885, and in 1888 during a subsequent visit, Wishard had pressed him further. At the same time, the Madras Missionary Conference issued a “call” for YMCA work, and it was arranged that McConaughy and his wife should go.³⁷ Like Swift, McConaughy made a point of representing YMCA work as advancing a sort of universal brotherhood in the face of such distinctions as “caste, creed, or race.”³⁸ In India, the North American YMCA was entering a field administrated by the British Empire. The process of industrialization in Britain had been fueled by colonial expansion and expropriation of resources and food supplies, and in the nineteenth century, Britain began a long process of liberalizing and rationalizing colonial government, investing heavily in colonial infrastructure, court and legal systems, railways, canals and irrigation, and telegraph networks. Until 1858, British rule in India had been conducted through the East India Company, but after the Rebellion of 1857, a bloody conflict lasting more than a year, the East India Company was dissolved and India was administered directly by the British Crown. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Britain and the other European Powers engaged in increasingly aggressive colonial expansion, “scrambling” for Africa, and extending and consolidating imperial claims across Asia and the Pacific, as the doctrine of “effective occupation” of colonial territory instigated an increase in the use of military force against indigenous peoples. Under British administration, Indian production was turned to food exports and cash crops such as cotton and tea, and famines in the 1870s and late 1890s killed many millions. The late nineteenth century saw a rise of nationalism in India, with some seeking reform of British rule and some demanding independence.

³⁶ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 334–35.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 335–36.

³⁸ David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 29.

Britain responded inconsistently to these movements. British colonial administrators, like the Christian reformers of the Associations, tended to tout the ideals of liberal freedoms, responsible government, and the rule of law, and in fact, colonial rule of India had been justified largely on the basis of these ideals, however deferred their practice. The Rebellion marked somewhat of a turn away from liberal universalist ideals as a justification for empire, and toward an emphasis on essential difference.³⁹ Demographically, India was marked by centuries of rule by successive empires. English was the language of administration and was spoken by educated Indians, British rule had consolidated caste as an administrative system, and while a majority of Indians were Hindu, there was a large Muslim minority, and significant Sikh, Christian, and other religious minorities as well. Whereas Swift's appeals to universal brotherhood were made in the context of a demographically homogenous Association membership acutely conscious of Japan's perceived status in relation to other nations, McConaughy made the same pronouncements in India to a decidedly diverse Association membership, in the face of the inequalities inherent in colonial rule.

En route to Madras, McConaughy had stopped in Britain and in Geneva to secure the blessings of George Williams and the British YMCA, and then of the administrators of the World's Committee. While it did not place the same deeply symbolic importance on this sort of institutional diplomacy as it did on the "call" from the field, the International Committee did take such contacts seriously, considering them the basis for "association" as such, and it did its best to avoid contention on all fronts. In light of this fact, the stance that McConaughy immediately took on inclusion across racial and religious lines was notable, especially in contrast to the policies of the existing British Associations. On his arrival, as he later wrote, he found that the existing YMCAs may as well have posted "None but Christians need apply," which he considered "quite out of line with the spirit of the Association Movement, which had now sent its representative to India to introduce a very different order of things."⁴⁰

From the first meeting he conducted, McConaughy insisted upon five "fundamental principles of YMCA work" as the basis for this "very different order of things." As later paraphrased by an historian of the Association in India, these were:

1. It would be the work of young men, by young men, for young men.
2. It would minister to the whole man—body, mind, and soul.
3. Its privileges would be extended to all young men of good character, without distinction of race, rank or religion.
4. The management was confined to active members, who were in full communion with Evangelical Christian Churches.
5. It would be extended only so far and so fast as funds were locally forthcoming.⁴¹

In comparison to the work of the YMCA in North America, what is most notable about these five points is the greater emphasis on overcoming the distinctions of "race, rank or religion," and the insistence on local funding. Like Swift's commitment to local control,

³⁹ For instance, Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*.

⁴⁰ As quoted in Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 338; David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 27. David suggests that such a sign was actually posted at the Bombay YMCA building.

⁴¹ David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 28.

McConaughy's commitment to local funding was an indication of the degree to which the Associations assumed that their work was universally applicable, and would be adopted and supported by locals wherever it was introduced. It was also a signal to philanthropists at home that the expansion into Foreign Work was not to be a perpetual drain on their funds.

McConaughy's insistence on inclusion regardless of "caste, creed, or race" also mirrored Swift's insistence that his Japanese membership were "some of the brightest and proudest men on the face of the earth." Like Swift, McConaughy recruited local leaders; from the start, his Assistant Secretary was an Indian Christian.⁴² At the first National Convention for India, held in Madras in January of 1891, a little over a year after his arrival, McConaughy further pressed the importance of the principle of inclusion, insisting that,

The basis of YMCA membership should be ... broad enough to extend its privileges to all deserving young men, absolutely without distinction of race or creed or occupation. In India, beyond any other country on the face of the earth, has the Association a duty to perform in practically demonstrating the real equality and fraternity of the followers of Jesus. The Association affords a platform where all men may meet and freely mingle.⁴³

In that first year, the YMCA of India had made considerable progress toward that end. Wishard, still on his tour, had met McConaughy on his arrival in India, and was in Madras for this conference. In the pages of the official North American YMCA periodical, he reported that, "it was as it should be in India, a convention chiefly of Indian young men." At that point, the Madras YMCA had 250 members, of whom 140 were Indian, 82 Eurasian, and 28 European. Of the 250, 151 were Christian (41 of these being Indian,) 92 were Hindu, 4 Muslim, and 3 Parsi.⁴⁴ The National Committee, as enumerated by Wishard, was "composed of seventeen members, eight Indian, two Eurasian, five European, two American."⁴⁵ McConaughy and Wishard both stressed this diversity as a positive accomplishment in their reports. At the second National Convention of YMCAs in India, held in Bombay the next year, the delegates, after much debate, adopted the resolution "That Associations be exhorted to do everything in their power towards extending the privileges of their work to the non-Christian communities around them."⁴⁶ Over the following two years, the growth of the Association in India continued along these lines, if somewhat unevenly; by 1894 McConaughy reported that there were 75 Associations in India with 3500 members, two-thirds of whom were local Indians, and the Madras membership was 430, of whom 302 were "native Indian young men," and "of the whole number, 213 are Christians [and] 217 are non-Christians." Across India, however, only 18 of the 75 Associations included non-Christians as

⁴² Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 309.

⁴³ As quoted in David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 40.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁵ Luther Wishard, "The First National Convention of the Young Men's Christian Association of India," *Young Men's Era* 17, no. 19 (May 7, 1891): 292. He was then writing from Cairo.

⁴⁶ As quoted in Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 362.

associate members.⁴⁷

McConaughy's statement that "real equality and fraternity" were especially important in India was a reference to the caste system, and also, to a lesser degree, a reference to the imperial context. Missionary advocates pointed to the caste system as a clear marker of India's backwardness, the barbarity of the Hindu religion, and the need for Christian intervention on behalf of the oppressed castes—despite the fact that the caste system as it then existed had been the result of developments under the administration of the British Empire.⁴⁸ The "real equality and fraternity" of Christianity was consistently lauded over the divisions and oppressions of Hindu caste, and the first National Convention featured a keynote presentation by E. Yesudian of Madura on "The Caste System and Christianity," arguing that Christians who practiced caste should not be considered full members of the Association because such was not consistent with the ideals of Christianity.⁴⁹ The Madras YMCA also opened a restaurant on its grounds dubbed the "caste-breaker" frequented by people of all castes and races. McConaughy broke with local tradition in hiring a lower-caste cook for this establishment.⁵⁰ While the caste system was McConaughy's primary foil in his exhortations for "real equality and fraternity," he could also have been alluding to the imperial context. Americans tended to congratulate themselves on having done away with the rigid class distinctions of British society, and American critics of imperialism tended to pass judgment, however politely, on Britain's treatment of its imperial subjects. A suggestion of this attitude can be found in McConaughy's strongly stated conviction that the segregated Associations previously established by the British were "out of line with the spirit of the Association Movement" in India—to the extent that the founding of the YMCA of India was only considered complete with the establishment of McConaughy's integrated Association. In official narratives from that point on, the earlier whites-only Associations in India received mention as forerunners in name only, referenced primarily to be discounted for failing to serve the general population. McConaughy, like Swift, honestly hoped to instill a sense of Christian brotherhood based in "real equality and fraternity," and he dedicated himself to that end. Of course, this attitude constituted a tremendous inconsistency, being that in the United States, the Associations were still completely segregated, and still enforced a strict policy of avoiding any sort of position on the "controversies" around the imposition in the United States of regimes of racial terror against African Americans, Native Americans, and others, through the 1890s and beyond. K. T. Paul, who would lead the YMCA in India for decades, hinted at the inconsistencies in the critique of caste in his later pronouncement that while the caste system was "the curse of India," he would "certainly cling to it if it is to be replaced by the unchristian and inhuman class system of the West."⁵¹ Such inconsistencies around

⁴⁷ *The Report of the Thirteenth Triennial International Conference and Jubilee Celebration of Young Men's Christian Associations, London, June 1st-7th, 1894* (Jubilee Council, 1895), 93–94.

⁴⁸ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*; Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁴⁹ David, *The YMCA and the Making of Modern India*, 34.

⁵⁰ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 338.

⁵¹ K. T. Paul, "How Missions Denationalize Indians," *International Review of Missions* 8, no. 29 (January 1919): 520.

where, how, and to whom it would be necessary to “practically demonstrate real equality and fraternity” would continue to manifest for decades, but due in part to the more marked pedagogical stance of the Foreign Work, Secretaries abroad tended to place much more emphasis on such ideas than those at home.

In January of 1891, the official periodical of the North American YMCA published an extended article relating to McCounaghy’s newly established Madras YMCA, titled “A Brahmin’s View.” It is notable that the editors chose to highlight caste status with this title—despite the outrage expressed by Christian reformers about the barbarity of the caste system, they continued to find such categories useful, even as they derided them. The author of this extended piece was a Christian from Madras named Krishnaswamy Iyengar, and while he touched on some longstanding tropes—he wrote, for instance, that the YMCA would bring “light to those who are yet in the dark”—his overall assessment of the importance of the YMCA varied from the standard in a few important ways. In his opening paragraph, Iyengar referenced the YMCA’s insistence on the idea of the “perfected machine,” stating,

I strongly approve of the maxim that what is beneficial to one country must be equally beneficial to another; but, with this reservation, that the principles of the one must be applied according to the needs and circumstances of another.⁵²

He did not actually specify ways in which the program might be altered to better fit local circumstances, and he went on to suggest that the YMCA’s program may in fact be exceptionally universally applicable, but his stated “reservation” regarding the need to attend to local differences stands as a telling indication of the skepticism with which some sympathetic locals may have viewed the YMCA’s early insistence that its program be replicated exactly, no matter the setting. Over time, and especially as local leadership with a better understanding of their own localities rose to leadership positions, the YMCAs of various nations would diverge somewhat in their programs, although not necessarily to the degree that one might expect—the early insistence on exact replication left a strong institutional imprint. What is especially interesting about Iyengar’s statement is that he recognized and recorded the remarkable extent to which the YMCA’s insistence on exact replication of program was based in a universalist approach.

In fact, Iyengar seems to have harbored strong universalist ideas himself. In the article, he went farther than most YMCA proponents in framing the Association as an agent of “civilization” as such, defined in explicitly universalist and utilitarian terms. He argued that the defining feature of “civilization” is its provision of “the greatest amount of good to the greatest number of persons,” providing for many more people with more limited resources, and he went on to submit that, “Christianity and civilization, not only go hand and hand, but I go further and say that they are one and the same thing.” In expounding his reasoning for this equation of Christianity with civilization, Iyengar, interestingly, focused explicitly on the idea of the individual and the implications of this idea for democratic government. He asserted that,

⁵² Krishnaswamy Iyengar, “A Brahmin’s View; What Christianity Has Done; The Work of the Madras Association,” *Young Men’s Era* 17, no. 2 (January 8, 1891): 19.

The idea that government is for the individual is a purely Christian idea. Christ was the King of democracy. It was He who first taught the equality of all men, and that every man has individual responsibilities, both in spiritual and temporal matters.⁵³

Iyengar applied the utilitarian concept of the “greatest good” to the YMCA in Madras, via the claim that the YMCA’s Christian framework imparted the ideas of individual equality and individual responsibility, specifically as they related to the principles of democratic government—ideas assumed to empower “civilization” to extend the greatest good to the greatest number. This assessment of the importance of the YMCA goes beyond the standard in linking the Association’s project explicitly to the inculcation of the principles of democratic government and to the production of the individual as citizen. It is significant that the writer making these connections was a subject of the British Empire and not himself a citizen of a democratic nation.

Even as the YMCA was committed to the project of inculcating Christian citizenship, its relationship with powerful philanthropists and its longstanding policy of avoiding controversy generally led it to present this project in the least disruptive light. However, as the YMCA carried these ideals into the realms of empire—insisting on a faithful replication of program regardless of circumstances—local members like Iyengar were often more clear about the implications of fostering these ideals. The YMCA did not tout its program as a challenge to empire, it retained ties to missionary populations which were more closely aligned with empire, and while their stance was generally sympathetic to Indian nationalism, individual leaders varied widely in their views.⁵⁴ But in its Foreign Work the Association leaned harder on ideals of “real equality and fraternity” than it ever had at home, and its commitment to universal Christian citizenship attracted local students and other members of the Western-educated elite who saw in these ideals implications disruptive to empire.

Despite determined avoidance of controversy, there were certainly tensions generated by the North American YMCA’s project within the British Empire. When McConaughy stopped in Britain en route to India in 1889, George Williams, in extending his blessing, had (probably inadvertently) lent credence to misgivings by suggesting that McConaughy went “to spy out the land.”⁵⁵ The British YMCA, on the whole, was not only more aligned with its empire, but generally more conservative and pietistic than its North American counterpart, remaining intent on evangelization of the individual and only slowly adopting American methods of work for the “whole man.” In response to Wishard’s tour, the British had fielded their own man—from October of 1890 through May of 1891, William Hind Smith traveled through Egypt, Palestine, India, Australia, and New Zealand, combining his private business travel with a tour on behalf of the British YMCA. Hind Smith visited forty Associations in sixteen British colonies and countries, and organized a few more, most notably in Jerusalem, where he set up separate Associations for Arabic speakers and for converts from Judaism.⁵⁶ McConaughy, recently established in India, reported privately to McBurney of the International

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ See for instance Susan Billington Harper, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: Bishop V.S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 46.

⁵⁵ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 336.

⁵⁶ Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 308.

Committee that Hind Smith was working at cross purposes with him, misrepresenting the Association and spreading antagonisms.⁵⁷ McConaughy had introduced the idea of racial and religious integration as core to the YMCA's work in India, and he sought to reorganize the existing Associations which catered solely to Europeans along these lines; it is probable that Hind Smith represented the existing British practice of de facto limitation of membership to European Christians, a practice still in place in three of every four Associations across India.

McConaughy, Hind Smith, Wishard, and John Mott each presented at the 1894 Jubilee Conference of the World's Alliance in London, a great show of worldwide association during which such tensions were carefully concealed. The Jubilee Conference was organized around the 50th anniversary of the fabled founding of the organization by George Williams—Williams had been knighted by Queen Victoria a few weeks before, and during the conference, the honor of the "Freedom of the City" was bestowed on him by the Lord Mayor of London. Morse of the International Committee commented that these honors recognized that the YMCA, originally organized to address the problem of the young man in the city, had "multiplied its usefulness within and beyond the bounds of the metropolis,"⁵⁸ further indicating the embrace of the idea of "usefulness" in the worlds of business and politics, and of the extension of its scope to include the wider world. While these accolades were bestowed upon George Williams as an individual and not on the YMCA as such, no one doubted that the honor belonged to the Association itself—Williams, quiet and unassuming as he was, served his organization best as a living token of its founding myth and as a model of restrained middle-class character held up as an object lesson before younger members. The sources of energy and innovation in Association leadership had long resided elsewhere. The Conference Report assured its readers that "Sir George from the first declined to regard such honors as bestowed wholly on himself, constantly affirming that they belonged to the whole body of Young Men's Christian Association workers."⁵⁹ As ever in Association representations, the balance between the ennoblement of the individual and of the principle of association was carefully maintained, and middle-class values confirmed.

At the conference, Hind Smith did not speak about his tour, or about any other aspect of the extension of the work overseas. Instead, he gave an unremarkable presentation on the constitution of the governing committee of an Association, leaning heavily on the standard middle-class language favored by the Association in confirming that a committee member should be not only "a whole-hearted Christian layman," but "a good business man, prompt, methodical, and possessing a fair share of sanctified common sense," as well as a "sympathizing friend" to young men.⁶⁰ McConaughy gave a more memorable report. He began with a forceful assertion that "there is no such thing as the foreign field"—a "fundamental fact" which he feared had been "covered over by misapprehension." In a striking address, McConaughy urged,

⁵⁷ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 340–41.

⁵⁸ Shedd, *History of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations*, 339.

⁵⁹ *The Report of the Thirteenth Triennial International Conference and Jubilee Celebration of Young Men's Christian Associations, London, June 1st-7th, 1894*, xxi.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 184.

Come with me to Calvary, and stand under the cross of Jesus Christ, ...and if you will take your stand there with me upon that only point on all the earth high enough to see this great wide world, you shall see that ... there is no such thing as a foreign field and a home field.⁶¹

This was an early, high-profile, and emotionally effective appeal to regard the work in non-Christian lands in the same light as the work anywhere, on the basis of the universality of Christian truth. McConaughy went on to extend this argument to insist upon the importance and power of local workers the world over—he insisted that

one young man, born under these Eastern skies, and speaking the language of the people, will have a vaster field and more power than any Europeans who would go out and take up the work.⁶²

The intensity of this appeal to regard the world as a single field, and to regard local leadership as not just desirable but indispensable, was probably a response to the contrasting approach of more conservative British YMCA leaders in India. In his address, McConaughy went on to draw a parallel between Government engineers in India grinding through rock to cut a canal to arid regions, and the YMCA “working through the hard flinty rocks of caste, working through prejudices that are hoary with age,” in order to open a channel for “the great power” to reach “the barren fields.”⁶³ A number of his listeners surely presumed that he referred exclusively to Hindu prejudices of caste and creed being countered by the Christian representatives of empire, from engineers to missionaries—however, given the overall thrust of McConaughy’s address, and especially in light of his record in Madras, it can be assumed that he intended to make a point as well about the prejudices of many of his listeners against “young men born under Eastern skies.” McConaughy further reinforced the idea that the same work should serve all men, first in pointing out that his methods in India were the same as those employed in the “western hemisphere,” and then while issuing the standard call, by stressing that he had been charged, “not only by the Christian young men, but also by many Hindoo, Mohammedan, Parsee, and Buddhist young men, to greet you today and to say to you, ‘Come over and help us.’”⁶⁴ Overall, however, it was his statement that there was “no such thing as the foreign field” which would be most remembered. A half-century later, the centenary account of the World Association would characterize this assertion as “one of the most prophetic statements to which this Jubilee Conference listened; ... a statement of philosophy that was to guide the World Movement for years ahead.”⁶⁵

That McConaughy’s assertion had an immediate impact was suggested by the fact that John Wanamaker, the prominent American businessman serving as a Vice President of the conference, and whose philanthropy had already enabled much of the early extension of the YMCA abroad, echoed it the next day in his Jubilee Day address. Wanamaker trumpeted: “THERE IS NOT SUCH A THING AS A STRANGER OR A

⁶¹ Ibid., 181.

⁶² Ibid., 182.

⁶³ Ibid., 183.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 93-94.

⁶⁵ Shedd, *History of the World’s Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations*, 342.

FOREIGNER ANY LONGER IN THIS WORLD. (Applause.) We are one, notwithstanding the strange twist in our tongues. (Applause and laughter.)”⁶⁶ Wanamaker returned to this theme on the final day of the conference, quipping, “May I say, in this moment of the closing scene, that I shall never henceforth be able to find a dictionary with the word ‘foreigner’ in it. (Cheers and laughter). We have blotted it out. (Laughter.)” The editorial interjections here are significant—they hint at the degree to which the leaders of the movement considered the idea notable, and they reveal something of the complexity of feeling within the YMCA on this topic. In this widely distributed report, editorial interjections are used sparingly, and the choice to emphasize this particular statement first via typeface, and then by noting audience reaction, stands out in the text. In particular, the fact that the statement would generate laughter and that such laughter was considered worthy of note suggest that the audience was unsure how to receive this assertion, and that the editors felt compelled not only to highlight the idea but to hedge its seriousness.

