

The Beauty of the Christian Life: The Cultural Influence of Eric Liddell – a Sportsman, Missionary and Religious Writer

Piękno chrześcijańskiego życia: Kulturowe oddziaływanie Erica Liddella – sportowca, misjonarza i pisarza religijnego

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Abstract

Relations between sport and religion have been drawing attention of more and more researchers in recent years. The paper examines the life and influence of one of the greatest British athletes and missionaries – Eric Liddell. It is divided into several major sections. First, the author discusses the historical development and importance of Muscular Christianity. Next, the fascinating life and fruitful activity of Liddell are explored. The main focus of interest is, however, his legacy – the impact on broadly understood culture, for example cinema, religion, as well as sport. The paper has largely been based on historical sources.

Abstrakt

Związki pomiędzy sportem a religią przykuwają w ostatnich latach uwagę coraz liczniejszego grona badaczy. Niniejszy artykuł to eksploracja życia i spuścizny jednego z najznamienitszych brytyjskich sportowców i misjonarzy – Erica Liddella. Jest on podzielony na kilka części. Wpierw zarysowany jest historyczny rozwój i znaczenie idei “Muskularnego Chrześcijaństwa”. Następnie, przedstawione i poddane analizie jest życie i owocna działalność Liddella. Największy nacisk położony jest jednak na jego dziedzictwo – wpływ na szeroko rozumianą kulturę, kino, religię, jak również sport. Artykuł oparty jest przede wszystkim na źródłach historycznych.

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Christ for the world, for the world needs Christ!
(Eric Liddell, 1925)

Introduction

The role of sport as an institution and element of social life is appreciated by an ever greater number of scholars all over the world. Cultural issues have helped to place sport in the context of international studies. There has been a steady and visible growth in the academic literature devoted to the history and sociology of sport. Even those who are not keen on sport, tend to admit that it plays an important part in modern-day societies. According to Kevin Blanchard, it is an all-pervasive phenomenon whose meaning has far-reaching consequences:

Anyone who reads the newspaper, watches television, or listens to casual conversation on the street is undoubtedly aware of the ubiquitous nature of sport. It is everywhere, it flavours our national culture, and permeates every corner of our daily lives. It has become almost its own medium of communication and has important ramifications for international and multicultural relationships².

As Andrew R. Meyer et al. note, “sport and religion share a long history of social significance, transcending culture and geographic location”³. Grant Jarvie rightly states that “religion has had a significant historical presence in sport”⁴. The direct link between sport and religion, so much visible in ancient

¹ Eric Liddell said these words (at Waverley Station in Edinburgh) when he was leaving Scotland in order to start a new chapter in his life and serve as a missionary in China. See for example: R. J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul: 150 of the World's Greatest Hymns Stories*, Nashville, Tennessee 2003, p. 37.

² K. Blanchard, *The Anthropology of Sport. An Introduction*, Westport, Connecticut 1995, p. xvii.

³ A. R. Meyer, Ch. J., Wynveen, A. R. Gallucci, *The contemporary muscular Christian instrument: A scale developed for contemporary sport*, “International Review for the Sociology of Sport” 2017, vol. 52, no. 5, p. 632.

⁴ G. Jarvie, with J. Thornton, *Sport, Culture and Society*, Abingdon, New York 2012, p. 326; see M. Mazurkiewicz, *Some Observations about Ritual in Sport*, “Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism” 2011, vol. 18, no. 4, red. W. Lipoński, P. Krutki, Poznań.

times, does not exist anymore as sport has become a considerably secularized phenomenon. Yet different kinds of connections between these two spheres of life have not disappeared over the years⁵.

A good example is Muscular Christianity, a philosophical movement which originated in the second half of the nineteenth century in Great Britain. It was characterized by the vigorous promotion of robust religion, patriotism, manliness, appreciation of athleticism, discipline, as well as the expulsion of all that was perceived as effeminate and excessively intellectual. Two English thinkers and writers, Charles Kingsley (1819–1875) and Thomas Hughes (1822–1896), are regarded as the main pioneers of the ideology of Muscular Christianity and its most eloquent advocates. For both of them “the manliness and the Christianity were inextricably bound up with each other, and their novels project an imaginatively compelling synthesis of the two elements”⁶.

