Title – The Men and Religion Forward Movement in Virginia, 1911-1912

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Abstract:

“More religion for men, and more men for religion.”¹ This was the official slogan of the Men and Religion Forward movement (MRFM) that swept through seventy-six cities in the U.S. and Canada from September 1911 to April 1912. Though short-lived, the MRFM was significant to American religious and social history for its unique target audience (exclusively male), prominent proponents (such as Social Gospel minister Washington Gladden, and politician William Jennings Bryan), the modern business publicity techniques employed, and its following of different protestant denominations, and organizations (like the YMCA, Protestant Brotherhoods, and the International Sunday-School Association). A MRFM ‘sweep’ of a city would last eight days during which ‘experts’ would expound and exhort on the five areas the movement emphasized Christian men to take part in: social service, work with boys, sharing the gospel, studying the Bible, and overseas missions. This research explores the rationale, and extent, and impact of the participation of Virginian Protestant churches and organizations in the MRFM. The cities of Newport, Staunton, Charlottesville, Richmond, and Alexandria all hosted MRFM “experts” and consequent meetings. Primary sources from these larger cities as well as from smaller towns, churches, and colleges are also examined.