Wishard’s presentation at the Jubilee Conference was not as ground-breaking as McConaughy’s, but struck a few of the same notes. Wishard clearly conceived of his work in terms of foreign mission, describing his recently completed four-year world tour as encompassing “216 mission stations in 20 mission lands.” His address was organized around the “ringing watch-cry—THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE WORLD IN THIS GENERATION!” and he spoke at length of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, of the College Associations of North America, as a “great enterprise of world-wide evangelization, beginning with the educated young men in heathen lands.” Unlike Swift and McConaughy, Wishard continued to think primarily in terms of evangelizing the “heathen.” However, his address dovetailed with that of McConaughy in his core argument, that such evangelization “depends largely upon their own educated young men.”⁶⁷ Wishard celebrated the point that, of the Associations he had helped to organize on his tour, four were already headed by local General Secretaries. Wishard, like Swift and McConaughy, and unlike most missionaries of the time, agreed that control of the work should be promptly turned over to local leaders. As had McConaughy, he advised that this would be critically important not just on principle but in practice, affirming that, “if we can transmit to the educated young men in non-Christian lands the spirit and agencies of the College Young Men’s Christian Association, they will accomplish a work of evangelization which foreigners alone can never accomplish.”⁶⁸

The Jubilee Conference looked to the future in other ways as well. John R. Mott, already a rising leader, spoke on the North American College Department and its role in the Student Volunteer Movement. His statements, even more than McConaughy’s, looked to the future in forecasting the political implications of the work—he attested that the worldwide work of the YMCA “in reaching the students reaches also those who teach and those who govern.”⁶⁹ There were also early hints of what would later become

⁶⁶ *The Report of the Thirteenth Triennial International Conference and Jubilee Celebration of Young Men’s Christian Associations, London, June 1st-7th, 1894*, 227.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 78-80.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

the Ecumenical movement, in which Mott would figure greatly—the gathering itself was referred to by one of the Geneva leaders as an “Ecumenical Conference.”⁷⁰ “The future,” opined one commentator on the importance of the Association’s work, “depends upon the young men now growing up. They will make the citizens, the statesmen, the voters, the soldiers, the workers of the next half century.”⁷¹ Increasingly, this future was being conceived as global, and the young men in question now included those in Tokyo and Madras, not only as evangelists, but also as would-be citizens and statesmen.

A year after the Jubilee, Mott joined with other student Christian leaders to organize the World’s Student Christian Federation (WSCF). Since 1890, Mott had been serving both as the College Secretary for the North American YMCA and as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Student Volunteer Movement, and he would now become the General Secretary of the WSCF, leadership positions which he would hold in tandem for decades. For the next half century, Mott would continue to occupy the highest executive roles across the YMCA and related ecumenical organizations, managing multiple chairmanships at once. He remained on the International Committee of the North American YMCA for forty years, first as College Secretary, then as Foreign Secretary, and after 1915 as General Secretary. He stepped down from this position only after accepting the highest executive role of the World Alliance of the YMCA, which he held from 1926 to 1937 while concurrently heading the worldwide International Missionary Council and serving on the board of the Federal Council of Churches, two of the most important ecumenical organizations of the day. He also served the United States in various diplomatic roles under President Wilson, most importantly on the Mexican Commission, the Root Mission to Russia, and in organizing international relief aid during the First World War. (He was offered but did not accept the ambassadorship to China). Since his student experience at Mt. Hermon, Mott’s orientation had been toward the “whole world.” His vision of universal Christian brotherhood guided both his policies and his personal style as a leader, and, increasingly over his decades of leadership, it permeated the organizations he headed. The ways in which this vision informed his leadership are suggested by the epitaphs selected by his biographers: “World Citizen” and “Ecumenical Statesman.”⁷²

The World Student Christian Federation brought the Student YMCAs of the world together with the College Christian Unions of various nations and regions, and encouraged unaffiliated Christian student groups in colleges and universities everywhere in the world to coordinate and join. Of the organizations Mott would lead, the WSCF is notable for having been explicitly founded on the ideal of “real equality and fraternity” worldwide, despite race or nationality—at least as far as university-educated Christians were concerned. While the founding group consisted overwhelmingly of white men (reflecting college attendance as a whole) the idea from the first was to organize and promote the leadership of the Christian students of the East; and female students, especially those already involved in the YWCA and the SVM, would take up leadership

⁷⁰ Ibid., 146.

⁷¹ Ibid., 174.

⁷² Mathews, *John R. Mott: World Citizen*; Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955*, also subtitled “20th Century Ecumenical Statesman”.

roles as well. The impetus behind the Federation was largely Mott's, but had probably been developed in part through conversations with student Christian leaders of other nations at the Jubilee Convention the previous year, most importantly with Karl Fries of the Stockholm YMCA, and the founding meetings were held not in North America but at a student conference in a medieval castle in Sweden.⁷³

In the summer of 1895, with a plan for the Federation in mind, Mott set out on a two-year world tour aimed at organizing and coordinating Christian student groups across Europe and Asia. He was accompanied by his wife Leila, who, like Jane Wishard, was informally representing the YWCA, and by a sponsor, Cleveland businesswoman and philanthropist Sophia Strong Taylor. They traveled for the first months with Luther and Jane Wishard. Their first stop was in Britain, where Mott attended the national student conference then being held, and coordinated with the leadership of the recently formed British College Christian Union to secure the approval of the conference to join the projected federation. The second stop was in Germany, where he did the same, presenting the idea to the national student conference, catalyzing the formation of the German Student Christian Alliance, and convincing the skeptical leadership to endorse the federation idea. By mid-August they had reached the castle in rural Sweden which would host the Scandinavian conference. Scandinavia already had a loosely organized Student Christian Movement, founded after Karl Fries had received and shared news of the first Japanese Student Christian Conference in Kyoto in 1889, and thus already oriented toward worldwide association. Mott helped to reorganize and formalize the Scandinavian organization, and then, as the representative of the North American Intercollegiate YMCA, he sat down with the representatives of the British, German, and Scandinavian Student Christian groups, together with Wishard, who was representing the Student Christian Movement in Mission Lands, to officially formulate the World Student Christian Federation.⁷⁴

As with the YMCA, each term in the name of the organization was significant. It was self-consciously a *world* organization—more than the YMCA, which had been founded first in the context of the city, the WSCF was founded to organize and unite the *world*. As Mott insisted from the first, “it takes the whole world into its vision and plan.”⁷⁵ It was also self-consciously a *federation*, not a “merging or consolidation” but an association in which each group “preserves its independence and individuality.”⁷⁶ In contrast to the Foreign Work of the YMCA, which intended to replicate the American “perfected machine” and to train local leaders to implement this prescribed standardized program, the WSCF hoped to federate student Christian groups regardless of their local differences, and to admit each to full and equal membership on a broader basis than the other existing proto-ecumenical organizations—a basis broad enough to encompass Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians. The YMCA, the YWCA, and the SVM all sought to impart their respective ideas in the non-Christian world—a broadly

⁷³ Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955*, 120–30.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 122–31.

⁷⁵ John R. Mott and World's Student Christian Federation, *The Students of the World United: The World's Student Christian Federation, the World's Student Conference at Eisenach, Some Achievements of the Year 1897-98* (World's Student Christian Federation, 1899), 23.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

pedagogical project. The WSCF also sought to influence the non-Christian world, but its project was not so explicitly pedagogical, and soon became explicitly reciprocal—it self-consciously approached its non-Western members as full equals and allies, and it did not distinguish between extending Christian influence at Oxford and extending it Jaffna College in Ceylon. “The old antithesis between the claims of the home and foreign fields is rapidly disappearing under the influence of the work and example of the Federation, which regards and treats the world as a unit,” Mott would argue.⁷⁷ Thus the WSCF was the organizational embodiment of McConaughy’s assertion that there was “no such thing as the foreign field,” and was built around his recognition that local leaders would have “a vaster field and more power” than any imported proselytizers.

The Motts left Sweden to continue on their tour, now authorized by the newly formed Federation to organize and affiliate the Christian students of the world. At every point they met with students, religious leaders, government leaders, missionaries and merchants in an exhausting schedule that included both what Mott called “platform work” and “personal work,” founding new student Christian organizations at colleges and universities and at the national level, and drawing existing groups into the Federation. They spent an additional month in Europe and attended another student conference in Switzerland, and then took two months ranging from Constantinople through the Balkans, Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. From there, they sailed to Ceylon and India, where over the course of three months they attended ten conferences and the organized the Intercollegiate YMCA of India and Ceylon as well as the SVM of that region. They took more than three months in Australia, New Zealand, and Tasmania, where they organized the Australasian Student Christian Union, and then headed to Hong Kong. During their three months in China, they attended seven conferences and conventions and organized the College YMCA of China, and after two months in Japan the result was the Student YMCA Union of that nation. Wherever possible along the way, Leila Mott addressed groups of women on the topic of the YWCA, and ultimately, calls were issued from India, China, Japan, and Turkey for American YWCA secretaries. They spent almost a month in Hawaii, and another crossing the American continent. Overall, across twenty-two countries and twenty months, they had visited almost 150 colleges and universities and met with students and teachers from 150 more at twenty-one conferences and conventions. Mott had helped to organize seventy new YMCAs and other Christian student groups, not counting those reorganized and expanded, and had brought five new national student Christian movements into the Federation from around the globe. He had also seen five hundred students converted, and three hundred volunteer for Christian work.⁷⁸ In his various accounts of the tour, Mott made the case that the student centers of the world were “strategic points”—“The realization of the highest hopes of the Kingdom of God” hinged upon the students, he argued, because “from their ranks are coming the leaders

⁷⁷ John R. Mott, *The World’s Student Christian Federation: A Decennial Review* (World’s Student Christian Federation, 1905), 21.

⁷⁸ John R. Mott, *Strategic Points in the World’s Conquest: The Universities and Colleges as Related to the Progress of Christianity* (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1897), 215–18; Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955*.

of the nations.”⁷⁹ Echoing the evangelistic language of the arithmetic of souls (and recalling the attitude of George Williams’ generation toward “the principals of houses”) Mott made the case that, although “the soul of the student is worth no more in God’s sight than the soul of the uneducated man,” due to the worldly power of the educated classes the WSCF’s work with students was “dealing not with addition, but with multiplication.”⁸⁰

From the beginning, Mott insisted repeatedly on respect for the independence of the federated national student movements, even as he and other YMCA leaders worked to replicate the American program in the YMCAs being organized by Americans abroad. The “true place” of the WSCF, Mott asserted, was to “serve the various movements and not to govern them.”⁸¹ He committed the federation to “preserving the national characteristics, individuality, and independence of each movement,” and insisted that “all the different national view-points are invaluable in the development of the world-wide movement.”⁸² While Mott used the language of independence and self-determination only in reference to national organizations of Christian students, he was very clear that the target demographic for these groups was the future leaders of the nations. When the WSCF revised its basis in 1913, it made explicit its goals to

bring students of all countries into mutual understanding and sympathy, to lead them to realize that the principles of Jesus Christ should rule in international relationships, and to endeavour by so doing to draw the nations together.⁸³

While the efforts of the YMCA and YWCA to extend Christian influence over the political and social relations between nations were less overt, the WSCF stated these aims explicitly.

For Mott, it was essential that the “world-embracing circle” of the WSCF include “students of all races,” and the Chinese, Indian, and Japanese College YMCA representatives to the WSCF were native to those nations. K. Ibuka of Tokyo was selected as Vice-Chairman of the Federation and thereafter, that position on the executive committee was always held by a non-Western student leader. The same was true of the Women’s Division—Professor Lilivati Singh of Lucknow College was the first Vice-Chair of the department and was succeeded by non-Western women leaders.⁸⁴ The Chairmanship was for years held by a Western leader. Ibuka, however, presided over the first WSCF convention in 1897, held, symbolically, near Mt. Hermon, at which all ten national movements, encompassing the Christian student groups from eight hundred colleges and universities across five continents, were represented. The convention also heard reports from corresponding members in Turkey, Greece, Syria, Egypt, and Hawaii. There were delegates registered from thirty-six Christian

⁷⁹ *The World’s Student Christian Federation: Origin, Objects and Significance of the Federation; the Convention at Northfield and Williamstown; Some Achievements of the First Two Years* (World’s Student Christian Federation, 1898), 27.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸² Mott, *The World’s Student Christian Federation: A Decennial Review*, 24, 9.

⁸³ As quoted in Muukkonen, *Ecumenism of the Laity*, 145.

⁸⁴ Wilson, *Fifty Years of Association Work among Young Women, 1866-1916*, 148.

denominations “and from all the five great races of mankind,” although being that the Student’s Christian Association of South Africa was white, it is not clear which delegates were black.⁸⁵ For Mott, it was “most important” not only to include students from around the world, but “to facilitate interchange” between “the various nations and races.” From the first, he was deeply convinced that “the Federation will greatly promote the Kingdom of Christ if it can keep these bodies of students acting and reacting upon each other.”⁸⁶ In his decennial report as General Secretary in 1905 he reported that “one of the chief results of the Federation has been that the movements in the countries of Christendom have been tremendously benefited by those of non-Christian lands ... The workers in the universities of Europe and America have been inspired to renewed and greater efforts as they have observed the heroic, self-sacrificing and fruitful activities” of non-Western students. Importantly, he pointed out that before the Federation, the Western students did not anticipate this positive impact—they had only considered the influence that they would exert on the students of the East.⁸⁷ He warned them to continue to beware of “false national pride” which could blind them to what they could gain from the smaller movements of other nations.⁸⁸ Mott went on to assert that by bringing together the “students of different nations and races” who would be “the coming leaders of the world,” the Federation was “fusing the nations together by stronger bonds than arbitration treaties or military alliances.”⁸⁹

This constellation of ideas comes up frequently in Mott’s writing—when he speaks of “races” it is often in conjunction with “nations” and both are considered in light of “strategic points” of worldwide power and influence. As head of the North American YMCA, the WSCF, and the SVM, Mott avoided advocating for racial equality as such, and the empowering of oppressed racial groups was never high on his agenda. Like his predecessors in the age of abolition, Mott seemed more worried about un-Christ-like attitudes and corrupted spiritual states among the powerful than about securing racial justice on its own merits for the oppressed. While he argued strongly that students should “feel their responsibility for improving social conditions,” to the point of spending their vacations engaged in social work, this work was always to be conducted for the larger purpose of advancing the Kingdom of God.⁹⁰ The framework of Mott’s thinking was always structured by Christian principle and directed toward this larger purpose, and his approach to race was no different. In arguing for the importance of the study of social questions, he pointed to the imperative of bringing Christian principle “into every department and relationship of life—into the world of thought, into family and social life, into commercial and industrial life, into municipal affairs, into national problems, and into international relations.”⁹¹ Like other Christian reformers, Mott believed that this application of Christian principle scaled up—from the internal life of the individual, to the family, to the municipality, to the nation, and ultimately to the world of nations. He

⁸⁵ *Convention Report, 1898*, 13, 15, 17.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁷ Mott, *The World’s Student Christian Federation: A Decennial Review*, 8.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

viewed the problems of racial antagonism and oppression from within this framework, and he considered the “strategic points” at which racial relations must be Christianized to be, first, internal to the individual, and second, at the level of the national leadership of the world. The most forward-looking aspect of Mott’s thinking on race was his underlying assumption, as early as the 1890s, that the world would and should ultimately be organized as a system of independent nations, which would and should have racially representative leadership. As the United States was expanding its own empire into the Caribbean and the Pacific, the Great Powers were still “scrambling for Africa,” and British dominion in India and elsewhere was ever more deeply established, the idea that the non-Western world would be organized as a system of independent nations headed by non-Western leaders was not a given. The fact that Mott and so many other Christian reformers felt this idea to be a logical extension of Christian principle, and therefore a condition of the Kingdom of God, was significant.

In 1901 and 1902, Mott conducted a second world tour on behalf of the YMCA, the SVM, and the WSCF. In 1903 he returned to Australia, in 1906 he visited South Africa and South America, and in 1907 he again traveled through Asia, and arranged for the WCSF conference to be held in Tokyo. By 1908, Mott was speaking of a “rising spirit of nationalism and race patriotism.” Speaking to a missionary conference on “The Urgency and Crisis in the Far East,” he detailed this spirit respectively in a series of countries, including the Philippine Islands, Siam, and Korea. Of the “rising spirit in India” he claimed that “it is to the infinite credit of Britain that she has made possible the very development of that spirit.”⁹² Nationalism and patriotism, Mott argued, were spurred by Western influences and enabled by Western technologies such as railroads. More broadly, they were “associated with Christianity” itself:

The cry is spreading over Asia, ‘Asia for the Asiatics!’ We can no more resist, even if we would, this rising national ...feeling, than we can resist the tides of the sea. But we would not resist it. We remember that the nation and the race are as much the creation of God as is the family. We remember that these mighty powers are to be allied with Christianity and never placed in antagonism to it.⁹³

Here again, Mott links “nations” and “races,” views their dynamics as subject to Christian principle, and furthers the assumption that the world will inevitably be organized into independent nations with racially representative leadership. Both this geopolitical system and the national feeling that will bring it into being are broadly considered to be aligned with God’s will.

In this address, Mott specified China as the “the most marked example of growing consciousness of nationality, and of a desire to acquire national independence and power,” and he identified Christian missions and mission schools as a cause of this feeling, due to “their unifying influence.” He also pointed to the opium wars with Britain, the “unjust” Exclusion Acts in America and Australia, the seizing of Chinese territory by Russia, Germany, France, and Japan, and “the building in their own capital city of

⁹² John R. Mott, “The Urgency and Crisis in the Far East,” ed. David McConaughy, *The World-Call to Men of to-Day; Addresses and Proceedings of the Men’s Missionary Convention, Held in Philadelphia, February 11-13, 1908*, 1908, 26.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

legations,” as contributing to this nationalist awakening in China. Mott called on his audience to consider this spirit sympathetically. “Put yourself in the place of an ambitious Chinese student,” he urged. “Under such conditions would not the national spirit assert itself in you?”⁹⁴

This particular appeal, asking Americans to put themselves in the place of those of other nations, was a hallmark of Mott’s, and under his leadership it became increasingly common in the language of the Christian reformers of the SVM, WSCF, YMCA, and YWCA. Mott had used this language at the first WSCF Convention at Northfield, insisting that “we must learn to put ourselves in the place of the man whom we are seeking to win.”⁹⁵ Along the same lines, he argued that the work of Christian students with those of other religions, nations, and races should be “intelligent,” “tactful,” “natural,” “sincere,” and “sympathetic.” Thirty years later, as he was transitioning from leadership of the North American YMCA to leadership of the World Alliance, Mott was still advancing the same idea—on a tour of China in 1926, he asserted that “we must begin at the foundation and with kindly feelings toward other peoples and strive to promote international acting and thinking,” and, as always, he affirmed that “the Golden Rule was made to be applied between nations as well as between individuals.”⁹⁶ Mott’s insistence on the Golden Rule was of a piece with the universalist tendencies of the Christian reform under his direction. The human interchangeability of “do unto others” and of “putting yourself in the other man’s place” assumes the basic semblance of man. Further, as generous and noble as this sentiment may have been, like the “call” it could allow for a certain degree of projection and erasure, as Christian reformers insisted that “the other man” would feel as they did about a great range of subjects, and proceeded to act on that insistence.

At the same address during which he argued that “the Golden Rule was made to be applied between nations,” Mott inflected the perennial idea of “plastic nations” with a decidedly pedagogical tone. “In my travels the most significant element to be observed is that all nations are humble today and hence are teachable,” he asserted. “Nations which were proud and haughty a few years ago are now humble and ready to listen to the messages of teachers.” He further connected this idea to religious education, referring to “nations that are willing and ready to confess their mistakes and sins.”⁹⁷ For Mott, and for many of those who looked to him for direction and inspiration, “the other man” who would naturally feel the same patriotic spirit as oneself once that feeling was awakened, would also naturally feel the same affinity for Christ once educated on Christian principle. To the degree that “the other man” was ultimately expected to be similar to oneself, he was also expected to be “humble” and “teachable.”

Over the first two decades of the twentieth century, the WSCF, the SVM, and the Foreign Work of the YMCA all grew in tandem, and to an important degree, their development proceeded along the lines of Mott’s suggestion in 1900 that “in a non-Christian land everything which manifests the spirit of Christ is in an important sense

⁹⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁵ *Convention Report, 1898*, 50.

⁹⁶ “Local Y.M.C.A.’s Welcome John R. Mott At Dinner,” *The China Press*, January 5, 1926, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chinese Newspapers Collection.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

evangelistic.”⁹⁸ This was the idea which animated the YMCA’s work with the “whole man,” and over time it came to pervade the more explicitly evangelistic organizations as well. By 1916, the International Committee of the North American YMCA supported secretaries in 55 foreign locations around the globe. There were 75 in China, 44 in India, 10 in Japan, 10 in Egypt and the Near East, and 23 in Latin America. By 1916, there were National Committees “composed chiefly of Christian citizens of these foreign countries” in Japan, China, India, South America, and the Turkish Empire. Almost 300 local secretaries served in these locations as well, supported by local funds, and local training programs were being established in China and India.⁹⁹

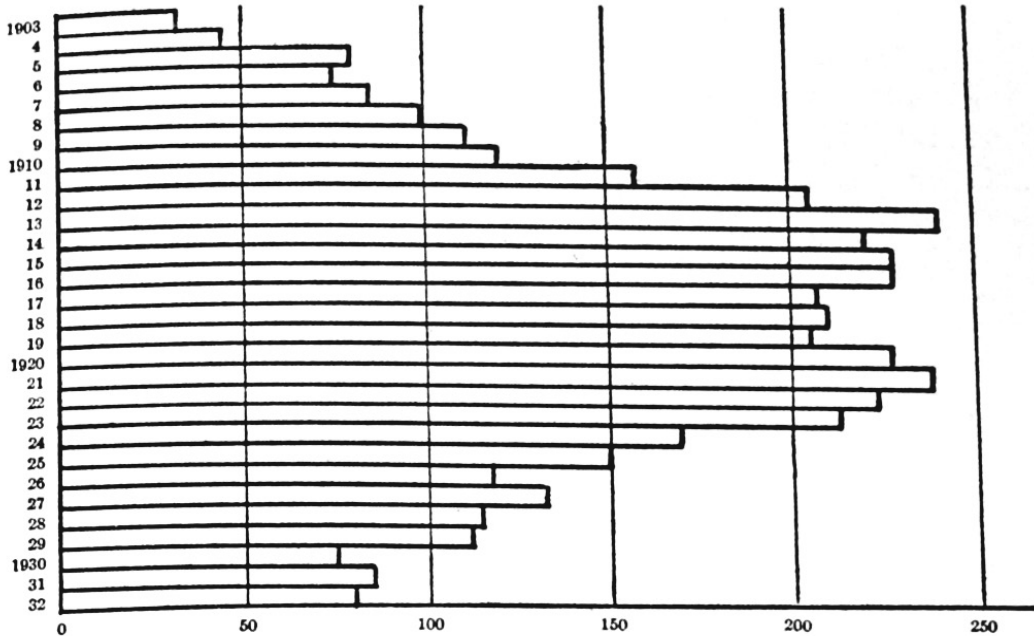


Fig. 9. American Secretaries in Foreign Service, 1903-1932, from a YMCA study completed in 1939, Owen Pence, *The Y.M.C.A. and Social Need: A Study of Institutional Adaptation* (Association Press, 1939), 129. The decline in the numbers of American Secretaries in Foreign Service in the 1920s owed more to the process of indigenization than to a decline of the Association in the nations in which it had been established.