The above-mentioned authors were also driven by a desire “to infuse Anglicanism with enough health and manliness to make it a suitable agent for British imperialism”⁷. It was one of the reasons why the public schools would become the greatest strongholds of Muscular Christianity. Their task was to produce strong and courageous national leaders. Importantly, the headmasters of the leading schools were more liberal Anglican clergymen. From the 1850s sport started to play a key role in many of those institutions⁸.

The influence of the ideas of Muscular Christianity on famous Scottish athlete Eric Liddell was clear. His decision not to race on a Sunday during the 1924 Olympics due to his strong Christian faith, as well as the fact that he abandoned his brilliant athletics career to start the life of a missionary in China, “demonstrate many of the virtues of the muscular Christian ethic”⁹.

⁵ M. Mazurkiewicz, *Sport and Religion: Muscular Christianity and the Young Men's Christian Association. Ideology, Activity and Expansion (Great Britain, the United States and Poland, 1857–1939)*, Kielce 2018. See also M. Mazurkiewicz, *'If God Be for Us, Who Can Be Against Us?': Religion and Religiousness in Polish Football, 2008–2017*, “The International Journal of the History of Sport”, Special Issue: Sport and Christianity: Historical Perspectives 2018 , 35:1.

⁶ N. Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought*, Cambridge 1985, p. 6.

⁷ C. Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London 2003, p. 1.

⁸ J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology (Sport in the Global Society)*, Abingdon and New York 2012.

⁹ N. J. Watson, S. Weir, S. Friend, *The Development of Muscular Christianity in Victorian Britain and Beyond*, “Journal of Religion & Society” 2005, vol. 7, [in:] <https://>

His story became widely known through the films *Chariots of Fire* (1981) and *On Wings of Eagles* (2016), which will be also presented.

The main aim of this paper is to examine the relations between sport and religion by means of analysing the life, activity and legacy of Eric Liddell. Particular emphasis is given to the last aspect, especially such issues as the aforementioned presence on screen, commemoration both in Britain and abroad, and the impact of the athlete on contemporary sport. All this constitutes the core of the analysis. The article rests on a substantial base of monographs and articles on the history of sport and Scottish culture and will, hopefully, help gain fresh insights into the legacy of “The Flying Scotsman”.

Eric Liddell – Life Full of Passion

The ideals of Muscular Christianity were taken up by numerous Evangelical groups in Victorian and Edwardian times; many of their members claimed that sport must come second to gospel ministry. “The Flying Scotsman” is an excellent example of this.

Eric Liddell (1902-1945) – the son of Scottish missionaries (working for the Church of Scotland) who served in China – was an outstanding sportsman from his school days. He excelled in athletics at Edinburgh University and played rugby for Scotland before he competed in the 1924 Paris Olympics, which brought him fame. He was also a Christian missionary who undoubtedly proved to be capable of moral and physical manliness. As Norman Vance stated, “physical manliness was still serving Christianity well as an Evangelical instrument at this time, at least in Scotland”¹⁰. Liddell’s story became widely known through the Oscar-winning film *Chariots of Fire* (1981), where the experiences of Eric and his teammate Harold Abrahams (sprinter of Jewish descent, the first non-American to win the sprint event at the Olympics) were powerfully depicted.

At the 1924 Olympics, Liddell, a devout Protestant Christian, refused to run in the 100 meters (which was to take place on Sunday), which created a major stir. He spent that Sunday preaching at the Scots Kirk in Paris. The British officials reluctantly permitted him to change his event from the 100 – a race considered to be his strongest – to 400 meters. Liddell broke the world record and won a gold medal “winning undying fame as a hero of the faith

www.veritesport.org/downloads/The_Development_of_Muscular_Christianity_in_Victorian_Britain_and_Beyond.pdf (access 15 X 2020), p. 8.

¹⁰ N. Vance, op. cit., p. 169.

and of the track”¹¹. This story “closely resonates with the type of Muscular Christianity advocated by [such its proponents as] Studd and Moody”¹².

According to Shirl Hoffman,

the uniqueness of the Liddell episode wasn't so much that he publicized his religious commitment, something the evangelical community continues to point to, but his willingness to allow his religious conscience to override the demands of the sporting culture. Liddell may have been the first Christian elite athlete to do this¹³.

Sport has never existed in a social vacuum. It must be noticed that by the time Liddell became famous, secularism had already bitten deep into British society. Although there were numerous tributes from churchmen to his upholding of the Christian Sabbath, still the popular press and the representatives of the Establishment, also from the circle of the British Olympic Committee (as it has been mentioned), were unsympathetic to Liddell's Sabbatarian sturdiness. This demonstrates how the situation changed. Eighty years earlier, when Kingsley and Hughes were young, all the pressure would have been exerted the other way (even Queen Victoria had to face harsh criticism for presuming to travel by train on a Sunday)¹⁴.