While the YMCA provided leadership for and exerted influence over the SVM, the SVM sent out almost fifty times as many young people as the YMCA did under its own auspices. By 1919, more than 8000 student volunteers had sailed as missionaries. Of these, about 2500 had gone to China, about 1500 to India, Burma, and Ceylon, almost 1000 to Africa, roughly 1000 to Latin America and the West Indies, close to 300 to the Philippines and Oceania, and about 300 to Turkey and Arabia. During this time, the SVM had provided roughly three of every four missionaries, both male and female, across 60 denominations. While these volunteers had achieved some conversions through “direct and indirect influence,” the SVM Convention report of 1919 emphasized

⁹⁸ John R. Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation* (Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1900), 10.

⁹⁹ Messer Commission report, as discussed in Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 676–81.

the ways in which they had been “widening the limits of Christ’s Kingdom” through establishment of and service in schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, and dispensaries, and through “bringing to bear the principles and spirit of Christ upon the economic, social, political and racial problems of nations and peoples,” in a great “exercise of Christian statesmanship!”¹⁰⁰ The SVM peaked before the Great War, as the model of social service suggested in the Convention report began to supplant the goal of “evangelization of the world in this generation.” The Foreign Work of the YMCA would peak in the late 1920s, but would continue through mid-century as the YMCA’s World Service.¹⁰¹

The YWCA was also closely associated with the SVM, the WSCF, and the College YMCA—Ruth Rouse served on the executive committees of the SVM, the WSCF, and the World’s YWCA for decades, and Nettie Dunn headed the American National Committee of the YWCA and was at the same time a leader of the SVM. The YWCA began its version of Foreign Work in 1895, when Agnes Gale Hill sailed for India to respond to a “call” orchestrated by Jane Wishard. Until 1909, there were two parallel national American YWCA organizations. Both were strongly rooted in Christian reform—the first emphasizing reform, and the second emphasizing the Christian movement. The International Board of the YWCA brought together the city organizations which were associated with the movement for women’s rights and with reforms to protect women and children. The International Board leadership tended to be older, more committed to independence from male influence, and more interested in providing services for young women working in the cities. The more reform-oriented International Board did not require an evangelical test for its affiliates, and some of its leaders were not members of evangelical churches. The second national organization, the American National Committee of the YWCA, had been organized in 1886 in conjunction with the SVM, and the two organizations shared leadership. The National Committee primarily represented the College YWCAs which were aligned with the College YMCAs, but also included some city YWCAs which had been founded by young women who had been introduced to the Association idea on campus. Following the YMCA, the National Committee was strongly committed to the evangelical requirement for active membership. It was not as interested in asserting independence from the male leadership of the YMCA, SVM, and WSCF—in several cases the YWCA leaders associated with the National Committee had immediate family members in the YMCA leadership. It was, however, strongly committed to control by the young women themselves, and not by the older generation of women who dominated the International Board. The National Committee had been inspired by the Mt. Hermon meeting, Wilder’s college tours, and the US tours of the Cambridge Band, and had been strongly caught up in the missionary spirit of the time. It was the National Committee which launched the foreign work of the YWCA, and which participated in the organization of the World’s YWCA in London between 1892 and 1898.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ *North American Students and World Advance*, 61–63.

¹⁰¹ Parker, *The Kingdom of Character*; Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 692.

¹⁰² Wilson, *Fifty Years of Association Work among Young Women, 1866-1916*; Anna Rice, *A History of the World’s Young Women’s Christian Association* (New York: Woman’s Press, 1948). Beyond Leila Mott

The World's YWCA, more so than the World Alliance of the YMCA, was closely involved in the extension of the Association idea to non-Christian nations by American and British leaders. In fact, whereas the World Alliance of the YMCA had been brought into being to associate the American and European work within their own respective nations, both the American National Committee of the YWCA and the World's YWCA were formed with an eye to coordinating missionary extension in non-Christian lands—the National Committee in conjunction with the SVM, and the World's YWCA among missionary-minded Association workers in order to align American and British YWCA projects in other nations. In discussing the value of a world organization, Jane Wishard had written to Emily Kinnaird of the YWCA of Britain that “America and Great Britain will stand side by side in the foreign field and their work should not be impeded by lack of harmony in methods and wisdom in the occupation of fields,” to which Kinnaird had replied, “I am sure it will be for the glory of God and the benefit of young women if we can, as far as possible, extend unitedly in foreign lands.”¹⁰³ The World's YWCA was thus formed for this purpose—explicitly to “extend unitedly”—and American and British YWCA secretaries on the foreign field were more than just superficially associated with the World organization. In 1896 Agnes Gale Hill organized a national YWCA for India, in 1905 Anna Estelle Paddock became the first national YWCA secretary for China, and Japan and Argentina soon had national organizations as well. In 1913 the work was extended to Constantinople, and by 1916, there were forty American and British YWCA secretaries serving in these national organizations and answering to the World's YWCA.¹⁰⁴

The specific conditions of the YWCA—the divided nature of the North American YWCA and the greater relative power of the World body, along with the underlying gender restrictions of the era—resulted in a few significant differences between the foreign work of the YWCA and the better-funded and more extensive foreign work of the YMCA. First, even as the YMCA was plying the “perfected machine,” the YWCA was worried about Associations “being started in new lands on the lines of the countries from which the workers came, instead of on lines especially adapted to the country for which they were being started.”¹⁰⁵ The leaders of the YWCA, having barely begun the process of standardizing their program at home, and being limited by stringent restrictions on women which manifested differently in every nation, had no delusions about the universal applicability of a “perfected” program. Annie Reynolds, as the first General Secretary of the World's YWCA, wrote in her first annual report that “the aim of the World's Association must be to encourage unity of purpose while recognizing liberally

and Jane Wishard, family connections at the top Association levels include Rebecca Morse of the World YWCA Executive Committee who was the sister of Richard Morse; Emma Bailey Speer of the unified National Board of the YWCA who was the wife of Robert Speer; Lady Kinnaird, the founder of the London YWCA who had three children who became Association leaders, Lord Kinnaird of the British YMCA, and Emily and Gertrude Kinnaird who led the British YWCA; and Grace Dodge of the unified American National Board who was the daughter of an active YMCA family, among many others.

¹⁰³ Rice, *A History of the World's Young Women's Christian Association*, 49.

¹⁰⁴ *Proceedings of the National Convention of the Young Women's Christian Associations of the United States of America* (National Board, Young Women's Christian Associations, 1915), 132.

¹⁰⁵ Rice, *A History of the World's Young Women's Christian Association*, 49.

great diversity of method.”¹⁰⁶ Further, as had happened in the United States and Britain, as the YMCA idea spread through the colleges of Asia the YWCA idea spread with it, and in places like Nagasaki (1889), Hang Chow (1890), and Tung Cho (1892), YWCAs were organized without Western resources of any kind. Elizabeth Wilson of the American YMCA, writing in 1916, celebrated the fact that such Associations “were truly indigenous and not a mere projection of the foreigners’ American notions.”¹⁰⁷ In language that can almost be read as a reproof to the YMCA, Wilson wrote that students who came from all over the world to study at the YWCA training school in Chicago “aim not to transplant but to select some of the ideas for grafting into either older or younger Association growths.”¹⁰⁸ She also noted that,

As far back as 1907, when women from other oriental lands met in Tokyo in the eighth World’s Student Christian Federation Conference, they recognized that the national work would not bear the hall marks of Canada or the United States or of any foreign country, but would be distinctly Japanese. Action and reaction are equal.¹⁰⁹

The YMCA was always interested in “truly indigenous” work, but in this era its workers were strongly committed to “transplanting” their program. They considered their project not in terms of “American notions” but of universal truths, and while the WSCF used the language of equal partnership with organizations in non-Christian nations, the YMCA did not. To this extent, the YWCA tended to be somewhat more responsive than its male counterpart to the conditions of the nations in which it worked. However, in not leaning as heavily on the essential sameness of humanity, the YWCA of this era periodically fell into essentializing national groups—a summation of the importance of the World YWCA stated that,

It is only when that mystical collectivism of the East, and the individualism of the West, and the strenuous gravity of the North and the tender passion of the South, have all been brought together to study the mind of Jesus, that we shall be able to understand what God has given us in Him.¹¹⁰

In 1905 the two parallel American YWCA organizations voted for unity, and after extensive negotiations they merged in 1909. The primary problem was that some of the reform-minded city Associations of the International Board did not meet the National Committee’s standards of evangelical church membership, and finally it was decided that these existing Associations would continue on their current bases, but that new Associations would be evangelical. The YMCA’s Portland Basis was found to be too strict, and the 1909 Convention settled on affiliation with a church represented by the newly formed Federal Council of Churches as their unified membership basis. There was also the problem of program. According to Elizabeth Wilson, a YWCA leader of the time, “There was appeal made for public service, for Christian women to take their due share of the municipal work of their nations, but the supreme obligation laid upon the women assembled in that conference was the winning of the individual soul for the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 69.

¹⁰⁷ Wilson, *Fifty Years of Association Work among Young Women, 1866-1916*, 303.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 311.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 307.

¹¹⁰ As quoted in Ibid., 315.

Kingdom of God.”¹¹¹ The Convention found a middle ground by designating as their “immediate purpose,” “to advance the physical, social, intellectual, moral, and spiritual interests of young women,” and their “ultimate purpose” as “bringing in of the Kingdom of God among young women.”¹¹² While the Convention stressed the ongoing mission of “winning the individual soul,” after unification, the priorities of the social-reform-minded women of the city organizations gained prominence, as the leaders of the erstwhile International Board extended their influence. Annie Reynolds, the General Secretary of the World’s YWCA, who had been affiliated with the National Committee, ultimately asserted that “the excuse for our existence will be the amount of practical help we give to young women.”¹¹³ In considering a motto to represent their unified mission, the 1909 convention discarded previous mottos of the National Committee which emphasized personal service and settled on John 10:10, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”—a motto seemingly advancing the worldly empowerment of young women.¹¹⁴

After unification, the foreign work of the YWCA, which had previously been solely the project of the National Committee, saw a greater impulse toward social service under the new influence of reform-minded women. Missionary work for women had already tended toward service in hospitals and schools, as missionary women expanded the traditional female roles of educating and caring for others. Now, following Mott’s dictum that “everything which manifests the spirit of Christ is in an important sense evangelistic,” and finding that their success as teachers and doctors was greater than their success at winning conversions, they turned more decidedly toward the “practical” work.

Christian reformer Helen Barrett Montgomery was representative of this turn of missionary women toward social reform. Many of the missionary women associated with the SVM and the WSCF had been, like Grace Wilder, inspired first by evangelical fervor, and had been more closely associated with their brothers and partners in the YMCA than with any groups specifically interested in the rights and problems of women. For Montgomery, however, the “evangelization of the world in this generation” was closely and importantly tied to the political rights and social interests of women around the world. Montgomery was not a leader of the SVM, the WSCF, or the YWCA, but was closely associated with them through philanthropy and through her leadership in the ecumenical movement, and she referred to works by Mott and Speer as required reading on missions.¹¹⁵ She had worked closely with Susan B. Anthony for women’s suffrage and for social and political reforms benefiting women in the state of New York, she coordinated philanthropy for women’s colleges in Asia, she translated the New Testament from the Greek into “everyday” language, and as a Baptist leader she was deeply involved in the ecumenical missionary movement. After the first Ecumenical Conference held in New York in 1900, she was recruited to produce a study on

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 254.

¹¹³ Rice, *A History of the World’s Young Women’s Christian Association*, 69.

¹¹⁴ Wilson, *Fifty Years of Association Work among Young Women, 1866-1916*, 332.

¹¹⁵ Helen Barrett Montgomery, *Western Women In Eastern Lands: An Outline of Study of Fifty Years of Woman’s Work in Foreign Missions* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910), 246.

“women’s work in foreign missions,” titled “Western Women in Eastern Lands.” In this work, she argued that, “The Gospel is the most tremendous engine of democracy ever forged. It is destined to break in pieces all castes, privileges, and oppressions.”¹¹⁶ For her, this “democracy” was both social and political. She traced the women’s missionary movement to roots in women’s struggles for abolition and for suffrage, and she interpreted it as “the uplift of oppressed womanhood and the betterment of social conditions in the most needy places of the world.”¹¹⁷ She believed that “the spirit of Christ... is drawing the whole world unto His own perfect charity, justice, friendliness, democracy, to that redeemed humanity in which there shall be neither male nor female, bond nor free.” For Montgomery, the “supreme worth of the individual” as Christian principle translated to the imperative of full social and political equality regardless of race or gender.¹¹⁸ In language that seems startlingly out of its time, Montgomery asserted that women’s missions were enabling the women of the world to rise up and “stand in power.”¹¹⁹

Like Mott, Montgomery believed that “everything which manifests the spirit of Christ” fell within the purview of Christian mission. She observed that “the ethical side of Christianity” was better received in non-Christian nations than its “supernatural side,”¹²⁰ and fully embraced social work and social reform as Christian mission. Hospitals, in particular, she believed, were perfect practical demonstrations of Christian principles.¹²¹ She felt that women had a “distinctive” role in such work—her belief in equality for women did not extend to non-differentiation. “It is a woman’s task to see that the poor, downtrodden, backward women of the non-Christian world have a chance,” she argued. “Let us take care of the kindergartens, orphanages, asylums, and schools that appeal most to us; let us touch the home side of life, believing that in so doing we are aiding the whole great enterprise to which as men and women we are committed.”¹²² She believed that such work would be best conducted by women’s organizations, such as the YWCA. On the question of complete integration of men and women in missions, she challenged, “Are the men ready for it? Are they emancipated from the caste of sex so that they can work easily with women, unless they be head and women clearly subordinate?...we have still a long stretch before the perfect democracy of Jesus is reached.”¹²³ Her use of the terms *emancipate*, *caste*, and *democracy* in conjunction here is significant. She links the language of abolition—men as oppressors must be “emancipated” from this corrupt system of oppression—to the idea of Christian principle as destructive of “caste”—long a justification for foreign mission in India and beyond—and finally to the idea of “perfect democracy,” drawing on all of the political connotations of that term. For Montgomery these ideas were inextricable—the ultimate end of Christian reform would be a worldwide mission for “perfect democracy.”

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 206.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 9, xiv.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 206, 207.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 243.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 221.

¹²¹ Ibid., 130-135.

¹²² Ibid., 273.

¹²³ Ibid., 269.

As a Progressive reformer, Montgomery was interested in achieving reform through political measures. She celebrated missionary accomplishments in supporting Indian women in using the courts to avoid forced marriage by invoking “the revolutionary doctrine of her right to her own person,” in outlawing foot-binding in China, in new legal freedoms for women in Turkey, and in a law promoted by the WCTU in Japan “that men and women might receive the same punishment for social crime.”¹²⁴ Like Mott, she considered the nations of the world to be temporarily “open” and “plastic,” and, like him, saw the “strategic” value of reform at the national level, especially during this period—“What the women appropriate in the opening years of this new freedom,” she argued, “will be wrought into the texture of national life for a century to come.”¹²⁵ Montgomery celebrated non-religious movements for democracy, like the new democratic clubs in Siam, as “at heart deeply religious,” due to the Christian principles inherent in political democracy.¹²⁶ Montgomery also believed in the power of education. She gave prominent place in her account to the story of Chinese school girls in a missionary dormitory considering the question of how best to “reform China.” After discussion, the girls decided against a proposition to destroy the idols, because “you cannot *compel* people to become Christians...if the *hearts* of the people are not changed, they will be nothing bettered.” They proposed instead to “give the power into the hands of the Reform Party” and “get back all the territory we have lost” in the unequal treaties, believing that this would be possible “if we could only *vote* for an Emperor as the Americans elect their president.”¹²⁷ For Montgomery, this was a quintessential example of Christ-inspired “new womanhood.” Instructing girls on Christian principles would not only change their hearts, but more broadly provide impetus to movements for national reform, national self-determination, and political democracy. If Mott assumed that the Kingdom of God would entail a world of nations controlled by racially representative leadership, Montgomery believed that those nations must be democratic, and that “Christian citizenship” would entail political involvement by women.

For both Mott and Montgomery, the advancement of the immanent Kingdom of God required ecumenicism, and both were at the center of the emerging worldwide ecumenical movement among Protestant churches of the era. Mott saw the ecumenical movement as an extension of the Association idea, and more immediately, he saw a “sense of the unity of Christendom” as a contribution of the World Student Christian Federation.¹²⁸ Against this movement, ecclesiasticism was “the greatest danger of the world.”¹²⁹ Montgomery considered ecumenicism to be a reflection of the influence of women who had been pioneers of interdenominational work, and of converts in non-Christian nations. Converts, she said, “see with clearer vision than we. ... Our essential

¹²⁴ Ibid., 212, 215, 209, 222.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 223.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 219.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 236-237.

¹²⁸ As quoted in Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 704.

¹²⁹ John R. Mott, “The World Problem,” in *Christian Unity; Missions*, vol. 4, Messages of the Men and Religion Movement (New York; London: Association Press, 1912), 304.

unity is to them the one clear, vital fact.”¹³⁰ In 1910, Mott chaired the International Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, organized in great part by J. H. Oldham, who had been a YMCA secretary in India, was then a leader of the Student Christian Movement, and would remain a prominent world ecumenical leader for decades to come. The conference, generally considered to be the “birth of public ecumenicism,”¹³¹ brought together twelve hundred delegates from across the Protestant denominations of the world to discuss coordination and cooperation on the mission field in order to achieve “the evangelization of the world in this generation.” Before the conference, commissions were charged with gathering information and reporting on such topics as “The Preparation of Missionaries,” “The Home Base of Missions,” “Missions and Governments,” and “Education in Relation to the Christianization of National Life,” and the work of the conference was organized around these topics. On all fronts, the delegates concurred that they must, as Montgomery phrased it, “inaugurate a policy of federation, consultation, consolidation, a policy of mapping out the work as a single campaign,” in fact, “to lay great, statesmanlike plans” for worldwide evangelization.¹³² The Continuation Committee of the Conference, in which Mott and Oldham were both heavily involved, launched numerous new studies—Montgomery, for one, was charged by this committee with touring Europe, the Middle East, and Asia researching the subject of women’s education. The Continuation Committee was reorganized as the International Missionary Council after the First World War, and it launched a journal, titled *The International Review of Missions*, edited by Oldham. To an important extent, the ecumenical movement can be seen not only as an attempt to organize for world evangelization, but also as an embodiment of the idea of Christian social relations for the world.

In 1912, Mott addressed the ecumenical Men and Religion Forward Movement¹³³ on “The World Problem.” He structured his address in answer to a challenge that had been made to him that, “This talk about crisis is overdone.” With an uncharacteristic use of an exclamation point, he responded,

Talk about crises being overdone at this time as we confront the non-Christian nations! When have so many nations been absolutely plastic, yet soon to set like plaster? Shall they set in pagan or Christian molds? When have the tides of nationalism surged among the places of Asia, of Africa, of the Pacific Islands, not to mention the near East or Europe as in the recent years? ...Tides that may set against the peaceful teachings of Christianity, or tides that may be regulated by Christian principles, which may be made factors for the upbuilding of the kingdom of truth and righteousness.¹³⁴

For Mott, the problem of the temporarily “plastic” state of nations was becoming ever

¹³⁰ Montgomery, *Western Women In Eastern Lands: An Outline of Study of Fifty Years of Woman’s Work in Foreign Missions*, 273–74.

¹³¹ Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations*, 12.

¹³² Montgomery, *Western Women In Eastern Lands: An Outline of Study of Fifty Years of Woman’s Work in Foreign Missions*, 274.

¹³³ For more on this see Gail Bederman, “The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough”: The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-Class Protestantism,” *American Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1989): 432–65.

¹³⁴ Mott, “The World Problem,” 303.

more closely linked to the problem of rising nationalism around the world. Only Christianity as pedagogy, as “peaceful teaching,” would address the crisis. But the urgency of the problem of nationalism in “plastic nations” was only one aspect of this crisis—in a nod to the “whole man, whole world” trope, Mott observed that the world had now “found itself as one body,” and as such the national prejudices of “so-called Western Christian civilization” were increasingly impacting the non-Christian world.