Liddell enjoyed great popularity as a speaker at evangelical rallies as well as during meetings organized at universities, where students willingly listened to the thought-provoking testimony of “The Flying Scotsman”¹⁵. As Vance puts it, “conservative Scotland, by creating and preserving the legend of Eric Liddell, carried the neo-evangelical version of what was essentially Victorian Christian manliness into the middle of the twentieth century”¹⁶.

As it has been noted, Liddell's sporting career did not change his resolution to spread God's word and a year after the Olympic Games he returned to China to do missionary work with his father. He worked in Tianjin's Anglo-Chinese College, a school which was popular with the local elite¹⁷ and did not give up his sporting predilections – he even advised on the construction

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 171.

¹² N. J. Watson, S. Weir, S. Friend, op. cit., p. 8.

¹³ S. J. Hoffman, *Harvesting Souls in the Stadium: The Rise of Sports Evangelism*, [in:] *Sports and Christianity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. N. J. Watson, A. Parker. New York and London 2013, p. 139.

¹⁴ Vance, op. cit., p. 172.

¹⁵ N. J. Watson, S. Weir, S. Friend, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁶ Vance, op. cit., p. 172.

¹⁷ D. Midgley, *China's love for Chariot's Of Fire hero Eric Liddell*, “Express”, 19 VIII 2015, [in:] <https://www.express.co.uk/news/history/599358/Eric-Liddell-China-s-love-for-Chariot-s-Of-Fire-hero> (access 20 X 2020).

of the local stadium. To be more precise, “he proposed an exact copy of the then football ground of Chelsea FC, said to have been his favourite running venue in the UK”¹⁸. Eric would visit Scotland and during his furlough in 1932 he was ordained a minister of the Scottish Congregational Church. Yet it was China that was to be the hero’s final destination.

Liddell started his family on Chinese soil. In 1941, the situation became dangerous on account of Japanese aggression. Because of the advancing Japanese army, Liddell, together with his family, fled to a rural mission station but he did not escape his destiny – after some time he found himself in a Japanese internment camp at Weih sien (in 1943), “where he dedicated himself to the welfare of fellow inmates”¹⁹, often helping them in different ways, also giving up his meagre portions of meals. His activity included organizing sports contests, which – practised in a state of heightened tension – enabled the locals briefly forget the nightmare and go through the horror of the camp life. He “was seen as a great unifying force and helped to ease tensions through his selflessness and impartiality”²⁰. As Duncan Hamilton puts it, “he became the moral center of an unbearable world”²¹. Serving tirelessly at the camp, he died from a brain tumour five months before the end of World War II. Interestingly, Liddell refused to leave the camp (and join his family in Canada) even after Winston Churchill’s intervention. His life after the 1924 Olympics and the comeback to Asia is portrayed in a 2016 film *On Wings of Eagles*, which will be soon discussed.

Liddell was buried in the area of the camp but then, unfortunately, no record was kept of his last resting place. Thanks to Charles Walker, a Hong Kong based Scottish engineer fearing that one of Scotland’s greatest heroes could be lost forever, and determined to search for the forgotten grave, the site was found. It happened despite numerous difficulties (such as the fact that the place names had been changed and there were problems connected with finding the witnesses).

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ *Eric Liddell Biography*, [in:] <https://www.biographyonline.net/sport/athletics/eric-liddell.html> (access 20 X 2020).

²¹ D. Hamilton, *For the Glory: Eric Liddell’s Journey from Olympic Champion to Modern Martyr*, New York 2016, back cover.

“The Flying Scotsman” on Screen

*The best portrayals of sports are never about the sport itself, but rather the human condition in pursuit of its glories [...]*²²

The flow of time can diminish the interest in old sports heroes. Yet one event is capable of freshening up the memories of the fans. As for Liddell, Paul Putz remarks that

Liddell's religious convictions and Olympic gold made him a hero for Christian athletes over the next few decades, although one could notice that the memory of his accomplishments gradually faded over time. That trend was reversed in 1981 with the release of *Chariots of Fire*²³.