No longer are the races in water-tight compartments; the races are acting and reacting upon each other with startling directness and power, and perils and great dangers are taking place, the like of which other generations have not known in like degree, increasing friction, misunderstanding, prejudice. This twentieth century which some of us had hoped and prayed might be marked by universal good will, and by the spread of international arbitration, has come in as no other century—I make no exception—with the recrudescence of national prejudice.¹³⁵

This crisis of racially-driven national prejudice, Mott warned, was making the world “a very dangerous place.” What was the answer to the building crisis of race and nation? Not segregation, which Mott deemed “impossible,” not amalgamation, which he asserted “always failed,” and not domination, which, he warned, would “make the world more dangerous” still. The only solution was to “change the disposition of men,” to “revolutionize the methods and the ways of men.” This appeal to the perfection of the individual as the only solution to impending world crisis was, in this address, not primarily aimed at the nationalists of the “plastic nations.” It was aimed at his white, middle-class, Christian audience. It was up to them to Christianize the impact of “so-called Western Christian civilization.” Mott charged that it was absolutely imperative that this be done, “through the press and through the diplomatic and consular services; through our commerce, through our industry, through the streams of travel out from us to these nations.”¹³⁶ Notably, beyond the general disavowal of “domination,” Mott did not mention of any reorganization of colonial arrangements—Mott’s statements, while strongly worded and clearly delivered as a caution to imperialist and anti-colonialist nationalists alike, were so carefully crafted that they could always maintain the claim to the middle ground, and could be read as broadly consistent with the greater claims both of empire and of nation. In the approach to the First World War, Mott saw the task of Christianizing the nations to encompass both the “so-called” Christian and non-Christian nations in a single world-field, and he maintained the appeal to individual perfection as the first solution. “What could Almighty God do,” Mott demanded, “which He has not already done,” to stir Christians to address the impending crisis of race and nation, unless it be to visit their nations “with some terrible calamity?”¹³⁷

* * * * *

In the years before the First World War, the YMCA turned to the project of cultivating Christian social relations in public affairs, in the nation and around the world.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 307.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 304.

They framed the perceived social and political crises of the world as inherently moral, and they responded to these crises not only through Christian association, as ultimately expressed in the ecumenical movement, but through the ongoing work of producing and perfecting moral individuals the world over. Given the universal frame of the Kingdom of God, their project of the formation of moral individuals from the “plastic” masses of non-Christian nations was intimately linked to their project of perfecting individual citizens at home. This universalized “Christian citizenship” was on its face a democratic, egalitarian, inclusive thing—anyone could cultivate a Christian character, just as anyone could become a Christian. Indeed, YMCA leaders believed it to be imperative that every citizen of the world of nations cultivate just such a Christian character. However, this ideal of self-formation of the citizen—of a citizenship only fully legitimized by the individual internalization of the very particular set of values comprising this Christian character—ultimately lent itself more potently to reinscribing the social and political hierarchies of the world than to challenging them. The universalist tendencies of their liberal and evangelical ideals were always tempered in practice by a racialized pedagogical paternalism. If this project of inculcating the ideals of “Christian citizenship” was premised first on the inclusive belief that its subjects could and would develop such ideals if given the chance, it was based just as solidly on the less inclusive idea that they had not yet done so and that they needed to be guided in this development by those who were supposedly further along.

Chapter 5

FAIR PLAY AMONG NATIONS

Many Christian reformers of the YMCA and related Associations saw the First World War as the ultimate moral crisis.¹ The only solution, they believed, was the Christianization of relations between nations. Now, more than ever, as Mott put it, “All nations ... are in a plastic state and the world is liquid.” The crisis had not ended with Armistice—it would continue while there was still work to be done to leave a Christian imprint before the form of the nations was set. “Shall the form be that of militarism and national selfishness or that of idealism and altruism?” Mott asked. This, he asserted, was “the central question of the world today.”²

For more than a generation, the YMCA had touted the importance of healthful sport in the training of the “whole man.” Now, they turned the theories and practices of sport to the training of the “whole world.” The Associations, having remained carefully neutral on political questions up to this point, came out solidly and vocally in support of the League of Nations and the World Court.³ The nations, they asserted, must learn to “play fair.” They must learn to engage in friendly, healthful, rule-bound competition, according to Christian principle. Christian reformers imagined themselves as coaches, training future national leaders to be strong, generous, and cooperative, and to play cheerfully by the rule of law. If their ideals of Christian association could temper rampant nationalism into healthy team spirit, then militaristic aggression, which, as the law of the jungle, did not belong to the highest form of civilization, could be curbed. If the nations could be trained to err on the side of sportsmanlike generosity, they could be organized into a peaceful League, engaging in healthy competition. For the Christian reformers of the YMCA, good sportsmanship and good citizenship were not just informed by Christian principles, they were in fact the embodiment of Christian principles, and after the First World War, the project of inculcating these ideals seemed more urgent than ever.

J. H. Oldham, who had been a YMCA Secretary in India, a leader in the Student Christian Movement, and the organizer of the 1910 International Missionary Conference, wrote extensively on the need for Christianizing the relations between nations, and this chapter opens with a consideration of his ideas and those of others on

¹ J.H. Oldham referred to the war in 1914 as indicating “a deep-seated failure to understand the principles of Christ and to apply them to human affairs.” J. H. Oldham, *Papers for War Time: Oldham, J. H. The Decisive Hour, Is It Lost?* (Oxford University Press, 1914), 2. For Christian reformers like Oldham and Mott, who had been warning of an impending crisis of racially-inflected nationalism and arguing for the evangelization of the non-Christian nations on that basis, the fact that the primary belligerents were the world’s most Protestant powers was deeply disturbing. The nations which they had expected to be most guided by Christian principle had turned from the ideal of Christian brotherhood and had precipitated an apocalypse of horror on a global scale—the ultimate moral crisis.

² “Local Y.M.C.A.’s Welcome John R. Mott At Dinner,” 1.

³ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 546–48.

the topic, including African American Association Secretaries; contributors to Robert Wilder's 1918 appeal, *The Red Triangle in the Changing Nations*; a contributor to Oldham's *International Review of Missions* who expounded on the views of "The Man of 1919" on such topics as "child-races" which "must grow up to manhood;" and lastly Sherwood Eddy, prominent YMCA evangelist and Secretary for Asia, who by 1920 was calling for "the democracy of nations and the right of unprivileged classes"—it had been "everybody's war," Eddy argued, and so it must now be "everybody's world." The chapter then turns to the ways in which these ideas were worked out in relation to ideals of sportsmanship, looking first at the work of Luther Gulick, who was largely responsible for the development of the YMCA's physical programs, and then at the architecture of YMCA buildings and the ways in which the Associations' ideals were represented in their "physical plants" in the US and around the world. Finally, the chapter tells the story of Harry Kingman, a YMCA Physical Director in China in the 1920s, and shows how his attitudes about "fair play" shaped his responses to nationalist student movements in China, revealing both the generosity and the limitations of these ideals.

* * * * *

The YMCA threw itself into war work. The day that the US had declared war on Germany, Mott sent a telegraph to President Wilson offering the "full service of the Association Movement." Within a week, a National War Work Council was formed under Mott, and within a month, Wilson had drawn Mott off for diplomatic duty on the Root Mission to Russia. The War Work Council, while remaining under Association control, functioned in effect as a division of the US Armed Forces, providing welfare and recreational services to the troops and prisoners of war across Europe and around the world. Under the sign of the Red Triangle, the YMCA served more than two million US troops and support staff as well as those of multiple other nations, and ministered to six million prisoners of war. It maintained several thousand huts, tents, canteens, mobile units, and leave centers, including 140 huts for the Chinese Labor Corps, staffed in part by Chinese secretaries who had been attending Western-style colleges in China.⁴ During the war, the Association accelerated its shift from evangelism to social service, as it took up the work of relief on a colossal scale.⁵ Mott spent much of the war serving under Wilson as a diplomat, further marking the YMCA's turn toward political involvement, with an emphasis on mediation. The YWCA, too, joined the war effort through the War Work Council, declaring in a 1917 editorial that "the largest cause ever put up to mankind is the one now before us, 'to make the world safe for democracy.' In its highest sense this is the same thing as the Kingdom of God."⁶ The Associations, *en masse*, embraced and actively promoted this emerging millennialist vision of a new

⁴ Ibid., 486–92.

⁵ For more on the YMCA's work during the First World War, see William Howard Taft, *Service with Fighting Men: An Account of the Work of the American Young Men's Christian Associations in the World War* (Association Press, 1922).

⁶ As quoted in Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46*, 47.

democratic order for the world.⁷

On a psychic level, the war had a tremendous destabilizing impact. The Christian reformers of the Associations had been fretting about moral crisis for generations, and had been struggling with the fracturing of meaning and moral authority that had accompanied the processes of industrialization and urbanization. Now, the horrors of the war, unprecedented in kind and in scale, truly defied meaning and eviscerated the moral authority of those who had presided over them. The liberal optimism and Progressive confidence, which for more than a century had accompanied middle-class anxieties over civic virtue, were severely shaken. Even more markedly than the idea of social crisis had been brought to the forefront by the Panic of the 1890s, the war now stepped up the idea of international political crisis, framed explicitly as a crisis of democracy. Driven by the urgency of this multifaceted and ever-deepening sense of crisis, and in the face of the deterioration of the very meaning of morality, Christian reformers doubled down on their commitments to Christianize the social relations between individuals, and between nations.⁸

One of the most prolific advocates for the idea of Christian social relations between nations was the Scottish ecumenical leader, J. H. Oldham. Oldham had been born in Bombay to missionary parents, and after serving as a YMCA secretary in Lahore in the 1890s, where he had developed close personal friendships with Indian YMCA leaders, he had returned to Scotland and became involved in the Student Christian Movement. His ecumenical work would involve him politically in advocating for German missionaries at Versailles, and in attempting to liberalize British imperial policy in Africa. While editing the *International Review of Missions*, he authored several other books, the most widely read being *Christianity and the Race Problem*, against scientific racism. In an earlier work, *The World and the Gospel*, Oldham asserted, "In the world as it now is we cannot be Christians in the full sense without setting ourselves to Christianize the social order."⁹ As did an increasing number of missionaries, Oldham believed that social work could communicate Christian principles. "It has been necessary," he argued, for "the Gospel to commend itself in deeds and in the revelation of a new type of life before attention could be gained for its spoken message. The hospital and the school, the exhibition of Christian family life and a Christian home, have played an indispensable part in the presentation of the content of the Gospel." However, in the context of the horrors of the Great War, the idea of Christian social relations took on a deeper political

⁷ For more on the broader context of the messianic vision of world democracy as projected by President Wilson, see Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Malcolm D. Magee, *What the World Should Be: Woodrow Wilson and the Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy* (Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2008).

⁸ See Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Christian Basis of World Democracy* (New York: Association Press, 1919). Latourette, who would later write a well-regarded history of the Foreign Work of the Associations, organized *The Christian Basis of World Democracy* as a study guide, using discussion questions on biblical text to argue for the Christianizing of relations between and within nations, with the explicit aim of furthering democracy as a universal ideal.

⁹ Joseph Houldsworth Oldham, *The World and the Gospel* (London: United Council for Missionary Education, 1916), 15.

meaning. “In the face of the moral tragedy” of the War, Oldham argued, “we must examine again the meaning of the Christian ideal of the relations of men with one another.”¹⁰

The war, Oldham believed, was a result of the failure of humanity to live according to “the Christian ideal of the relations of men with one another.” However, it was no longer sufficient, according to Oldham, to merely act as an individual according to Christian principle. Quoting Woodrow Wilson from *The New Freedom*, he adduced, “Yesterday, and ever since history began men were related to one another as individuals... In the daily round, men dealt freely and directly with one another. To-day the everyday relationships of men are largely with great impersonal concerns, with organizations, not with other individual men. Now this is nothing short of a new social age, a new era of human relationships.”¹¹ Whereas in the time of George Williams the problem had been characterized as a moral crisis of the stranger in the city—the new individual, newly free—now more than half a century later, the individual was considered timeless and a given, and the crisis was perceived as social, and ultimately political. The violent breakdown of human relationships that constituted this crisis could no longer be addressed merely by Christianizing the individual. In Oldham’s view,

In the ‘Great Society’ in which we now live, with its highly complex organization and the enormously increased dependence of the individual on the community, the Christian life cannot find full and sufficient expression in the personal relations of individuals with other individuals. If we are to be Christians in any thorough-going sense, we must assert the Lordship of Christ not only in our personal dealings with other individuals, but also in those many relations of life in which our responsibility is shared with others and yet is real; in industry, commerce, civic government, national politics, international relations.¹²

The idea that economic and political relations at the municipal, national, and international levels must be Christianized was the same argument that Mott and other Christian reformers had been making for years, but it was now imbued with even greater urgency and immediacy in the context of the war. The question of nation and nationalism especially took on a new meaning. Oldham in 1916 was more ambivalent about national feeling than Mott had been in 1908. Oldham warned against nationalism as a selfish sentiment that must be Christianized and turned to a sense of national responsibility. “The awakening of national consciousness among Eastern peoples” was not in Oldham’s view an inevitable extension of Christian principle, as per Montgomery and Mott, but a problem that required “much insight, delicacy and tact.”¹³ Like other Christian reformers, Oldham leaned on the idea of “trusteeship.” In mediating colonial claims in Kenya, he argued against the assertion of white settlers that the Kenyans would always be a subject population, instead advancing the idea that while Kenyans were not yet prepared for self-government, that they should not be ruled indefinitely by an oligarchy of the white minority.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., 19, 8.

¹¹ Ibid., 14.

¹² Ibid., 199.

¹³ Ibid., 191, 175.

¹⁴ K Clements, *Faith on the Frontier: A Life of J.H. Oldham* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 198–200.

For Oldham, as for Mott, nationality was linked to race. In fact, both seemed at times to use the two terms interchangeably, especially when discussing the non-Christian world. In *The World and the Gospel*, Oldham expounded at length on the problem of relations between races, a problem he believed must have a pedagogical solution. "If the dangers involved in racial misunderstanding are to be overcome," he argued, "we require a policy of education which will aim at stimulating and strengthening the instincts of honour, chivalry and generosity towards other races. The public mind must become imbued with the idea that the world is a community of nations and races, none of which can be made perfect apart from the others." He continued, "It is the purpose of God that the races of mankind should form one family. That the strong should help the weak is the most elementary of Christian duties."¹⁵ There is no assumption in this language that the races must be equal. Instead racism is characterized as "misunderstanding" that can be sorted by educating the strong in their Christian duty toward the weaker children of God—his language keys the weak in gendered terms of family, suggesting that the "help" he references might include the duty of assuming benevolent familial authority. Oldham, like many other Christian reformers, spoke of the races of the world in terms of brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. However, while some reformers emphasized essential semblance, Oldham, like Elizabeth Wilson in her history of the YWCA, emphasized the value in essential difference. "Every people has its special and distinctive gift," he wrote, and thus, "nationality finds its true meaning and highest expression in the perfecting and offering of this gift in the service of humanity."¹⁶ By the mid-1920s, Mott had adopted this line as well, asserting that "every nation and race has something to contribute and should have the right to make its contribution."¹⁷ Perhaps due to Oldham's position as a British public figure at the height of the age of empire, his conception of Christian social relations among races and nations did not extend quite as far as that of Mott or Montgomery toward eventual political equality and national self-determination. The pedagogical relationship he emphasized in *The World and the Gospel* did not involve the training of the less-advanced in order that they might ultimately achieve equality, it involved educating the "strong" in their duty toward the "weak." His ideas would develop somewhat over time; in his later work in Kenya, and in his widely read treatise *Christianity and the Race Problem*, published several years later, Oldham would advance a more careful and nuanced version of this position.¹⁸

Before the 1910 International Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, ecumenical foundations had been laid in the United States. After the Ecumenical Missionary Conference of 1900 in New York, thirty-two Protestant denominations, representing a significant portion of the nation's Protestant church membership, had come together in 1908 to form the Federal Council of Churches. One of the first actions of the FCC was to adopt a "Social Creed," declaring in specific terms the position of the federated Churches on social issues, in light of the Social Gospel. The twelve positions focused

¹⁵ Oldham, *The World and the Gospel*, 191–92.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, vi.

¹⁷ "Local Y.M.C.A.'s Welcome John R. Mott At Dinner."

¹⁸ Joseph Houldsworth Oldham, *Christianity and the Race Problem* (George H. Doran Company, 1924); Clements, *Faith on the Frontier*.

primarily on Progressive reforms related to labor conditions, but the first explicitly designated the churches to be “for equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life.”¹⁹ The YWCA and the WSCF adopted the Social Creed more warmly than the YMCA, which finally passed it after heated debate and with a narrow margin at the 1919 Convention—the YMCA’s longstanding practice of careful avoidance of controversy and its dependence on the philanthropy of industrialists stood against its ever greater sense of the need to address the “social crisis” in clear and specific terms.²⁰ The 1918 SVM Convention had also officially taken a social turn, embracing a broader view of service, as opposed to narrow evangelism.²¹

African American YMCA leaders did not miss the Associations’ inconsistency on racial relations. Even as the YMCA was insisting on racial integration at all levels in its Foreign Work, Associations at home were segregated. In 1910, the official national YMCA periodical published an appeal by YMCA leader C.T. Walker, titled “For 10,000 Negroes.” Like other YMCA leaders, he asserted that the application of Christian principle to social relations “rights all wrong; settles all differences; solves all problems; ... and produces a perfect civilization.” However, he hinted at a critique of the standard pedagogical approaches to race relations, referring to the “tribulation” which they had historically justified as his people were “disciplined in the school of slavery.” Further, he challenged the YMCA’s double standard on race relations directly, arguing that “our white brethren cannot hope to have the greatest possible success in their foreign work if the millions of colored men are neglected at home.”²² For Walker, Mott’s assessment that the “strategic point” for race relations was at the level of international world leadership, overlooked the fact that the students and leaders of other nations would be well aware of the Association’s failure to apply its Christian principles in racial relations at home. Looking back from midcentury, African American YMCA leader Benjamin Mays reflected that,

It is a grim commentary on man’s inconsistency and his inhumanity that so many white men and women have got to foreign lands to ‘save souls’ who would not share the bread and wine of a communion service with a Negro in the United States, let alone sit down to share an ordinary meal.²³

That the experience of the war was beginning to change racial dynamics is hinted in a May 1918 article in the YWCA Association Monthly, written by African American YWCA leader Mary E. Jackson, and titled “Colored Girls in the Second Line of Defense.” Jackson asserted, perhaps overly optimistically, that “everyone realizes that both justice and efficiency demand that white and colored soldiers be treated alike.” If African American men were being afforded the opportunity to serve their nation, women must be as well—it was inefficient and unjust and would work counter to the war effort, Jackson argued, to do otherwise. Maintaining the construct of a balanced middle ground, Jackson enjoined African American women, for their part, “to do not [their] bit

¹⁹ White and Hopkins, *The Social Gospel*, xvii.

²⁰ Fisher, *Public Affairs and the Y.M.C.A.*, 72-74.

²¹ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 866.

²² C. T. Walker, “For 10,000 Negroes,” *Association Men* 36, no. 3 (December 1910): 105.

²³ Benjamin Elijah Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography* (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 154.

but [their] biggest.” Suggesting that the pedagogical model of race relations may have been valid, but that the time had come to move on, Jackson wrote that the African American woman was “no longer in any sense a ward of America, but a citizen with the rights, duties, and responsibilities of citizenship.” Like Walker, Jackson suggested that US projects abroad were being undermined by inconsistent application of liberal ideals at home. Careful to qualify her statement to fit within the pedagogical frame, Jackson asserted that, “until colored women have been accorded the right to compete in every line of endeavor for which training, capability and adaptability fit them, we cannot hope to rank as an ideal for world-wide democracy.”²⁴

In light of the ideals that the United States so vocally championed during the war, the Associations now became more explicit in framing their project in terms of worldwide democracy. In 1918, the YMCA published a volume titled *The Red Triangle in the Changing Nations*, edited by Robert Wilder, longstanding leader of the SVM. Its central question asked, “When the war is won, how is the world to be kept safe for democracy, and how is a real and lasting brotherhood of man to be established?” If the answer wasn’t immediately clear to readers, Wilder continued, rhetorically, “Does the war show that Christianity has failed, or is it the only hope for ultimate peace between nations?”²⁵ The crisis was now one of worldwide democracy, and the solution, as ever, was the application of Christian principle. Like the studies of missionary advocates in the 1880s, the volume was organized by nation and region, and contributors who had served in each area addressed its perceived needs in terms of the YMCA’s project. On the South American nations, the General Secretary of South American Federation of YMCAs lamented “the inefficacy of the forces for the building of individual character, on which the success of democracy absolutely depends.”²⁶ The Secretary of the YMCA of Manila reported that while at the turn of the twentieth century the Philippines had been described as “three centuries behind the car of Progress,” it was now showing a “surprising” propensity to “make up in decades the lost centuries.” An educated class was steadily growing, and “here, as elsewhere, this intelligent voting middle class must be the hope of a stable national life after the democratic model.”²⁷ In both cases, these secretaries imagined democracy as the pinnacle of a civilizational process which their constituencies had not yet attained, and thus presented the problem of democracy as a pedagogical one. The YMCA Secretary of the Department of Public Health in China focused his contribution on the topic of “World Citizenship,” which he argued was not only a matter of addressing world problems on the basis of Christian principle, but of imagining oneself in the other man’s shoes. World citizenship, he argued, required that “every thinking man will make a conscious effort to understand the viewpoints which prevail in those vast reaches of human experience in other parts of the world, with which he did not concern himself seriously in the past.”²⁸ The YMCA Secretary for

²⁴ Mary E. Jackson, “Colored Girls in the Second Line of Defense,” *Association Monthly* 12, no. 5 (May 1918): 363–64. For more on this, see Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46*.