The famous film *Chariots of Fire* (dir. Hugh Hudson) followed the preparations and Olympic fortunes of two British athletes in the Paris Games of 1924 – Liddell and Harold Abrahams, who “is criticized by his Cambridge tutors for being too Semitic in his single-minded pursuit of victory in contrast to the young Lord Burghley's studied casualness”²⁴. As for Abrahams as for Abrahams attitude to Liddell, he recognized that “intense spiritual convictions contributed largely to his athletic triumphs [... and] but for his profound intensity of spirit, he surely could not have achieved so much”²⁵. *Chariots of Fire*, adored both by viewers and critics, “had amassed £49.4 million, making it, at the time, the biggest money-making foreign movie in US box office history”²⁶.

As regards the complex subject matter and the nature of Liddell's faith shown in the film, Grant Jarvie amply elucidates:

Liddell is introduced in the film as an establishment Scottish rugby international who turns to running as a form of secular preaching. The conflicts in the film between amateurism, idealism, realism, god and nation, sport and social class are crucial to the narrative. Liddell's metaphysical, evangelical running qualities are a core theme throughout the film. Liddell's faith was deep-rooted within a Scottish evangelical fundamentalist tradition. The core of his faith was a burning conviction in personal salvation through the merits of Jesus. To bring men and women to this spiritual climax was one of the ultimate aims of Scottish evangelicals. The evangelical fundamentalists shared many similarities with the Scottish covenants; both were fervent, both were puritanical

²² Ibidem, p. 10.

²³ P. Putz, *The Untold Story of Olympic Champion Eric Liddell*, 6 V 2016, [in:] <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/for-the-glory/> (access 25 V 2020).

²⁴ R. Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, Oxford 1992, p. 275.

²⁵ “Sunday Times”, 20 V 1945, p. 8.

²⁶ G. Jarvie, op. cit., p. 328.

and both in their heyday were anxious to see their ideals adopted by the rest of society. The story presented in *Chariots of Fire* transforms Liddell's evangelical ideology into a metaphorical statement about the ultimate possibilities that could be achieved through sport. The framing of this story about the athlete tended to depoliticise the role of the evangelicals within Scottish society but also framed the notion of freedom within a religious frame of reference²⁷.

It should be, however, noted that many aspects of this work – which is also famous for its memorable electronic theme tune by Vangelis – were mythologized for creative effects. Just to give one example – in the film, Liddell learns that the 100-meter heat is to be held on the Christian Sabbath only when he is boarding the boat to Paris, although, in fact, the schedule was made public several months in advance²⁸.

The athlete's life after the victorious turn at the 1924 Paris Olympics and the comeback to Asia is portrayed in a 2016 Chinese-financed film *On Wings of Eagles* (originally titled *The Last Race*, dir. Stephen Shin, Michael Parker), regarded as unofficial sequel to *Chariots of Fire*. One should bear in mind that besides visiting Scotland two more times after he had left for China, Liddell remained utterly dedicated to helping people in the Middle Kingdom. The film – which received mixed reviews, offering “uneven, unfocused storytelling with the accounts of Liddell's extraordinary China-set final years hampered by too many unnecessary diversions”²⁹ – depicts his work as a missionary on Asian soil and details everything until his death.

The Legacy of Eric Liddell – Remembrance, Commemoration, Influence

As Andrzej Pawłucki rightly notes, “the real sportsman does not wholly die”³⁰. Sports heroes go down in history and many become living legends. The social impact of some of them goes beyond the sphere of sport. According to Duncan Hamilton, one of Liddell's biographers,

His character constitutes the basis of his legacy, which is a gift that keeps on giving to whoever discovers both it and him. You see it in those who now

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ See E. Cashmore, *Chariots of Fire: Bigotry, Manhood and Moral Certitude in an Age of Individualism*, “Sport in Society” 2008, vol. 11, no. 2-3, *Introducing Sport in Films*, p. 159–173.

²⁹ C. Tsui, ‘*The Last Race*’ (*Zhong Ji Sheng Li*): *Film Review*, “The Hollywood Reporter”, 17 VI 2016, [in:] <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/last-race-zhong-ji-sheng-903887> (access 10 IV 2020).

³⁰ A. Pawłucki, *Etos i patos w kulturze ucieleśnienia*, [in:] *Kultura fizyczna a etos*, ed. Z. Dziubiński, N. Organista, Warszawa 2019, s. 289.

quote his daily devotions and philosophies on Twitter. You see it in the references made about him in newspapers, in chat rooms and on blogs across the world. You see it in the stories of men and women, born decade after decade after Liddell's death, who labour on behalf of others because he inspired them. You see it, too, in the bricks and mortar of Edinburgh's Eric Liddell Centre [...]³¹

Before discussing the above-mentioned centre, it seems justified to mention the establishment of the Eric Liddell Memorial Committee in Glasgow in 1945. It had several goals, for example providing for the education and maintenance of the athlete's daughters, and commemoration of Liddell in China by means of erecting a Memorial, which was successfully realized. In order to widen the appeal of the institution, the Committee published a pamphlet by D. P. Thomson, a Church of Scotland minister and a Christian author and publisher, entitled *Eric Liddell, The Making of an Athlete and the Training of a Missionary* (1946). The Committee's Fund was eventually wound up in 1954³².

As for the Eric Liddell Centre, it was established in Edinburgh in 1980 to honour the sports hero's perception of the importance of community service. Christianity is perceived as synonymous with serving and giving. Understanding this, the local residents aimed at creating a special place where people of all ages, cultures and abilities could receive support. It soon became apparent that the action made sense and as such it effectively continues its activity till present day – "In its devotion to the community, the centre does today what Liddell began almost a century ago – caring, supporting, educating, inspiring. And so ideas and ideals he espoused go on. We owe him a debt for that"³³.

The Eric Liddell Centre declares on its website:

We are a registered Scottish charity providing specialist caring services from a unique historic building in south central Edinburgh. [...] Our building was formerly Morningside North Parish Church and continues to be extensively modified to meet local community needs. In 1992 the Centre was renamed the Eric Liddell Centre in memory of the Olympic gold medallist who was portrayed in the 1981 Oscar award-winning film "Chariots of Fire". Eric Liddell lived in this area of Edinburgh whilst studying at Edinburgh University in the early 1920's³⁴.

³¹ D. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 343.

³² *Eric Liddell Memorial Fund*, [in:] <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/719ad6df-21e5-339b-9ba0-b7c71ed07705> (access 15 VI 2020).

³³ D. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 343.

³⁴ *Eric Liddell Centre*, [in:] <https://www.ericliddell.org/> (access 10 II 2020).

It is crucial to note that Liddell, known as Li Airui in the Far East, is also commemorated in China, although – considered a godly, heroic figure in the country which was not yet communist – he became forgotten for a generation in the communist reality, just like most missionaries. The modern-day Chinese authorities have agreed to let his story of Christian humanity and sporting excellence be told³⁵. This, however, is taking place after a long time of purposeful casting the Scottish hero into oblivion. Jifeng Liu and Chris White explain it in the following way:

The Maoist years initially exploited the memory of missionaries to condemn the imperialism they were associated with, but these figures soon largely faded from the collective memory. However, as we see in the commemoration of Liddell, China's Christian history is again being utilized by the state, but this time at the local level and in a nearly opposite fashion. The official discourse from the nation-state regarding the missionary encounter has changed little in the reform era, but the interpretation of this history at the local level has greatly evolved in recent years. In order for local officials to reconcile their need to adhere to the national-level aversion to promoting Christianity, while also hoping to appropriate missionary history, authorities must render ambiguous or grey China's Christian history by emphasizing the non-religious aspects. In the case of Liddell, this has meant portraying an anti-Japanese, pro-CCP, and global star to serve as a bridge linking Weifang to the world³⁶.

Liddell is commemorated by a headstone made from the Isle of Mull rose granite, which had been sent to China in 1991. It was erected in the courtyard of the school which is now located in the area of the former work camp. There is also an inscription which comes from the Book of Isaiah (40:31) – “They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary.” Nearby, there is the life size bronze statue of Liddell. Another sculpture of the famous sportsman is located far away – at Edinburgh University's Old College, which the sports hero attended in the 1920s.

The influence of Liddell on religion is visible in the form of frequent references to his missionary activity. He is highly valued mostly in the Protestant circles, but also the liturgical calendar of the Episcopal Church in the United States, a member church of the worldwide Anglican Communion, remembers Liddell with a feast day on 22 February. Let us recall the words of the Episcopalian Collect, Rite I, of that day:

³⁵ B. Gallagher, *Eric Liddell's Story to Set Chinese Hearts Racing*, “The Telegraph”, 21 VII 2008, [in:] <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/olympics/2436938/Eric-Liddells-story-to-set-Chinese-hearts-racing.html> (access 15 II 2020).