²⁵ Robert Wilder, *The Red Triangle in the Changing Nations* (New York: Association Press, 1918), iii.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 72, 66.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

Japan used the imagery of the war to warn that “the forces of democracy and autocracy are so evenly balanced” in that nation as to render it “the first line trenches” of the forces of Christian principle in world politics. He remained optimistic, however, reporting a high Japanese official of having said of a diplomatic problem between the United States and Japan,

Gentlemen, we have spent hours in discussing this important question—we have frankly stated the pros and cons, and we have found it impossible to overcome certain obstacles. I want to state to you my profound conviction that nothing can solve such questions as this but the spirit of Jesus Christ. I want to ask you Americans to do all you can to arouse American Christian public sentiment to focus itself upon this great international question and I want to ask my Japanese friends to create a similar Christian public sentiment here; only thus can we maintain the peace of the world, in the face of such difficult misunderstandings.²⁹

Undoubtedly, this sentiment was in no small degree a projection on the part of the YMCA Secretary. In its characterization of the problems of race, nation, and empire as “misunderstandings,” in its positioning of Christian reform as the mediating party between two sides, and in its advancement of the Christian ideals of national citizens as the only solution to the crisis of world politics, it perfectly encapsulates the YMCA’s approach to keeping the world safe for democracy.

On the question of whether the war indicated that Christianity had “failed” or whether it was the “only hope” for peace, J. H. Oldham agreed with Wilder. In the January 1919 issue of the *International Review of Missions*, Oldham recognized that overcoming the crisis of the war would require “refashioning the whole of political and social life.” But, he insisted, “the new order must rest on some spiritual foundation.”³⁰ A centerpiece of this issue, and one to which Oldham drew special attention in his editorial preface, was authored by Edward Shillito, a minister and missionary advocate who would become known for his war poem, “Jesus of the Scars.” It was titled, “The Appeal of the Missionary Enterprise to the Man of 1919.” Shillito opened with the idea that if the Man of 1919 was “bidden to think of the Faith of Christ and His ethical teaching as meant only for individual souls, and not for nations in their commerce one with another, he will listen no more.” In light of the crisis of war, the Shillito’s Man of 1919 was now convinced, if he had not been before, that Christian principle scaled up from individual to nation. “The claim of Christ to save the individual soul from sin carries in it implicitly the claim to set that soul in its divinely appointed relations to other souls, and that cannot be unless there is also the claim that these relations are valid for nations as well as for individual souls,” Shillito maintained. But in contrast to the alarmed tone of most commentators on the relations between nations in 1919, Shillito assumed a braver face, and reverted to a missionary trope of the 1880s, declaring that, “to work this out in practice is a great adventure.”³¹

²⁹ Ibid., 9-10.

³⁰ Joseph Houldsworth Oldham, “Introductory Note,” *International Review of Missions* 8, no. 29 (January 1919): 4.

³¹ Edward Shillito, “The Appeal of the Missionary Enterprise to the Man of 1919,” *International Review of Missions* 8, no. 29 (January 1919): 18-26.

Like both Mott and Oldham, Shillito associated nation and race, using the terms almost interchangeably. Shillito's primary argument linked the idea of the responsibilities of manhood with a pedagogical formulation of relations between races and nations, and packaged this link as the core of the "missionary enterprise of the Man of 1919." "What is the problem of the races?" Shillito asked. It was not chiefly economic or political, he contended, but, "in reality a spiritual problem; it is concerned with ideals and values." The nations could not live in peace "unless they are agreed upon the meaning of human life, and upon its true values and destiny." Christianity, then, must provide this universal meaning. To this end, Shillito contended, "races may be related as teacher and taught, father and child." Like Oldham, he professed that, "this is indeed a necessary stage but it cannot be an end" and that this pedagogical relation must not be punitive but must take into account "how children are trained today in all enlightened nations." Ultimately, Shillito believed that "the child-races must grow up to manhood. Another bond must then take the place of the temporary one." This would be the bond of Christian brotherhood, and it would be the basis on which "a commonwealth of nations" could be built. The work of resolving the problem of races and nations through inculcation of Christian principle would not be easy, but it must be done—on the basis of this formulation, Shillito challenged his readers to take up the missionary obligation that he insisted was inherent to manhood. "These times are not meant for weaklings or cowards," he wrote. "The man of 1919 sees that."³²

Sherwood Eddy was coming to see things somewhat differently. The war had a profound impact on him. Eddy had been a leading YMCA evangelist for decades, having served as a traveling Secretary in India and across Asia since 1896. He had been recruited as a student at Yale by David McConaughy, had had a conversion experience at the 1889 Student Summer Conference at Moody's Northfield retreat, and had signed a pledge card and become a leader in the SVM. He was ardent, magnetic, and tireless, and while Mott's addresses were careful, thoughtful, and measured, Eddy's were accessible and specialized in simple, catchy, turns of phrase. In the first half of the twentieth century Eddy was one of the world's most well-known evangelists.³³ He had been one of the earlier YMCA leaders to turn to the Social Gospel, and the crisis of the war was leading him to become a vocal pacifist and a socialist. While some of the more prominent philanthropists who supported the Associations denounced him, Mott kept him on, and he served in the YMCA for more than six decades in all. In response to the War, Eddy published a book titled, *Everybody's World*, explicitly linking democracy, liberty, and Christianity, and expounding his newfound social principles. The war, Eddy contended, had been between two principles, and this dichotomy could be formulated in three ways, "political, moral, and spiritual." The political struggle was between "autocracy and democracy," the moral between "the oppression of militarism and human liberty," and the spiritual involved "the materialism of might and the spiritual power of right." Democracy, liberty, and right were on the side of God, while autocracy, militarism,

³² Ibid.

³³ Rick Nutt, *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Sherwood Eddy and the American Protestant Mission* (Mercer University Press, 1997).

and might were things of mammon.³⁴ For Eddy, the war clarified the association between Christianity and democracy very distinctly. Further, he asserted, “because it was everybody’s war, it must be Everybody’s World.” Whereas for Shillito, the new order required the schooling of the child-races, for Eddy, the war, following his decades of experience in Asia, had shifted that frame. Dozens of nations and peoples had fought in the war, and “they must be given their chance in the new order,” Eddy insisted. “Those dark races, which in the War were good enough to die for the cause, are good enough now to live for it,”³⁵ he wrote, and specifically,

Colonies or possessions must be no longer fields for selfish exploitation, but for development toward self-determination. The searchlight of full publicity will be turned with all its fierce glare upon America’s administration of the Philippines, upon Japan’s responsibility in Korea, upon Britain’s relation to India, Egypt, and Ireland, upon the colonies of France, the administration of Turkey and the Near East, the welfare and integrity of China.³⁶

Eddy did not call for revolution, which, against evolution, he classed with autocracy, militarism, and selfishness—his phrase “development toward self-determination” was not in point of fact a very large departure from the pedagogical relationship of empire inherent in Oldham’s emphasis on trusteeship or Shillito’s child-races which must grow to manhood. But the tone was different. Eddy was clear on the point that, “A man or a nation possesses a divine inheritance, an inalienable birthright, a latent though often inarticulate longing for liberty, democracy, and righteousness.”³⁷ It would be difficult to justify the indefinite postponement of a divine inheritance and inalienable birthright.

Just as Eddy was now clear on the need for liberty and democracy for all races and nations, he was also clear on the same for exploited industrial classes. With language that was strong, even for Eddy, he declared that those who selfishly sought to preserve their privileged position were “Reactionaries,” those who selfishly engaged in violence in the name of the unprivileged were “Revolutionaries,” and those who took no position were “Neutrals:” “slackers” with “dead souls.” What was needed was a “Party of Social Redemption.” The members of this party were “practical idealists” with “a grip on life.” They knew that “humanity is one, sacred and divine, in which each individual, each class, each backward nation, is of infinite worth, with limitless possibilities of development,” and they believed in “application to daily life and politics of the eternal moral law of righteousness.”³⁸ Eddy’s citizens of Everybody’s World showed the same universalist tendencies that had been suggested in the writings of the missionary advocates of the 1880s, who insisted that each soul was of infinite worth, and in the work of generations of previous Christian reformers who applied moral law in daily life and politics. But for Eddy, the war had reframed things, and the emphasis was now on what he was calling “social justice.” His brand of socialism still relied heavily on the liberal language of equality of opportunity—everyone deserved a fair chance. But the

³⁴ Sherwood Eddy, *Everybody’s World* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1920), 7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 259.

“Neutral” position, which had always been the ground from which the YMCA extended its moral authority over the corruption of the privileged and the disorder of the masses, was, for Eddy, no longer a morally defensible position, let alone the high ground. In the context of the war, the language of the “slacker” with the “dead soul” was designed to shock his Association audience into new moral commitments to a greater degree of fairness.

Such shifts were necessary, Eddy believed, because not only the plastic nations, but the whole world was now “undergoing cataclysmic change. The old world is in the melting pot,” Eddy proclaimed, and “the new will run into moulds of our making.”³⁹ On these grounds, he issued a challenge,

Will you, Reader, dedicate your life to this new world, with a deeper faith in the common man, a fight for social justice at home and abroad, a new belief in the democracy of nations and the right of the unprivileged classes, and a new internationalism—all made possible by a life of service and sacrifice? Will you dedicate your life to the service of Everybody’s World?⁴⁰

Most YMCA secretaries did not follow Eddy’s lead toward socialism, although a notable few, many in the foreign work, did do so.⁴¹ Most Christian reformers across the Associations, however, agreed with Eddy in the need for “a new internationalism, founded upon a true nationalism, realizing itself in a new League of Nations, a new world-consciousness, *a new belief in world brotherhood.*”⁴²

The overwhelming sense across the Associations was that the League of Nations was the world’s hope for the institutionalization of Christian relations between nations. Their commitment to the Christianizing relations between nations was deep enough and the conviction that this could be accomplished through a League of Nations was strong enough that the Associations departed from their determined neutrality and took a strong stand on this controversial issue.⁴³ In November 1919, Christian reformers gathered in Philadelphia for a World’s Citizenship Conference on the World’s Moral Problems. The conference organizers declared that, “To establish the justice of Jesus, thereby attaining the peace of Jesus, is the demand upon all Christian citizenship of the world.”⁴⁴ One of the speakers encapsulated the attitude of the Christian reformers of the Associations in an address titled, “Program for Permanent Peace,” arguing that the “nations as such” must “act in a Christian way, if the world is to have peace,” that “the nation is a moral being,” that “it is as responsible for keeping the peace with a neighbor nation...as the individual citizen is to act in a similar manner to the man next door.” To

³⁹ Ibid., 257.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 261.

⁴¹ See for instance, Karen Garner, *Precious Fire: Maud Russell and the Chinese Revolution* (Univ of Massachusetts Press, 2009).

⁴² Eddy, *Everybody’s World.*, 20. By 1924, Sherwood Eddy had come to believe that war was “wrong in its methods” and “wrong in its results,” that it was destructive of wealth, of human life, and of moral standards, and finally, that it was “unchristian.” Sherwood Eddy and Kirby Page, *The Abolition of War: The Case against War and Questions and Answers Concerning War* (George H. Doran Company, 1924).

⁴³ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 546–47.

⁴⁴ *The World’s Moral Problems: Addresses at the Third World’s Christian Citizenship Conference Held in Pittsburgh, Pa, U.S.A. November 9-16, 1919* (National Reform Association, 1920), 6.

this end, the League of Nations, as an embodiment of Christian principle, would be fundamental to the peace.⁴⁵

The League idea appealed on a number of levels. The YMCA had for decades been invested in the idea of *association*, not only as an organizational form that allowed for efficient work, but as an approach to reform in which associated individuals positively impacted one another, and as a manifestation of the social nature of humanity. In line with the habit of scaling such notions up, the idea of the League of Nations mirrored the idea of the Association itself. President Woodrow Wilson, who represented the idea to the world, was a close associate and admirer of Mott.⁴⁶ He was considered an important ally of the Associations, and as American presidents had been for generations, he was a vocal proponent of their work.⁴⁷ The Associations never endorsed politicians, but they felt a natural affinity for Wilson's Progressive policies. Further, the World Court, in conjunction with the League of Nations, was imagined as the ultimate moral mediator, the natural extension of Christian reformers' urge to claim the righteous middle ground in arenas of conflict.

Finally, the idea of the League appealed as a sports metaphor. Sport was on the rise in the early twentieth century, in the US and around the world, due in no small part to the ideas and the facilities developed and made available by the Associations, and the term *League of Nations* had distinct sports connotations. More than in any other arena, the Associations' conceptions of Christian citizenship and fair play were articulated and disseminated through their ubiquitous athletic programs. Since the 1890s, when the YMCA had begun in earnest to turn its attention to the "whole man," their physical program, and team sports in particular, had become increasingly prominent in YMCA work. The YMCA saw sportsmanship as emblematic of a necessary balance between individualism and associationalism, a balance that they considered the answer to the problems of the modern world. Through sports, men would develop moral and physical strength as individuals; they would learn the self-discipline to play by the rules; they would learn to sacrifice for the team; they would learn to see themselves in the other man's (and the other team's) shoes; and they would learn to err on the side of generosity to ensure that the play was fair. This dual training of individual strength and of unselfish cooperation was considered essential to the functioning of a strong democratic nation, and now, through the metaphor of the League, to maintaining the peace in a world of nations.

The YMCA thinker most responsible for this set of ideas about sport was Luther Gulick. Gulick had been born to a missionary family in Hawaii, had received a medical degree from NYU, and served as the YMCA's director of Physical Work from 1886 to 1903.⁴⁸ In the 1890s, Gulick brought together emerging ideas about social-Darwinism, genetics, and psychology to develop a new and influential theory of play, based on the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 275–77.

⁴⁶ Fisher, *Public Affairs and the Y.M.C.A.*, 75.

⁴⁷ See for instance Taft's years of YMCA service, in the US and the Philippines. Presidents Harrison, McKinley, Roosevelt, and Taft were all actively involved in YMCA work.

⁴⁸ Clifford Putney, "Luther Gulick: His Contributions to Springfield College, the YMCA, and 'Muscular Christianity,'" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 39, no. 1–2 (Summer 2011); Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 251–64.

ideas of evolutionary recapitulation and moral reflexes. As one historian has explained it, Gulick posited that “man had acquired the fundamental impulse to play during the evolution of the ‘race.’ Each man, as he passed from birth to adulthood, recapitulated or rehearsed in a proximate way each epoch or stage of human evolution.”⁴⁹ Early childhood tag games represented “pre-savage” modes of hunting; later team games represented “savage” approaches to group hunting; and advanced skills and cooperation tended toward the “modern” and were learned through practice until they became “reflexive” through neural development. Gulick argued that “the modern industrial order fundamentally frustrated man’s most primal instincts.” In his words, “everything conspires to bring the city-born upon the stage of life with an over-sensitive nervous system and an undertoned physique.” Further, physical activity was necessary not only for proper neural development, but for proper “moral reflexes.”⁵⁰ The cooperative instincts of the savage stage of development must be trained to become reflexive, and this was best done through team sports. As Gulick’s follower William Forbush maintained in *The Boy Problem*, team sports were better moral training than Sunday school, guiding the boy as he repeated the “history of his own race-life from savagery unto civilization,” developing “constructiveness, curiosity, emulativeness, intiativeness, loyalty ... [and] pugnacity.”⁵¹ As this list of desirable attributes suggests, the highest forms of civilization were understood to require both individualism and association, and team sports were thought to stimulate the development a young man’s innate tendencies in both of these directions.

Gulick’s theory was extremely influential in the first decades of the century. Municipalities across the country built playgrounds, and the playground workers who were installed to supervise them were tested on his theories and expected to design programs in accordance with them. It was Gulick who had created the inverted triangle as the international symbol of the YMCA and advocated for the importance of this symbol as a representation of the idea that physical and mental development served as the foundation for spiritual health, and it was under Gulick’s influence that physical education became an increasingly important aspect of the YMCA program worldwide.⁵²

As the YMCA adopted Gulick’s ideas, it moved to the forefront in the production of new forms of physical culture along these lines, and the games of basketball and volleyball were both developed within the YMCA system under his guidance. Gulick’s course on “The Psychology of Play” became a core element of the YMCA curriculum as physical programs that channeled premodern instincts through team play in accordance with Gulick’s ideas were seen as fundamentally important to addressing the problems of industrial society—socialization through team play, it was thought, would be an effective means of promoting peace and cooperation between opposing groups.

Gulick saw the two evils in modern industrial society as, first, the exploitation of

⁴⁹ Benjamin G. Rader, “The Recapitulation Theory of Play: Motor Behaviour, Moral Reflexes and Manly Attitudes in Urban America, 1880-1920,” in *Manliness and Morality: Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, ed. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 123.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 124, 130.

⁵¹ Quoted by Rader, “The Recapitulation Theory of Play,” 127-128.

⁵² Rader, “The Recapitulation Theory of Play,” 126.

the many by the few, and second, a lack of individual self-control, and he believed that both could be remedied by programs such as the YMCA's physical work with young men. He believed that adolescents too often "recapitulated" their "racial history" by joining gangs and engaging in theft and violence, and that organized sports would allow them to play out their instincts while teaching the moral self-control that was essential for modern life. Further, the problem of exploitation would be ameliorated as young men destined for positions of power were taught to subordinate their self-interest for the good of all. In Gulick's words,

The sandpile for the small child, the playground for the middle-sized child, the athletic field for the boy and the girl in the teens, wholesome means of social relationships during adult life—these are fundamental conditions without which democracy cannot continue, because upon them rests the development of that self-control which is related to an appreciation of the needs of the rest of the group and of the corporate conscience that is rendered necessary by the complex interdependence of modern life.⁵³

As Christian reformers imagined the populations of the "weaker" nations as lacking both individual strength of character and the associational spirit of cooperation, the YMCA increasingly turned to the teaching of sport to remedy these supposed failings. Play theory, it was assumed, could be applied universally to teach a Christianized version of citizenship that was essential to the functioning of a world of democratic nations. Luckily for this project, the YMCA's physical education program was proving to be popular wherever it was introduced.

In order to fully equip its fourfold work, the YMCA began to place much emphasis on the construction of appropriate buildings, complete with gymnasiums and natatoriums. In 1919, an article on the subject remarked that, "during the past fifteen years, Y. M. C. A. buildings throughout the country have multiplied prodigiously. Not less than 500 new buildings have been erected."⁵⁴ Similar attention was given to buildings overseas during the same period, and by the 1920s most of the major cities in China had YMCA buildings, often architecturally indistinguishable from those in the United States. Just as the physical body was considered to be intimately connected to the moral welfare of an individual, so the physical plant was considered of utmost importance in the health of the organization's work. "While the Association building does not make the Association," it was argued, "it does constitute in many cases the major basis of public judgment concerning it. This is so true that the building itself is frequently spoken of as the Association. If the institutional home of an organization is to bear so vital a relation to the public conception of the organization itself, the design and construction of a proper Association building constitute no small contribution to the promotion of its interests and purposes."⁵⁵ The Associations believed that impressive and dignified buildings were all-important to their work, and that it was necessary that "the character and tone of architectural finish and furnishings should bespeak the

⁵³ As quoted in Rader, "The Recapitulation Theory of Play," 131.

⁵⁴ Charles May, "A Post-War Construction Program: The Building Bureaus of the International Committee of the Y. M. C. A.," *Architectural Record* 45 (April 1919): 217.

⁵⁵ W. M. Wood, "Working Plants for Young Men's Christian Associations," *Brickbuilder* 20 (1911): 264.

brighter and higher ideals” —this would provide an appropriate venue for work with “cultivated and uncultivated alike,”⁵⁶ while the dignified setting would instill in its members “a proper sense of dignity” which would be undermined if the fixtures were cheap or gaudy.⁵⁷ The physical, again, was thought to have an intimate effect on the moral, and the building itself served a pedagogical purpose.

Two design principles were considered essential in the layout of these plants. The first was “composite unity.” It was thought that “since Christian manhood, as interpreted by the Association, involves in well-balanced proportions the physical, intellectual, religious and social life of the individual, an Association building intended as an institutional center and means for the culture of such manhood must make provision for activities in all these lines,”⁵⁸ and that “the building, rather than being a combination gymnasium, schoolhouse, social club and church, should be a composite unit. Each section should be made sufficiently distinctive to facilitate and dignify its work, but a division into seemingly independent departments should be carefully avoided.”⁵⁹ Just as the social, the mental, the moral, and the physical were integrated in the man, they must be integrated in the building. This was especially true because the “purpose of the physical department, that is, the gymnasium and auxiliary rooms, natatorium, shower and locker rooms is not solely to give physical training, but must serve as an efficient instrument for moral, educational, and physical culture.”⁶⁰ Composite unity also meant the “arrangement of features magnifying their self-advertising value: Since many men are attracted for the use of certain single privileges, and since the Association seeks to enlist men in all-round activities for their symmetrical development, it is advantageous that all features shall be so placed with relation to one another that the men who come for one thing shall automatically be brought face to face with other privileges into the use of which they may be led.”⁶¹ Both the individuation and the integration of the departments was understood to be key, and to be a physical representation of the moral work of the Association.

The second design principle shared among these new buildings was the attention given to spatial provisions for effective supervision. For the “ease of control by minimum force,” it was argued, “it is expedient that the entire plan shall focus at one general office, and that privileges in other portions of the building shall be grouped around what might be called sub-foci, making it possible for a man at a central point to have within easy and effective control of the use of all privileges in that section of the building.”⁶² In many plans, the offices of the General Secretary and the Physical Director were grouped together, and placed in such a way that from this group of offices, it would be possible to watch the front entrance and the various passages and stairways to all other portions of the building. Lines of sight and even of hearing were kept as clear as

⁵⁶ Ibid, 159.

⁵⁷ L. A. Abramson, “The Planning of a Young Man’s Christian Association Building,” *Brickbuilder* 22 (1913): 51.

⁵⁸ Wood, “Working Plants for Young Men’s Christian Associations,” 264.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 266.

⁶⁰ Abramson, “The Planning of a Young Man’s Christian Association Building,” 127.

⁶¹ Wood, “Working Plants for Young Men’s Christian Associations,” 267.

⁶² Ibid.

possible; louvered transoms on the bedrooms were used, in order that “infractions of the rules can be easily detected,”⁶³ and that “all games should be placed where constant oversight is possible.”⁶⁴ It was even recommended that no separate toilet be provided for Secretaries and office staff, forcing intermittent supervision of hygiene and behavior in the shared restrooms.⁶⁵ In all of these cases, the disciplinary bent of the institution is clear, and is clearly designed to promote self-disciplinary measures on the part of the young men—the buildings were designed to make the young men aware that the directors could be watching or listening, and so encourage them to maintain their self-discipline.

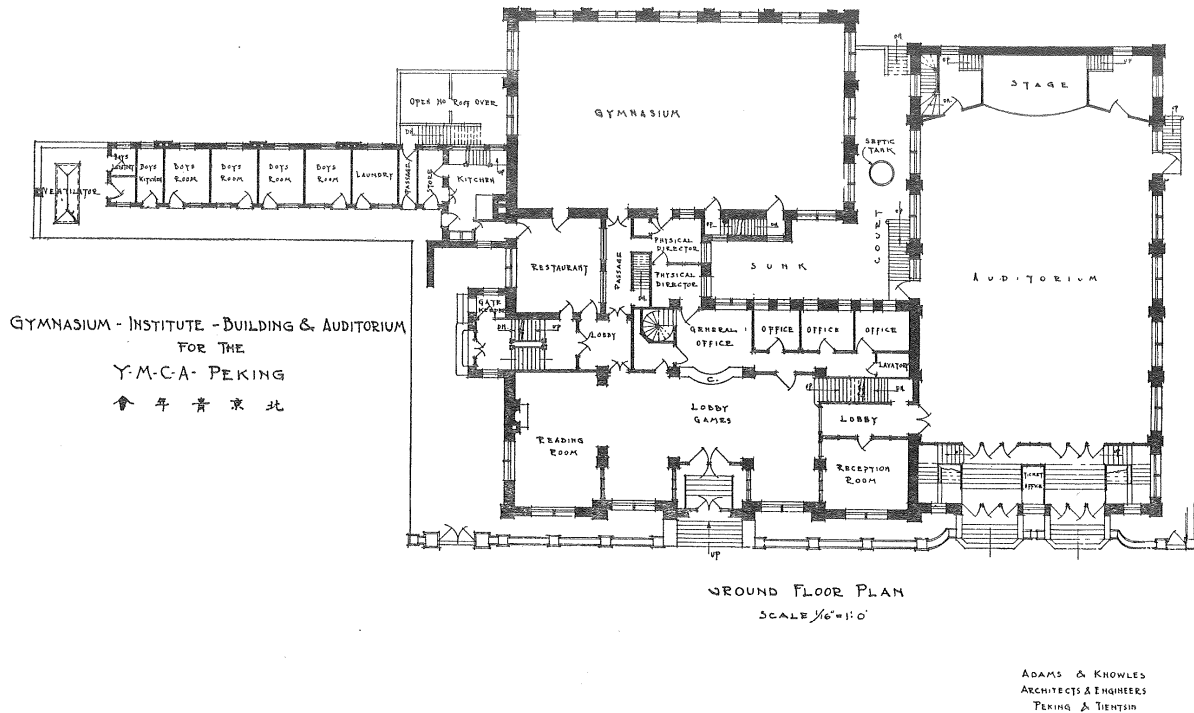


Fig. 10. Plan of the ground floor of the Peking YMCA building, completed 1913, Box 113, YMCA Buildings in China Folder, YMCA International Work in China, Y.U.S.A.9-2-4, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota.

These design principles are clearly discernible in this typical main-floor layout from Peking. The physical, social, and moral aspects of YMCA work were clearly delineated and integrated within this building, on this floor and on those above and below. It would be possible to enter the auditorium without coming into contact with the other departments—but to use the gym or the game rooms below it would be necessary to pass through the social area, and to get to the bedrooms, a member would come in close proximity to the gym. The Secretary’s office is situated directly across from the main entrance and is separated from the social area not by a wall but by a curved counter which would allow for supervision of the passages to the gym, the auditorium, the

⁶³ Abramson, “The Planning of a Young Man’s Christian Association Building,” 78.

⁶⁴ Wood, “Working Plants for Young Men’s Christian Associations,” 168.

⁶⁵ Abramson, “The Planning of a Young Man’s Christian Association Building,” 52.

classrooms above, and the lockers and game rooms below. This layout did not seek to adapt itself to perceived differences between white and Chinese members, and on paper the building is indistinguishable from any number of others built in the United States at the same time. Completed in 1913, almost a quarter century after Wishard proclaimed his intention to build the Foreign Work along “exactly the same lines” as at home, and after Swift set himself the task of sharing the blueprints of the “perfected machine,” the Peking building and buildings like it around the world stood as a physical manifestation of the YMCA’s tendency toward universalist principles.

The YMCA’s physical program proved as popular abroad as it was at home, and as gymnasiums, natatoriums, and playing fields were constructed overseas, YMCA Physical Directors were recruited to oversee this important aspect of the Foreign Work. Harry Kingman, who would be forced to leave Shanghai in 1925 for his appeal to a sportsmanlike view of student nationalism, served as a Physical Director in China in the years following the First World War. Kingman had been born in China to a missionary family, as his father had been before him. Almost a quarter century after the Mt. Hermon Student Conference of 1886, Kingman had his conversion experience at the age of 17 at the 1910 YMCA Student Conference in Asilomar, California. Kingman excelled at several sports, and in 1914 he signed with the New York Yankees. During his two years with the team, he spent his off-seasons at the YMCA Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts, studying for a degree in Physical Education.⁶⁶

In his Springfield College thesis, completed in 1916, Kingman explicitly made the case for the importance of physical education in the YMCA’s Foreign Work. “If physical education is filling such an increasingly large place in the life of our so-called civilized nation, as it is,” he argued, “the need for it in such countries as China and India must be inordinately greater.”⁶⁷ Kingman believed that the impact of physical education on “the more backward of the foreign nations” could be huge, and could help determine their place in the international system; in accordance with the notions of “open doors” and “plastic nations,” he believed that the moment to make that impact was at hand, and that this moment would be fleeting. “It is impossible for anyone, until he has studied the subject, to understand what a master-stroke can be performed within the next few years by a few capable and big-hearted Christian physical directors if they will accept the call,” he asserted, and he “covet[ed] for some of the men of Springfield College this remolding and refashioning of the bodies and minds of those peoples who at no great distance ahead are destined to take their place among the leading nations of the world.”⁶⁸ Physical education, he believed, was “to play [a] very considerable part in world history,” and the opportunity to make that move was “now, but never again.”⁶⁹

Kingman took it as given that “physical perfection is necessary if there is to be

⁶⁶ Harry Kingman, *Citizenship in a Democracy: Oral History Transcript and Related Material*, ed. Rosemary Levenson (Berkeley, CA: Regional Oral History Office, UC Berkeley, 1971), 3–10, <http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=kt9199p014>.

⁶⁷ Harry Kingman, “Physical Education in China, India, Japan, Latin America and the Philippine Islands,” 1916, 2–3, Kingman (Harry L.) Papers, Bancroft Library.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 81, 6.

mental, moral and spiritual perfection,”⁷⁰ and instead of elaborating this point, he devoted the bulk of his report to the argument that there was a marked but remediable lack of “physical culture” in China, Latin America, India, and the Philippines. Kingman posited that this lack was not innate but cultural, and that “in every case the peoples have within them the instinctive love of play, and that they become fervent in the pursuit of physical development when the matter is really brought to their attention and when they begin to understand the benefits that will accrue.”⁷¹ Sports, then, could become the bait that could lure the Christian reformers’ target audiences into their sphere of influence. To make this point, Kingman cited the YMCA secretary in Tientsin, who submitted that “the young students of Tientsin are the most accessible door to the real literati of China. The key which has opened the door is modern athletic sports. The most fruitful effort in affording opportunities to actually get ahold of men”—a perennial difficulty in the project of evangelization—“has been athletics.”⁷² In fact, Kingman concluded, because of the universal instinct for organized physical play, “it seems to be the unanimous opinion of those who know, that through physical education, Christianity has one of its most effective approaches to the inhabitants of these far-off lands.”⁷³

According to Kingman, the YMCA was promoting a remarkable change in Chinese students. “The old scholar was ascetic,” Kingman asserted, but “the new has become athletic. He was quiet, sedate, and prided himself on his long fingernails. The new scholar of China effervesces with college enthusiasm and cheers his college team on the athletic field.”⁷⁴ Following Mott’s conception of “strategic points,” Kingman celebrated this transition as an essential one in the production of the future national leaders of China. For Kingman, the robust college letterman was the model physical specimen of the ideal citizen, not the hollow-chested ascetic. It was necessary, Kingman believed, to eradicate cultural traditions which limited physical exercise, such as the consideration of muscular exertion as ungentlemanly, undignified, or unscholarly—“the breaking down of just such traditions is one of the great services which physical education renders,” Kingman argued, “and it is by no means an impossible thing to break them down, as the people and governmental leaders are recognizing their deficiencies, and are ready to go the great lengths to free themselves from the bonds which have been holding them back.”⁷⁵ In Kingman’s view, culture had kept Chinese men weak, and this national weakness made China a weak player on the international field.

Throughout his thesis, Kingman made reference to the idea that the training of bodies was essential to the training of citizens, and that changes were necessary in the “conception of the place of the body in national life.” In fact, he asserted, people all over the world were coming to realize that “no nation can achieve greatness so long as its citizens are weak, diseased, and slothful,” and he touted “the boon of national health and vigor which physical education dispenses...because of the close relationship of muscular control to leadership and initiative, courage and self-control, qualities which

⁷⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁷¹ Ibid., 19.

⁷² Ibid., 5.

⁷³ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 7-8.

history has shown China, India and Latin America so sadly lacking in.” To Kingman, from afar, it seemed, “when all the facts are known, as though physical education may be an invaluable factor in the development and civilization of these foreign countries, the ignorance and misery of whose peoples brings so much pity to the hearts of all men and women who have the slightest feeling of sympathy or brotherly love in their make-up.”⁷⁶

Kingman wrapped up his thesis with an extended narrative of the first national athletic tournament held in China, which was organized by China’s first YMCA physical director in 1910. Among the reported successes of the games was that they “had made for manhood. The spirit of true sportsmanship, of fairness, and of honesty and honor which was strongly upheld throughout the games, was,” according to Kingman, “a revelation to a large body of the athletes.” Perhaps more important, however, was the “breaking down of sectional feeling which... stands in the way of growth of national spirit” and the fostering of “patriotism, one of China’s greatest needs.” As Kingman was happy to report, “the ‘uplift of China’ was the leading note throughout.”⁷⁷

In 1916, Kingman resigned from the Yankees to commit himself to YMCA work, and after serving in the First World War, he answered the YMCA’s “call” to China. In August 1921, he boarded a ship to return to the country of his birth. He spent the first of his seven years there in a language school in Nanking—he had spoken some Chinese as a child but had forgotten it—after which he began work at the YMCA in Shanghai.⁷⁸

China in the 1920s was wracked by political instability. The Ching Dynasty had fallen in 1911, after imperial encroachment by the British in the Opium wars of the mid-nineteenth century and by Japan in the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, and after forced concessions to Britain, France, the US, Germany, Russia, and Japan in the form of “unequal treaties” allowing for foreign control of territory, resources, and infrastructure, and rights of extraterritoriality for foreigners. These threats to Chinese sovereignty had led to a growing nationalism and involvement in political questions on the part of the educated classes, and anti-foreign and anti-Christian reaction included the Boxer Uprising of 1900. In 1905, Sun Yat-Sen, who was Christian, had organized a Revolutionary Alliance, and in 1912, China had become a republic headed by Sun’s Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party. Soon, however, warlords claimed power, and a military government held Peking. After an exile in Japan, Sun Yat-Sen established a rival Kuomintang government in Canton, and both governments remained in effect through the First World War and into the 1920s.⁷⁹

China had been a focus for the Student Volunteer Movement since the days of the Cambridge Seven. The first North American YMCA Secretary there was D. Willard Lyon, who arrived in Tientsin in 1895. Tientsin was the port for Peking, and the site of several Western-style colleges and schools not under missionary control, several of which had independently organized Student YMCAs. The first YMCA building in China opened there on June 6th, 1897, funded by Sophia Strong Taylor, who had just returned from accompanying John and Leila Mott on their first world tour for the Associations.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁷⁸ Kingman, *Citizenship in a Democracy*, 20-27.

⁷⁹ Schirokauer and Clark, *Modern East Asia*, 212–38.

The June 6th date was chosen in recognition of the original founding date in 1844. By 1897, two more North American Secretaries had arrived, and Lyon was working to form the national YMCA of China. The first Chinese Secretary to join the North American effort was S. K. Tsao, who began in 1896 and was still working with the YMCA in Shanghai in the 1920s. Mott's 1896 tour of China resulted in the formation of 22 new Associations. By the Fifth National Convention in 1907, all the officers of the convention were Chinese, and the only foreign convention speakers were Mott and Richard Morse. C. T. Wang began work with the YMCA in 1906, and in 1915 became the first Chinese General Secretary of the National Committee. The following year, that post was assumed by David Z. T. Yui, who held it for decades. In 1912, there were 25 City Associations in China and 105 Student YMCAs, and annual athletics events in Shanghai and Tientsin drew crowds of many thousands. The Far Eastern Olympics, first organized by a YMCA Physical Director in the Philippines in 1913 included China and Japan, and were held every two years into the 1930s, in the face of mounting international tensions.⁸⁰ At the 25th anniversary of the YMCA in China in 1920, in a scriptural take on the idea of the "plastic nation," Sun Yat-Sen declared,

China has left Egypt, but needs a Joshua to lead her out of the wilderness. Looking round the whole country, one fails to find another organization whose solidarity and strength and purpose is comparable to that of the Y. M. C. A. When we look for an organization to play the role of Joshua and lead the Chinese people to Canaan, ...what others do we have save the Y. M. C. A.?⁸¹

As this statement would suggest, the Chinese leaders of the YMCA had become heavily involved in both the Peking and the Canton governments, most notably in the arenas of international diplomacy, popular education, and rural reconstruction. As President Woodrow Wilson observed approvingly to William Jennings Bryan at the time, "the men most active in establishing a new government and a new regime for China are many of them members of the Y. M. C. A., and many of them trained in American universities. The Christian influence, direct or indirect, is very prominent at the front."⁸² C. T. Wang, the son of a Chinese Christian minister and a graduate of Yale, was a diplomat for the Kuomintang into the 1940s, even as he continued work with the YMCA. In 1910, Wang explained the "usefulness" of the YMCA to China in an article in the official American YMCA periodical, explaining that while China had strong intellect, a strong moral code, and endless energy, "the thing which ails China is the lack of development of an all-round man." In light of China's "plastic condition," Wang found "a deeper meaning" in the triangle of the YMCA badge, bringing together intellect, morality, and energy, in the formation of a new man for a new China. He ended his piece with an appeal for more YMCA secretaries for China, framed as a Macedonian call of the kind that had appealed to Kingman.⁸³

⁸⁰ C. W. Pettit, "The 1930 Special Study of the Young Men's Christian Associations of China" May 1930, Box 107, Folder 6-7, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, <http://purl.umn.edu/241022>.

⁸¹ "Kuomintang's Attack on Y.M.C.A.: Spirited Reply by Local Association to Resolution by Tangpu to Incorporate It Under Ministry of Education," *The North - China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette (1870-1941)*; Shanghai, June 3, 1930.

⁸² Harry Kingman, *Citizenship in a Democracy*, 75.

⁸³ C. T. Wang, "World-Wide Expansion," *Association Men* 36, no. 3 (December 1910): 100.

Wang served as the representative of the Canton government at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Nationalist students around the world had been inspired by the promise of President Wilson's Fourteen Points. The universalist principles of equality of nations and of national self-determination as the basis of a new world order substantiated their nationalist claims and raised their expectations for international justice.⁸⁴ At the Peace Conference, C. T. Wang and Wellington Koo, the young Christian-educated minister of the Peking government, very eloquently called for the abrogation of the "unequal treaties," an end to the privilege of extraterritoriality for foreign nationals, and the return of concessions in ports and infrastructure. When it became clear that the Peace Conference would limit itself to issues which had arisen in the war, Wang and Koo narrowed their demands to the return of the Shantung province to Chinese control. Shantung had been occupied by Germany, and during the war, Japan, as an Allied force, had gained control of the territory. At the Peace Conference, Japan sought to strengthen its international position by extending its empire into China, and, further, it sought a "racial equality clause" guaranteeing fair treatment of nationals in any other nation, regardless of race. The Japanese representatives supported their claims for international recognition of racial equality with the same universalist principles advanced in the Fourteen Points, but Wilson and the representatives of Australia balked—their interests in restricting immigration and citizenship privileges on the basis of race were stronger than their commitment to equality as a universal principle. Having denied Japan racial equality, Wilson was more inclined to concede the Japanese claims on Shantung, and Britain and France both had their own interests in maintaining their respective concessions in China. Although many US diplomats strongly and vocally supported Wang and Koo on China's claim to Shantung—the territory was unquestionably Chinese, and Japan had no prior claim to it—their arguments for fair dealings between nations were overridden by the continued interests of the Great Powers in maintaining and extending their imperial claims. The Treaty of Versailles gave control of Shantung to Japan, and Wang and Koo refused to sign it. On May 4th, after news of the decision reached China, Chinese nationalist students the world over rose in protest at this failure of world leaders to stand by their so called universal principles, and the protests grew into a longstanding nationalist movement.⁸⁵ YMCA General Secretary David Yu would head the work to redeem the Shandong railway from Japan in 1922, and soon after, China regained control of the territory—the nationalist movement, however, would persist. Wang served briefly as Premier of China in 1922-23, and then for years as Foreign Minister, negotiating settlements with Japan, Russia, Britain, and France restoring Chinese territory or infrastructure, and with multiple countries regarding tariff autonomy. In his YMCA capacity, he served as Chairman of the Far Eastern Olympics.⁸⁶

Other YMCA-affiliated government officials, like Wang, were invested in the idea of nation-building through character-formation, as championed by the YMCA. The

⁸⁴ Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 112-113, 177-196.

⁸⁶ Pettitt, "The 1930 Special Study of the Young Men's Christian Associations of China"; "Yu Rizhang," *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity*, accessed July 21, 2017, <http://www.bdconline.net/en/stories/y/yu-rizhang.php>.

pedagogical movement for “Christian citizenship” that formed the core of the YMCA’s project in China was adopted by the government, with a slogan “ren ge jiu guo” alternately translated as, “Saving Nation through Character,” “Character Will Save the Nation,” or, less succinctly, “National Salvation through the Development of Individual Integrity.” This campaign, which consisted of teaching ethics and “intelligent use of citizenship privileges,”⁸⁷ peaked in the mid-1920s as the Civic Education Movement.

The YMCA was also behind the National Association of Mass Education Movements. During the First World War, Chinese laborers had served in France, and Chinese YMCA Secretaries had accompanied them. One of these was Y. C. James Yen, who had been educated first by the China Inland Mission, and like Wang, had attended Yale, before earning a master’s degree from Princeton. Literacy in China at that point was about five percent, and during the war, Yen, after helping laborers to read and write letters, developed a 1000 character system to teach the laborers to read for themselves. The system was organized such that it could bring an adult to basic literacy over the term of a three month course of night classes, culminating with an exam and a certificate vouching for the bearer’s ability to read. Working within the YMCA in China—improving upon the “perfected machine” to better fit it for work in that nation—Yen expanded this program to reach many hundreds of thousands. In the single year of 1924, in the mid-sized city of Chengtu, the YMCA passed more than ten thousand literacy students through this course. That year, the local warlord in Chengtu celebrated the accomplishments of these students with a mass parade in which they were each given gifts.⁸⁸ D. Willard Lyon, who had been the first North American YMCA Secretary in China and was now heading the National Committee, wrote that this work “was going to mean a great deal in preparing the Chinese people for the responsibilities of democracy.”⁸⁹

The YMCA athletic program was proving even more popular than the literacy classes. In Chengtu in 1924 alone, more than twenty thousand participated in YMCA athletic activities.⁹⁰ Kingman, in Shanghai, found himself absorbed with the work. He also found that the work was proving an education for him as well. As he had made clear in his thesis, Kingman went to China with the idea of contributing to the advance of the Chinese nation through physical training and exposure to the benefits of Christian civilization. Soon, however, his tone shifted somewhat away from the pedagogical imperialism of Shillito’s *Man of 1919*, and toward a more reciprocal idea, similar to Mott’s representation of the ideals of the WSCF. Kingman came to feel that he had “something to learn from citizens of a nation with the long and respected civilization that China had.”⁹¹ Seemingly somewhat surprised, and in a marked change in tone from his

⁸⁷ D. Willard Lyon, “Letter to Dr. D. J. Harris from D. Willard Lyon, Acting Senior Secretary,” September 25, 1925, Annual and Quarterly Reports of YMCA International Work in China, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, <http://purl.umn.edu/193712>.