³⁶ J. Liu, Ch. White, *Consuming missionary legacies in contemporary China: Eric Liddell and evolving interpretations of Chinese Christian history*, “China Information” 2019, vol. 33, no. 1, p. 60.

We rejoice in remembering thy athlete and missionary, Eric Liddell, to whom thou didst bestow courage and resolution in contest and in captivity; and we pray that we also may run with endurance the race that is set before us and persevere in patient witness, until we wear that crown of victory won for us by Jesus our Savior; who with thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, for ever and ever. Amen³⁷.

As for sport, Eric Liddell was recognized as the most popular athlete Scotland had ever produced according to the public voting for the first inducted for the Scottish Sports Hall of Fame in 2002. Housed at the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, this institution celebrates and pays tribute to Scotland's iconic sports men and women from the past 100 years, inspiring future generations. Liddell is one of the most exceptional ones.

Religion still marks its presence in sport. Grant Jarvie states that "the influence of religion on sport may have declined but it has not disappeared..."³⁸. As Harry Edwards notes, "the religious theme in the sports creed is clearly Protestant in emphasis, though hardly systematically orthodox"³⁹. Just like in the case of Liddell, athletes "find sports participation and the Christian ministry to be compatible pursuits"⁴⁰. A good example is American football player Calvin Hill, who was an ordained minister in both the Presbyterian and Disciples of Christ denominations.

As for the notion of the sacred Sabbath, it has impacted upon sport in many ways. In America, "among many conservative Protestants, Sabbatarianism remained alive and well for at least a decade after World War II"⁴¹. Outstanding American middle-distance runner Gil Dodds, known as "The Flying Parson" for his foot speed and his religious convictions⁴², insisted that his event be scheduled for Friday night or Saturday before he would compete (it took place in the 1940s). Interestingly, the tradition has not vanished. In 2010, the devoutly Christian Scottish rugby forward, Euan Murray refused to play in the match against France because it was due to be played on a Sunday. To give one more example, let us direct our attention to some more religious parts of Scotland such as the the Outer Hebrides, where religion has always been a cornerstone of life. Sabbath Day observance is practised predomi-

³⁷ *The Liturgical Calendar*, [in:] <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/lectionary/eric-liddell-missionary-china-1945> (access 20 III 2020).

³⁸ G. Jarvie, op. cit., p. 338.

³⁹ H. Edwards, *Sociology of Sport*, Homewood, Illinois 1973, p. 125.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*. p. 124.

⁴¹ T. Ladd, J. A. Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity: Evangelical Protestants and the Development of American Sport*, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1999, p. 147.

⁴² R. Balmer, *Dodds, Gil(bert) (L.) (1918-1977)*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, Louisville, Kentucky 2002, p. 214.

nantly in the Presbyterian northern islands⁴³. That is why recently there has been so much controversy connected with surfing on a Sunday on the Island of Lewis, which is characterized by longstanding tradition of Sunday being a day of “worship, rest and reflection”⁴⁴.

Harry Edwards is right to note that

Sport is a social institution which has primary functions in disseminating and reinforcing the values regulating behavior and goal attainment and determining acceptable solutions to problems in the secular sphere of life. The channeling functions carried out in a general fashion through the religious institution (or through the dissemination of political ideology in atheistic societies) are thus extended and supported. This channeling affects not only perspectives on sport, but, it is commonly assumed, affects and aids in regulating perceptions of life in general. And herein lies the primary significance of sport as an institution⁴⁵.

Eric Liddell's honest and meaningful life is a proof of this. That man of value is still arousing a great deal of interest, is looked up to and treated as a model to follow, not only by Christians. Although much has been written about him, there are probably a lot of yet unknown aspects of his life to explore.

Literary Legacy of Liddell – *The Disciplines of the Christian Life*

It should be also noted that while in the camp Liddell wrote the book currently known as *The Disciplines of the Christian Life* (first entitled *Discipleship*), which aimed at helping Christians grow spiritually through a daily practice of prayer and Bible study. The author was clearly inspired by diverse sources, including Aristotle or American educator Booker T. Washington. It is also visible that “the Sermon on the Mount remained the keystone of his faith”⁴⁶. The results of Liddell's work reveal the essence of his vibrant Christian faith. In this short book the heroic missionary lays out his philosophies of living a life of growth and pursuing holiness. The emphasis here is on obedience, but also following the truth, living a God-guided life, prayer and meditation are strongly promoted. As for the former, Liddell underlined

⁴³ *Religion*, [in:] <https://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk/see-and-do/culture-and-heritage/religion> (access 22 VI 2020).