⁸⁸ A.J. Brace, “Report of A.J. Brace, Chengtu 1924,” 1924, Subject Files. The 1930 Special Study of the Young Men’s Christian Associations of China, 1930 (Box 107, Folder 6), Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, <http://purl.umn.edu/254179>.

⁸⁹ Lyon, “Letter to Dr. D. J. Harris.”

⁹⁰ A.J. Brace, “Report of A.J. Brace, Chengtu 1924.”

⁹¹ Kingman, *Citizenship in a Democracy*, 33; Harry Kingman, “China,” 1967, Kingman (Harry L.) Papers, Writings and Speeches, Carton 1, Folder 2, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley. Kingman was not alone in this

thesis, he wrote of his Chinese student membership in a 1921 journal entry, “They are easily our equals. They keep me in a continual state of admiration. Their quickness of understanding, their sincere friendliness, their appreciation of our desire to be of some help, their keen sense of humor, their idealism, their diligence, their modesty, their ambition and their ability, are striking. It is a great privilege to be over here.”⁹² As is clear even from this complimentary assessment, Kingman never lost the tendency to project onto the Chinese his own understanding of their nature and their motivations for action, but his new sense of civilizational fair play even led him to suggest that just “as the West is now sending missionaries to China, so China should send missionaries to the West.”⁹³ In 1925, he wrote home to his friends and fellow YMCA workers, “The next time you hear a furloughed missionary grow eloquent over heathen China’s dire need for the western gospel, ask him to give a supplementary lecture on what China has, which the West lacks and needs.” Kingman had come to feel that the West had much to learn “at the feet of ‘heathen’ China,” including, in his estimation, “the spirit of tolerance, the dependence upon moral sanctions rather than on physical, the spirit of tranquility, the sense of harmony between man and nature, the emphasis on the family ideal, the respect for learning rather than for power resting on money or position, [and] the ability to get along with people even under the most difficult conditions,” all of which were values important to the YMCA. In fact, by 1925 Kingman had come to believe that “western Christianity is not sufficiently an improvement over the ethical codes which China has already, to make the supplanting worth laboring for.”⁹⁴

While he continued to be devotedly Christian, Kingman began to believe in a kind of scientifically informed religious relativism, or as he called it, “relativity.” In notes for a speech made while he was in China, he sought to explain this theory, describing a situation in which a man would throw a ball in the air on a moving train, and the path of the ball would be observed from the point of view of a man on the train, a man standing by the tracks, a man in a passing train, and a man in outer space. Each man would see the ball travel in a different path relative to himself, and each path would be accurate in relation to that man. “What does this theory of relativity of truth mean to the Christian movement?” Kingman asked. “It means that however true his gospel may seem to the evangelist it is likely to be only a very small portion of truth as a whole, and for others to whom it is not relative it is likely to be, to all intents and purposes, untrue.”⁹⁵ Kingman

experience; the YMCA International Survey of 1932 said of many of its workers: “Sent out with a clear-cut purpose to fulfill a given task [evangelism], they have come to realize to a surprising extent the wealth of spiritual and cultural resources which these ancient civilizations of the so-called ‘mission field’ have to contribute to the life of the world.” Daniel Fleming and International Survey Committee, *International Survey of the Young Men’s and Young Women’s Christian Associations: An Independent Study of the Foreign Work of the Christian Associations of the United States and Canada*. (New York: Association Press, 1932), 68.

⁹² Kingman, “China.”

⁹³ Harry Kingman, “New Year’s Letter, 1925,” 1925, Kingman (Harry L.) Papers, Carton 1, China Folder 1, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Harry Kingman, “Resolved: That Social Service Should Have Priority Over Evangelism in the Chinese Mission Field,” n.d., Kingman (Harry L.) Papers, Writings and Speeches, Carton 1, Folder 3, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

felt that the insistence of Christian evangelists that they were in command of the whole truth, and their intolerance toward the beliefs and understandings of the Chinese, was bound to repel those they hoped to convert. Further, it seemed to Kingman, many of the professed Christians in China were not living up to the Christianity they preached. He found meaning in the statement of the liberal minister Harry Emerson Fosdick that, “vital religion, like good music, needs not defense but rendition.”⁹⁶ Kingman could sympathize with Chinese Christians who challenged that “Y.M.C.A. secretaries talk a good deal about sportsmanship. But how highly do you want us to rate the brand of fair play which most of you Western Christians display in the way you treat Christ?”⁹⁷ Kingman felt that too many Christian workers in China professed Christianity without enacting the ideals of generosity and fair play that he believed to be so central to Christianity as a social project, and, like Eddy, he believed that a purely “theoretical” gospel without social aims was no longer adequate for the modern world.

Like many YMCA workers, Kingman believed that good Christian citizenship could be taught on the playing field, through training in sportsmanship, and he rejected the idea, held by many foreigners in China, that such ideals were “indigestible” to the Chinese. In an article from the early 1920s titled “Sports and Sportsmanship in China: Modern Chinese Play,” he systematically answered the charges of the “Old China Hand” that the Chinese were by nature quitters, cheaters, cowards, or sore losers.⁹⁸ Kingman still did hold the opinion expressed in his thesis that some elements of Chinese culture had to change before China could be successful on the field or in the world. He smirked at the story that when the Chinese first saw people playing tennis, they “inquired whether it wasn’t work which coolies could be hired to perform,” and he agreed with the Old China Hand that traditional Chinese culture was weak in its alleged association of physical impotence with high status. He found descriptions of the old literati with two-foot-long fingernails to be grotesque, and he celebrated the fact that Chinese athletes, beginning with pole vaulters, were cutting their queues in order to enhance performance. He also agreed with the Old China Hand that the practice of “saving face” by wrecking the game rather than losing it was a problem. However, Kingman believed that the Chinese were learning the concept of honor in defeat, and “an educational process” has been the deciding factor.⁹⁹ In one case, as he described it, all that was necessary to keep the losers from wrecking the game was the publication of some editorials on sportsmanship in the newspapers of the city, to appear in the days before the meet. The idea that the Chinese were weak and lacked courage Kingman associated with the common occurrence of physical abuse by foreigners of Chinese, and with the foreigners’ habit of beating workers and servants with impunity, and even of abusing people on the street. Kingman found this behavior distasteful, but denied that

⁹⁶ Harry Kingman, “What Is Religion?” by Harry Emerson Fosdick from Harper’s Monthly, Clipping with Notations by Kingman,” n.d., Kingman (Harry L.) Papers, Carton 4, Religion Folder, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

⁹⁷ Harry Kingman, “War, Sportsmanship and the Christian,” n.d., Carton 1, Writings and Speeches Folder 4, Kingman (Harry L.) Papers, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

⁹⁸ Harry Kingman, “Sports and Sportsmanship in China: Modern Chinese Play,” n.d., Kingman (Harry L.) Papers, Writings and Speeches, Carton 1, Folder 3, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

it indicated that the Chinese lacked courage; he believed that refusing to strike back was a matter of principle and not of weakness and could in fact indicate the stronger man. He was, however, pleased to recount the story of a Chinese American ballplayer, who when assaulted by a white American on a Shanghai streetcar shocked his assailant by returning blows and throwing him off the car.¹⁰⁰ Soon, Kingman believed, all Chinese would respond in this way, and the nation would be stronger for it. The charge that the Chinese were cheaters Kingman dismissed outright as unfounded, based on nothing more than the Old China Hand's "favorite theory that all Chinese are dishonest."¹⁰¹ Kingman found a solid basis for sportsmanship in Confucianism, but conceded that "it must be admitted that Confucianist ethics have not, at the outset, carried over into play." He believed that although the Chinese were quickly learning the principles of sportsmanship, they still needed to transfer these ideals into "a wider sense of obligation and new habits and traditions helpful to the building of integrity in community and national affairs."¹⁰² Where the Old China Hand believed that the Chinese by nature were inferior and incapable of either sportsmanship or citizenship, Kingman believed that these things were cultural, and that with foreign guidance they were becoming adept at both, and that the two were very closely associated.

After having answered the Old China Hand, Kingman took time to stress the importance of sports for the training of national citizenship and national civic leadership. He quoted a prominent Chinese statesman as thanking the foreign physical directors for having "started a great moral force which is destined to awaken the Orient," calling it "the greatest practical contribution that has yet been made to the modernization and civilization" of China.¹⁰³ In Kingman's estimation, organized sports not only trained citizens in qualities they would need for their nation to thrive and "heightened national self-consciousness,"¹⁰⁴ they provided a proving ground for national leaders and for the idea of national self-determination.¹⁰⁵ "In their athletic organizations," Kingman claimed, "the Chinese were replacing foreign administrators by men of their own nation before the idea of China for the Chinese had even occurred to most of the people."¹⁰⁶ Like a proud parent, Kingman reported that the last National Games in China were "arranged for and carried through without foreign assistance."¹⁰⁷ In Kingman's view, national self-determination in sports was seen as a training ground and as an indication of readiness of national self-determination more generally. Further, Kingman saw international engagement through sports as promoting world peace. He quoted a Chinese diplomat who spoke of engaging in a commercial boycott of Japanese products while arranging for Japanese teams to participate in an international sports event in China. Even while international relations in other arenas were strained, "on the field of sport," the diplomat

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰² Ibid., 17.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 9-10.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 83.

¹⁰⁵ See for instance, Fleming, *International Survey*, 35, 68.

¹⁰⁶ Kingman, "Sports and Sportsmanship in China," 5.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 12.

asserted, "I can never express any attitude other than a friendly one."¹⁰⁸

Kingman and other YMCA workers hoped that this sportsmanlike good will that seemed so natural on the field would come to dominate national and international politics as well. It wasn't only the Chinese that Kingman found in need of training in sportsmanship. He was disturbed by "the arrogant and contemptuous treatment of all Chinese by many foreigners, a continuous performance in Shanghai," and although he was always careful to couch his disapproval in measured language, he felt that the industrial exploitation of China by the West and the "unequal treaties" that allowed for it were deeply unfair.¹⁰⁹ "Many foreigners sincerely believe that there has been but little exploitation of China by foreign Powers," he noted, but, "on the other hand, men of at least equal intelligence but of different training and viewpoint hold that no other nation which has continued to maintain any claim to sovereign power has been so victimized as China."¹¹⁰ In support of the latter opinion, Kingman quoted an employer who stated that his company's exceedingly high profits were due to the "absurdly cheap labor supply" and the absence of "vexatious factory laws."¹¹¹ Kingman observed that while some foreign employers displayed a generous human sympathy, the majority considered such to be "rank sentimentalism, impractical and dangerous." Kingman considered this view to be not only ungenerous and inhumane but short-sighted, and predicted that "an awakened China will not discontinue the drive against unequal or dishonouring treatment from foreign powers until all injustices are removed."¹¹²

May 30th, 1925, was a watershed for China as Kingman knew it, and he interpreted the events of that day and of the months that followed in light of his understanding of the YMCA's project in China. Over the course of the previous months, there had been increasing industrial unrest in the factories of Shanghai. In February of that year, there had been a strike involving forty thousand workers, protesting, among other things, rampant and cruel physical abuse and arbitrary dismissals without backpay.¹¹³ The foreign mill owners had conceded to a number of the workers' demands in order to bring them back to the machines, but then had promptly broken all promises, with most foreign owners claiming that they had not been party to the agreements. Over the course of that spring, conditions had worsened and instances of abuse had increased. In mid-May, a worker was killed on the factory floor, and according to Kingman, "had the Law shown itself equally as anxious to discover the true facts about the killing of Koo Cheung-hung as it did when an employer claimed an injury, the events which followed might not have occurred."¹¹⁴

On May 24th, a memorial service was held for the worker, after which six students entered the foreign concession to make speeches against industrial exploitation. Shanghai at that time was divided between the Chinese city and roughly

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰⁹ Kingman, "New Year's Letter, 1925."

¹¹⁰ Harry Kingman, "New Year's Letter, 1926," 1926, Kingman (Harry L.) Papers, Carton 1, China Folder 1, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

¹¹¹ As quoted by Kingman, "New Year's Letter, 1926."

¹¹² Kingman, "New Year's Letter, 1926."

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

twelve square miles of territory legally conceded to foreign powers. Although the population of the foreign concession was mostly Chinese, the territory was governed by a Municipal Council consisting entirely of foreigners. The six students were arrested and imprisoned by the foreign police who answered to this Municipal Council, and on the morning of May 30th, the students were brought before a foreign judge who ruled that they remain in prison. In protest, student groups began a mass demonstration in the foreign concession, the foreign police fired on the crowd, and eleven were killed.¹¹⁵ This event sparked a massive national protest and, in Kingman's words, "turned every intelligent Chinese into a patriot."¹¹⁶ In Kingman's opinion, too much blame had been placed on the actions of the police, "and not enough consideration has been given the fundamental evil in the situation."¹¹⁷ "Is it not becoming quite inevitable," Kingman asked, "that when two thousand aliens, living within the boundaries of a nation not their own, all-powerful because they own a certain amount of property, give orders to their police employees that the eight hundred thousand natives are to toe a chalk-line not of their own drawing and not of their own liking, is it not inevitable, I repeat, that those police can only carry out orders by the help of gunfire?"¹¹⁸

Of course, this was not how the "Old China Hands" who ran the Shanghai foreign press saw it. In their opinion, the demonstration had been an instance of "bolshevism" and "anti-foreignism" of the worst kind, a stance which student leaders countered by claiming their protest as a "cry for humanity," as in the poster at right. Within a week, Kingman had become "so fed up with the palpable unfairness of it all" that he wrote a short letter to the editor of the *North-China Daily News*, titled "The Students' Viewpoint."¹¹⁹ In it, he dismissed the idea that the students who participated in the demonstration were "bolshevik tools" or "anti-foreign agitators," and he called on his fellow foreigners to "make an immediate and sportsmanlike attempt to

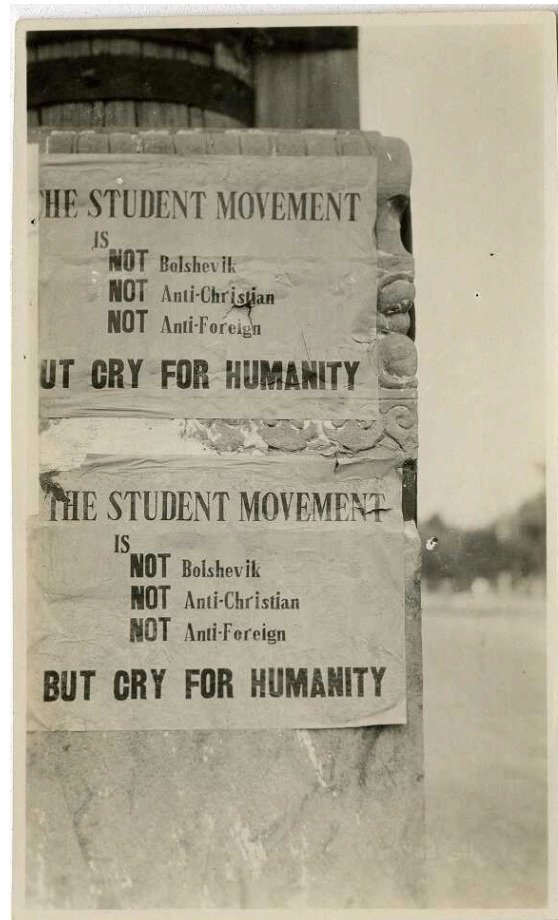


Fig. 11. Image from the collection of a YMCA Secretary in China of a poster in Shanghai after the May 30th Incident, 1925. <http://purl.umn.edu/127032>

¹¹⁵ Kingman, *Citizenship in a Democracy*, 35-36. For more on the problems of American extraterritoriality in China, see Eileen P Scully, *Bargaining With the State from Afar: American Citizenship in Treaty Port China, 1844-1942* (Columbia University Press, 2001).

¹¹⁶ Kingman, "New Year's Letter, 1926."

¹¹⁷ Kingman, "New Year's Letter, 1925."

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

appreciate the Chinese viewpoint.”¹²⁰ The students, he asserted, were “only doing as high-spirited varsity men have been doing in all countries for generations;” they were expressing their loyalty to their mates and protesting what they felt to be an injustice against them. The protesters, Kingman maintained, were just “typical college and preparatory school men and nothing more....No wiser and no dumber, no better and no worse, in all lands the same.” He urged his fellow foreigners, “think back to varsity days and then try to put yourself in the place of these young chaps.” In Kingman’s opinion, the “direst of all dire needs at this hour is the sporting attitude of 'putting oneself in the other man's place.’”¹²¹ Kingman’s editorial further underscores the tendency in the YMCA to see ethical political action in terms of sportsmanship, and to see an explicit need for sportsmanship in political disputes. Further, Kingman’s characterization of the foreign masses as the rough equivalent of a college rally makes the actively universalizing move of insisting on seeing others in the same terms as he sees himself, and in calling on his peers to do the same, a very generous move, if not one which would necessarily lead to complete understanding—it is doubtful whether the majority of May 30th protesters actually did see themselves as high-spirited varsity men going to bat for their mates in a pinch. And it is significant that Kingman did not explicitly back the characterization of the student movement as a “cry for humanity;” he chose to focus on the specific event and not on the greater issue of the dehumanization inherent in the conduct of imperial justice.

The reaction to Kingman’s editorial was vitriolic. The foreign press printed letter after letter attacking him for breaking ranks, deriding his dangerously “ostrich-like” view of Chinese anti-foreignism and bolshevism, and mocking his delusions about the true nature of the Chinese. Friends would no longer acknowledge him on the street, and within a month he was transferred from Shanghai to Tientsin. The one friend who came to see him off at the dock told him, “Harry, you’ve got friends here but the feeling is so great that none of the fellows felt free to come down to say ‘Good-bye.’”¹²² Of the dozens of YMCA secretaries, missionaries, and other Christian reformers in Shanghai, none joined Kingman in his stand. Looking back later that year, Kingman wrote that having lived through the month of June 1925, he would “have little fear of serving unpopular causes henceforth.”¹²³ His editorial was also translated into Chinese and widely reprinted all over China, and given the attitude of most foreigners in China at that point, Kingman thought that he was known across China as the only outspokenly sympathetic foreign friend the Chinese had in the country. To the end of his life, Kingman remained proud of the “appeal for fair play” that he made at that time.¹²⁴

If Kingman’s characterization of the “Students’ Viewpoint” was telling, his article

¹²⁰ Kingman, “The Students’ Viewpoint.”

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Kingman, *Citizenship in a Democracy*, 38-39; “New Year’s Letter, 1925.”

¹²³ Kingman, “New Year’s Letter, 1925.” In fact, Kingman would go on to support many unpopular causes in the future, including struggles for racial equality in the United States and against the incarceration of the Japanese in World War II, as described in *Citizenship in a Democracy* and Galen Fisher, *Citadel of Democracy: The Story of the Public Affairs Record of Stiles Hall, the Young Men’s Christian Association at the University of California, Berkeley*. (Berkeley, CA: University YMCA, 1955), <http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=kt1199n498>.

¹²⁴ Kingman, *Citizenship in a Democracy*, 38, 41.

published on the first anniversary of May 30th was even more so. As indicated in its title, "Asks That May 30 Be Made a Day of Spiritual Significance: Occasion Should Be One For Serious Thought On China's Ills Rather Than A Day Of Parade And Protest," this article constituted an appeal to the Chinese leaders more than to the foreign community. After briefly reiterating his call of the previous year for foreigners to make a generous and sportsmanlike "attempt at trying to think, for the time being, with Chinese minds," he devoted the rest of his several columns to laying out what he perceived to be the ideal course of action for the Chinese.¹²⁵ In contrast to the views he had expressed earlier, Kingman had come to believe that as "serious as is foreign encroachment, the real problem of China is internal." Because the protests that would mark the day were directed against foreign exploitation more than toward internal nation-building, Kingman felt that they were bound to be less than constructive. He thought that mass action produced a "spirit that divides mankind," and in line with the tenets of the YMCA, Kingman urged individual reflection and small group discussion, culminating in solemn pledges of service to the nation. If, he argued, May 30 was allowed to become "a day when Chinese citizens dedicate or rededicate their entire lives to their country, purging their hearts of all mean or selfish desires and determining with steeled wills to live lives of truth, courage, hope, and loyalty, then it will be actually at work on the task of saving China."¹²⁶

What China lacked more than anything else, Kingman felt, was a strong model of upstanding citizenship which could then produce strong and upstanding local leaders—and the model of citizenship which Kingman held up for the Chinese to emulate was Akim Chen, one of his students who had been among the eleven killed the year before. In Kingman's description, Akim Chen had displayed impressive physical prowess, coupled with great academic strength and an adventurous spirit. More importantly, however, he had been fiercely devoted to the ideals of good sportsmanship and fair play, and it was these ideals, Kingman asserted, that were behind the demonstrations of May 30th of the previous year. In joining the protests, Akim Chen, in conjunction with the rest of the students, had been acting "in direct line with his training in sportsmanship and fair-play."¹²⁷ As he would later write, "Akim Chen lost his life because the play field had prompted him to generalize for himself that a good sportsman should always pitch in on the side of the 'under-dog.'"¹²⁸ This devotion to the ideals of sportsmanship was, in Kingman's view, a perfect model for patriotic devotion to national citizenship, and he associated Akim Chen with the likes of Gandhi and Joan of Arc.¹²⁹ He asked, "if this spirit is to be harnessed to the effort really to solve China's problems, is it not evident that something more significant than a day of parade and protest must be forthcoming?"