⁴⁴ L. Martin, *Lewis hands surfers 'never on a Sunday' warning*, “The Guardian”, 8 VIII 2004, [in:] <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/aug/08/britishidentity.lornamartin> (access 15 IV 2020).

⁴⁵ H. Edwards, op. cit., p. 90.

⁴⁶ D. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 248.

“that obedience to God and the surrendering of one’s will to the Lord’s are essential prerequisites for a successful Christian life”⁴⁷.

As far as the structure of the work is concerned, David McCasland explains that the author “organized it as a book of daily readings for an entire year”⁴⁸. This is what it looked like:

For the month of January, Eric developed the theme of ‘Surrender.’ February focused on ‘God’s Moral Law and the Sermon on the Mount.’ Each month had a list of thematic daily Bible readings, preceded by a brief introduction and followed by ‘Suggested Reading’ – usually one or two books that had been significant to Eric⁴⁹.

The Eric Liddell Centre notes the timelessness of the valuable publication, stating that this „admirably practical guide to discipleship is as relevant today as it was for those who first read it in manuscript – his fellow prisoners in the wartime Japanese camp where he [Liddell] eventually died”⁵⁰. Lots of Christians who want to get to know “The Flying Scotsman” and desire to change their lives for the better still find motivation thanks to *The Disciplines of the Christian Life*. As Duncan Hamilton puts it, the book is “the closest we get to hearing Liddell speak from the heart”⁵¹.

Summary and Future Outlook

Sport has become an important topic of social scientific investigation (and it is highly probable that the interest in sporting spectacles will keep growing⁵²). Most salient for the purposes of this paper was the presence of religion in sport. Obviously, neither time nor space has permitted an exhaustive presentation of the historical development of the idea of Muscular Christianity. Much the same can be said regarding the activity and legacy of famous sportsman and evangelical Christian missionary Eric Liddell. It was and is still visible that muscular Christian ideals continue to influence the world of sport and physical activity. In other words, “many values inherent to modern sport perpetuate muscular Christian notions of fair play, sportsman-

⁴⁷ J. Wilson, *Complete Surrender: A Biography of Eric Liddell*, Crownhill 2012, p. 31.

⁴⁸ D. McCasland, *Eric Liddell: Pure Gold: The Olympic Champion Who Inspired Chariots of Fire*, Grand Rapids, MI: 2001, p. 246.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ *Eric Liddell Centre*, op. cit.

⁵¹ Hamilton, op. cit., p. 249.

⁵² J. Kosiewicz, *Moralność i sport*, Warszawa 2016, s. 235.

ship, and the value of participation, and are expressed in the conversations and decisions made about sport every day”⁵³.

It is important to note that “throughout modern history sport has been one of the key cultural arenas from which heroes have emerged”⁵⁴. Sports heroes enjoy exceptional status – they “are accorded special treatment almost everywhere; people often treat them with a deference approaching that otherwise reserved for national heroes, esteemed dignitaries, and high public officials”⁵⁵. One ought to remember that the story of Eric Liddell – who achieved international renown as an Olympic gold medalist, avid rugby player, and as a person totally devoted to his faith – became one of the dominant sports narratives of the twentieth century. Liddell is currently one of the English-speaking world most well-known Christian athletes⁵⁶. Analysing a variety of publications dedicated to his life and legacy leads one to conclude that he continues to influence people all over the world. It is often emphasized that the Christian life is a journey; one can assume that the journey of Eric Liddell has not come to an end yet as he keeps attracting both historians, cultural scholars and ordinary people, which bears new fruit. I hope I have demonstrated that despite the passage of time his legend is still alive.

The paper, hopefully, shows and explores – at least to some degree – the cultural significance of sport. A fuller understanding of the legacy of great athlete and committed Christian Eric Liddell can add considerably to the wider understanding of the question of fascinating and complex connections between religion and sport, as well as the issue of heroism in sport. It seems reasonable to expect that this publication might stimulate further research.

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⁵³ A. R. Meyer et al., op. cit., p. 632.

⁵⁴ J. Hughson, *On sporting heroes*, “Sport in Society” 2009, vol. 12, no. 1, *The Making of Sporting Cultures*, by John Hughson, p. 85.

⁵⁵ Edwards, op. cit., p. 177.

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