¹²⁵ Harry Kingman, "'Asks That May 30 Be Made a Day of Spiritual Significance,' Clipping from The China Press," May 30, 1926, Kingman (Harry L.) Papers, Carton 1, China Folder 1, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Kingman, "Sports and Sportsmanship in China," 4.

¹²⁹ Kingman, "Asks That May 30 Be Made a Day of Spiritual Significance"; Harry Kingman, "Playing Life's Most Glorious Game," n.d., Kingman (Harry L.) Papers, Writings and Speeches, Carton 1, Folder 3, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley.

Many of China's contemporary leaders, Kingman felt, were corrupt "parasites," insufficiently "responsible," "qualified," or "worthy." In order to raise up leaders of "courage, honor, public spirit, [and] faith," he proposed a plan of action that very closely mirrored the pedagogical practices and procedures of the conferences, leadership groups, and religious classes that the YMCAs in China had been sponsoring all along. He asked:

Should the morning be given over to comparatively small meetings in schools, guilds, chambers of commerce, and churches at which worthy and experienced leaders shall deal with China's problems and possibilities, shall dwell on the paramount need for men and women qualified for leadership by an apprenticeship in noble living, and shall appeal finally for the dedication of life-long service to the welfare of society? Should members of the audiences be permitted then to discuss what had been said and publicly to declare their desire to serve the nation? Should the afternoon be devoted, partly at least, to serious thought by people, individually or in small groups, as to the implications of truly patriotic living? Should a special attempt be made to bring potentially public-spirited people out, the older men as well as the younger, those intelligent and who now are lost from sight and are discouraged and disintegrated?¹³⁰

Obviously Kingman believed that these questions had only one correct answer, and that this course of action would serve to recruit honorable and public-spirited leaders. Kingman's plan is striking first for his—and the YMCA's—commitment to the idea of a local Chinese leadership, and secondly for the persistence of the idea that this leadership should be "apprenticed," presumably to Christian reformers like Kingman. This plan represented an understanding of the democratic process as one of individual reflection, group association, and national devotion, not one of mass action, and it is strongly informed by Christian sensibilities, both in the format of the declaration of service, in that churches were included as appropriate venues for such discussions, and in its ultimate "goal of human brotherhood." In all, Kingman's plan for May 30, 1926, was a fairly comprehensive representation of the YMCA's project in China—a project of apprenticing local leaders through training in good sportsmanship, which would then translate into the honorable and public-spirited citizenship necessary for a strong and healthy world of nations.

In July of 1925, the YMCA had held a National Conference in Shanghai, attended by forty-five Chinese and forty American Secretaries, to discuss the program of the Association in light of the May 30th Incident. The Conference reaffirmed a commitment to "ideals of international friendship, equality of race, and world harmony," and denounced political, economic, and cultural aggression. They recognized that the "unequal treaties" had caused great conflict and were a factor in the events leading up to and following May 30th. Their wording, however, was careful, and once again they claimed the middle ground—the Association would be "impartial, not neutral." Like Kingman, the Conference admonished the students not to respond with hatred. Finally, in light of the rising spirit of nationalism, the Conference agreed that the Association in China should do more to adapt to Chinese needs.¹³¹ But the middle could no longer be

¹³⁰ Kingman, "Asks That May 30 Be Made a Day of Spiritual Significance."

¹³¹ Grace E. Wright, *Personal Letters from China 1919-1929 Hallie Cline (YMCA)* (Lulu.com, 2011). Source listed as "Impartial not Neutral," *China Daily News*. Shanghai, January 22, 1926.

claimed as the moral high ground. As Lyon reported in September,

Following the tragic events of May 30th and soon after, [the] Anti-Christian Movement took a new lease on life. Much criticism has been leveled against the Christian Church...its lack of courage in dealing with great moral issues, its apparent subservience to the political and economical influences, and the presence in it of many inconsistent Christians.¹³²

Despite the Associations' ties to the Student Movement, this criticism extended to them as well. After May 30th, the Associations became increasingly indigenized, and by 1930, it was declared that "The Y.M.C.A. stands for the following things: — (1) character building; (2) popular education; (3) citizenship training; (4) industrial welfare; and (5) international understanding."¹³³ Religious work as such was no longer on the program.

The association of sportsmanship and citizenship survived indigenization. On May 4th, 1930, on the anniversary of the nationalist rising against the failure of the Great Powers to extend their universal principles to China, Dr. H. H. Kung, the Minister of Industry, Commerce and Labor, laid the cornerstone of the new Shanghai YMCA building and marked a "new era in the history of the Young Men's Christian Association of Shanghai" with an address on the "New Responsibilities of the Y.M.C.A." These included the "development of sportsmanship and sound citizenship among the younger members of Chinese society." Kung maintained that the people of China must be helped to realize the "interdependence of the individual's welfare with that of society," and he trusted the Y.M.C.A. to "train up a strong citizenry who would ...possess a strong sense of fair play, sportsmanship, and justice."¹³⁴

* * * * *

The project of the YMCA's Foreign Work was driven by a tendency toward universalism rooted in both liberalism and evangelical Protestantism—by the 1920s, the YMCA was promoting a scientific view of bodies as universal, a moral view of souls as universal, and a liberal view of a universal relation of individuals to the state, and it had come to believe that in training the body and the soul, it was perfecting the political individual. In the years after the First World War, in response to their experiences on the world-field, the men and women of the Associations had come to imagine this universal individual as the citizen of a specifically *democratic* nation. Although their universalism was always incomplete and always tempered by persistent assumptions of racial and cultural difference, the Associations maintained the idea that human development follows universal patterns on the level of the individual and the nation, partly determined by nature, and partly dependent on a certain amount of physical, moral, and social training. Based on an assumption of human semblance, the YMCA did its best to convince the young men of the world that if each individual would just recognize the

¹³² Lyon, "Letter to Dr. D. J. Harris."

¹³³ "Kuomintang's Attack on Y.M.C.A."

¹³⁴ "Dr. H. H. Kung Delivers Address at Y.M.C.A. Corner-Stone Laying," *The China Weekly Review*, May 10, 1930, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chinese Newspapers Collection. For more on the link between sportsmanship and citizenship in China, see Andrew Morris, *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

dignity in himself and the humanity in the other man, the world would function like a basketball game—nations would compete and cooperate alike in a spirit of goodwill, playing by the rule of law, and treating all parties with fairness and respect.

The recurring injunction for men to see themselves in the other man's place was a universalizing move—to follow this advice, each man must first see himself as an individual, then see himself as interchangeable with members of his own team, group, or nation, and finally, as interchangeable with members of the other team, group, or nation, a process which homogenizes as it individualizes. The very generous-spirited worldview of the YMCA was ultimately an attempt to impose a certain kind of sense of self and a certain kind of sense of how the world should work on other people and other groups. Further, in its focus on individuals, its approach to social service tended to ignore the negative effects of structures of power on a systemic level. Increasingly, in the 1920s and 30s, some Christian reformers, like Kingman, were able to move beyond some of the limitations of this universalism, and in fact came to accept a more nuanced cultural relativism.¹³⁵ Kingman's critique of the forceful imposition of the Western rule of law in China is a case in point. As he saw it,

A complication for the foreign arbiter has been the fact that the Chinese attitude towards the law is somewhat different from that of the Westerner. Possibly the two positions may be hinted at by the terms, humanism and legalism. The Westerner sets up an abstract concept like 'Law and Order' and tends to ride roughshod over human values in order to respect it. The Chinese, on the other hand, is chiefly concerned with the effects of such a concept upon human beings at the time. Westerners justified the shooting of students on May 30th because it was carried out in order to uphold the principle of 'Law and Order.' The Chinese couldn't see it so simply....the question of whether or not Western philosophy is superior to Chinese at this point has not yet been settled.¹³⁶

Perhaps, Kingman seemed to suggest, the Chinese focus on the particular content of justice could be seen as more "Christian" than the Western focus on the universal form of the rule of law. As Kingman knew, fair play could be a very nuanced thing.

Harry Kingman spent most of the rest of his life working for the YMCA, promoting the sportsmanship and fair play he believed to be vital to citizenship in a democracy. He returned to the United States in 1928, and assumed the duties of General Secretary of UC Berkeley's Student YMCA, Stiles Hall. While at Stiles Hall, he became involved in various struggles for fair play as he saw it, advocating for free speech for communist student groups, advocating for black workers with the Fair Employment Practices Commission, advocating for Japanese students during World War II and working to keep them out of internment camps, and advocating for the rights of African Americans to use public swimming pools and golf courses. On retiring from Stiles Hall in the late 1950s, he and his wife founded a small political lobbying team that they called "The Citizens' Lobby for Freedom and Fair Play," devoted primarily to advocating civil rights domestically and "magnanimity, humility and integrity" in international relations. Throughout his career, Kingman did his best to "stick up for the underdog," and to

¹³⁵ For a study of how YWCA Secretary and Physical Education instructor Maud Russell worked through these ideas and ultimately committed to Marxism, see Garner, *Precious Fire*.

¹³⁶ Kingman, "Sports and Sportsmanship in China," 9-10.

encourage those around him “to put themselves in the other man’s place.” As he saw it,

The fact that so many millions of men have repented of their sins and have given consent to evangelical theology without its having made them enemies of economic injustice, war, or racial prejudice furnishes strong grounds for the conviction that a religion which does not put social action in the forefront, is inadequate.¹³⁷

Fair play, he believed, was the foundation of democratic citizenship, and well worth the life he dedicated to it.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Harry Kingman, “Resolved: That Social Service Should Have Priority Over Evangelism in the Chinese Mission Field.”

¹³⁸ Kingman, *Citizenship in a Democracy*; Fisher, *Citadel of Democracy: The Story of the Public Affairs Record of Stiles Hall, the Young Men’s Christian Association at the University of California, Berkeley*. It is not an accident that both these works include the term *democracy* in their titles.

Conclusion

In 1946, Mott was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his "earnest and undiscourageable effort to weave together all nations, all races and all religious communions in friendliness, in fellowship and in cooperation."¹ This had, in fact, been his lifework, and the Associations' ideals of Christian social relations, Christian character, and Christian citizenship were promulgated in service to this work. Mott was an exceptionally able administrator, and by all accounts, a lovely person. Those who met with him, and there were thousands upon thousands over six decades of Association leadership and world travel, felt heard and respected.² Under his leadership, the YMCA, YWCA, SVM, and WSCF moved away from the project of the evangelization of the world in a single generation, and toward the more open end of teaching young people to play fair, and to imagine themselves in other people's shoes.

Imagining yourself in the other man's shoes is a very generous and warm-hearted move. This was especially true in the context of empire, formal or otherwise. It was also especially true in light of the growing resurgence after the First World War of the idea of self-interest as a political good, as the Western world increasingly positioned its suite of democratic and capitalist freedoms against the unfreedoms of communism. However, imagining yourself in the other man's shoes is also based in an idea of human equivalence that not only underlies the democratic ideal, but echoes the logic of the arithmetic of souls. Like the Macedonian call, it has the potential for allowing those in positions of relative power, with the best of intentions, to project their own wishes, desires, mores, and values on others. This is one of the ironies of the YMCA's project in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—in seeking, with the best of intentions, to provide meaning and purpose to the lives of young strangers caught up in the atomization and massification that characterized the industrializing world, their pedagogical approaches to character formation continually reinforced the very processes of individuation and erasure that had contributed to the sense of crisis in the first place.

The ideal of fair play, so generous and well-meaning, also served to mixed effect. Because the conception of the Christian citizen remained haunted by the pedagogical myth-model of George Williams, marked as white, male, Christian, middle-class, and commercially aspirant, the imagined universal selfhood contained in that ideal could never quite be embodied as universal. While individual non-white Christian Association leaders in non-Christian nations often enjoyed relations on a basis of equality with their North American colleagues, overwhelmingly, these leaders remained marked by their race, their class, their gender, and the cultural values associated with their nationality. Even when, as individuals, they perfectly exemplified the ideals of Christian citizenship, they found themselves unable to escape the markings of the unindividuated mass. They

¹ As quoted by Galen M. Fisher, *John R. Mott: Architect of Cooperation and Unity* (New York: Association Press, 1952), 2.

² Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955*.

found that the norms of fair play, closely associated with the idea of the rule of law, were maintained by authorities who factored these markings into their judgments, and thus applied the norms unevenly. Christian reformers, in the habit of casting themselves as disinterested parties mediating between sides, tended to compromise their ideals of fairness in light of the claims of those who benefited from political and social arrangements that were on their face unfair, but could be argued in terms of fairness given the authority of legal precedent. Association-affiliated nationalists found the ideal of fair play useful in their appeals for international justice—C. T. Wang, for instance, relied heavily on this trope in his unsuccessful appeal to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 for Chinese control of the Shantung Peninsula. However, more often than not, they found that the established rules of the game confounded the meaning of fairness—allowing the Great Powers, for instance, to hold up their treaties consigning Shantung to continued occupation as legal and thus only fair.

In the years just after the First World War, nationalist leaders in China, and in other subjected nations and colonies, appreciated the liberating promise of the ideal of democratic citizenship as advanced by the Christian reformers of the Associations. In China, especially, several nationalist leaders in the years before, during, and after the First World War were explicitly associated with the YMCA, and many thousands of nationalist students had been introduced to the ideals of democratic citizenship through YMCA programs. In the years after the First World War, the Chinese Associations, and those across the non-Christian world, succeeded in becoming significantly indigenized.³ As Wishard, Swift, and McConaughy had insisted in 1889, the North American YMCA had largely stood by its commitment to eventual self-governance of the various national Associations it had launched. In terms of its broader pedagogical project, however—that of molding the citizens of “plastic nations” according to the democratic ideal—most North American Secretaries did not consider the would-be citizens of these nations to be sufficiently prepared for national self-governance. Their preconceptions of an unindividuated heathen mass had persisted, unconsciously or otherwise, and their attempts at inculcating Christian citizenship according to the universal model, as represented by the young, white, middle-class, Christian man aspiring to commercial success, had been incomplete at best. Absent a population sufficiently individuated, sufficiently Christian in character, sufficiently committed to the principle of fair play according to existing rules of the game no matter the state of the field, the North American Secretaries could not imagine national self-governance. Their imagined universal citizen remained marked, in important ways, by race, class, gender, and culture, and their imagined world of self-governing democratic nations was, like the Kingdom of God, always but coming.

In 1915, before the experience of the war turned him toward the idea of self-determination, Eddy laid out his conception of the relations between the West and the nations of the non-Christian world. He wrote,

The introduction of the leaven of twentieth-century Christian civilization into the nations of the East inevitably creates ... great problems. ...The leaven of new ideas, of liberty, of democracy, of the worth and rights of the individual, and kindred doctrines

³ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, 699, 702.

are instilled into the minds of the rising generation, and old traditions, customs, and institutions are weakened or undermined. As a new national consciousness and a desire for self-government are introduced, ...The young progressive party aspires to self-government before the capacity and experience for that government are developed. ...Christianity alone can complete the work it has begun; it alone can solve the problem it has created.⁴

As Eddy discerned, the injection of “the leaven of twentieth-century Christian civilization into the nations of the East” was a recipe for crisis. Like the perceived moral and social crises of the 1840s and 1890s, this crisis had a lot to do with disruptions to cultural authority and with processes of atomization and massification, now imposed as much through imperial governance as through industrialization and urbanization. Eddy considered liberty, democracy, and the rights of the individual, like railroads, electricity, and telephones, and Christianity itself, to be the inevitable accoutrements of progress. The crisis of the “plastic nations,” as he saw it, would be one of young progressive nationalists aspiring to self-government before they were ready, before they had fully developed the capacity for self-rule, before their nation had sufficiently acquired a selfhood based in Christian character and Christian citizenship. For Eddy, the problem was still one of moral crisis, and the solution still lay in the Christianization of the individual—now marking extent of civilizational development and thus readiness for self-rule. Progressive nationalists were getting ahead of themselves in the march of history and progress. To avert crisis, they had to wait. Eddy’s idea of, as it were, an “imaginary waiting room of history” was not particular to the thought of Christian reform, and it was not new when the YMCA turned itself to the task of the production of Christian citizens. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in *Provincializing Europe*, finds an historicist strain in John Stuart Mill’s essays “On Liberty” (1859) and “On Representative Government” (1861) suggesting that “we were all headed for the same destination” of self-rule, but that “some people were to arrive earlier than others,” that a pedagogical approach to colonial rule was “somebody’s way of saying ‘not yet’ to somebody else.”⁵ The North American Christian reformers of the Associations, due to the ways in which they imagined the individual as Christian citizen, were, like Eddy, very much in the habit of saying, “not yet”—providing justification for further extension of pedagogical authority, for forcible intervention, for further erasure in the service of an ostensibly universal ideal.

In 1919, the same issue of the *International Review of Missions* that presented the “Man of 1919” (who understood that enlightened treatment would be necessary for child-races to grow to manhood) published a critique titled, “How Missions Denationalize Indians,” by K. T. Paul. Paul was a Christian missionary and an Indian nationalist leader, and he would head the Indian YMCA into the 1930s, taking it in important new directions that departed from the original idea of the perfected machine. Like K. S. Iyengar, who in 1891 had written in support of McConaughy’s first Indian YMCA, K. T. Paul was very attuned to the individualist implications of the Christian construction of democratic citizenship. Unlike Iyengar, he declaimed the efforts of Christian reformers

⁴ Sherwood Eddy, *The Students of Asia* (Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1915), 49–51.

⁵ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 8.

to produce the Indian Christian as individual. This, he believed, was not only an affront to the “social heritage” of India but inconsistent with the highest values of Christian brotherhood. He contrasted the “western individual” who claims his rights, with the Indian “irrespective of creed or sect or social condition” who values social obligations and responsibilities. This ingrained sense of social responsibility, he contended, made for a “sense of solidarity, of corporate life” and he presented it as “a most valuable asset” to the nation.⁶ A follower of Gandhi, Paul echoed his construction of a specifically Indian nationalism in contrasting at length the deep spiritual understanding of India with the tendency toward skepticism and lack of spiritual depth of the western liberal individual. If Anglo-American Association leaders could not imagine a world of self-governing nations absent a world population of individuated citizens holding Christian principles, Chinese and Indian Association leaders could and did, and were perennially frustrated by the half-hearted, inconsistent, or conditional support, or outright denial of such, from their Anglo-American colleagues.

K. T. Paul recognized the kind of selfhood that the missionaries were seeking to inculcate as that of the western liberal individual. The Associations preferred the terms *Christian character* and *Christian citizenship* to describe this selfhood, and they were not interested in discussions of liberalism as such, much as they avoided discussion of theological doctrine. Even as they remained committed to the perfection of the individual, they also placed important emphasis on *association*, and increasingly after 1890, they prioritized the fostering of *Christian social relations* between individuals, groups, and nations. Still, the individual remained at the heart of their project—a selfhood as inflected by evangelical ideals as by liberal ones, but certainly western, and unquestionably projected as universal. They imagined this universal individual not only as a soul to be saved and a body to be trained, but also as a moral actor, as a social being, and ultimately as a political entity, and across the century after 1844, the attitudes and policies that they based on these conceptions helped to elaborate the thing that K. S. Iyengar and K. T. Paul designated as the western liberal individual. While Chinese and Indian nationalists connected with the Associations appreciated the promise of liberation from imperial domination inherent in the idea of a world of democratic nations, for most North American secretaries the idea of democratic nationhood was predicated on the existence of a population of individuals who inhabited this particular brand of selfhood. This idea of selfhood then—based in the conceptions of *Christian character* and *Christian citizenship* that remained at the core of the Associations’ project—because of the ways in which it was projected as a universal norm, functioned more effectively as a tool of exclusion and subjection than of liberation.⁷

As a response to the challenges of the modern city and the globalizing world, the YMCA and related groups sought to reform individuals and to reorder social relations along Christian lines. In the century after 1844 the Association idea had spread rapidly, first across the Anglo-American world, and then, after a missionary turn in the 1880s,

⁶ Paul, “How Missions Denationalize Indians.”

⁷ In *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood suggests a way of disengaging the idea of freedom from the liberal idea of the individual.

globally. On the strength of this missionary turn, Association-minded men and women had formed the Student Volunteer Movement, the World Student Christian Federation, and the World's YWCA, to carry their ideals to the world-field. With the rise of the Social Gospel and liberal theology in the 1890s, the Association project based on these ideals evolved from the perfection of the individual, to the Christianization of social relations, and ultimately to the inculcation of "Christian citizenship" in so-called "plastic nations." If before the turn of the twentieth century most Christian reformers had imagined the world in terms of an arithmetic of heathen souls, by the 1920s many had begun to imagine a world of democratic nations populated by a citizenry which had "digested" the liberal ideals, which in Shanghai in 1925 were still considered to be, for some populations, "indigestible."

The history of the Foreign Work of the Associations in the first decades of the twentieth century is key to understanding the ways in which certain strains of evangelical Protestantism have entangled the democratic project. Through their Foreign Work, the Christian reformers of the Associations had an impact on the development of an ideal of democratic personhood projected to be universal, and on the growing acceptance of an ideal of a world organized into self-governing democratic nations. Further, Association programs provided models for subsequent governmental and non-governmental programs designed to inculcate these ideals around the world. This history foreshadows the ongoing problem of imagining a universal individual, the projection of which, while unquestionably liberating for many, still tends to provide justification for extension of pedagogical authority over subjected groups who are perennially told, "not yet." The problem of who should be included within the parameters of democratic citizenship is still often imagined as a problem of the morality of the mass, whether atomized or unindividuated, and this morality is still framed largely in Protestant terms. The story of the Foreign Work of the Associations must be considered as part of the history of these problems.

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