THE INCOMBATIBILITY OF THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH AND FUNDAMENTALIST THEOLOGY: WHY FREE METHODISTS ARE NOT FUNDAMENTALISTS

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by
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Abstract

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The purpose of this study was an investigation into the question of whether or not the Free Methodist Church is compatible with fundamentalism. Key research questions included whether the FMC at its inception would be predisposed to fundamentalism, why fundamentalism has at times been attractive to Free Methodists and why Free Methodists ultimately rejected fundamentalism.

Over the course of the thesis, I have used the literary tool known as reception theory to analyze the way in which leaders and governing bodies within the Free Methodist Church have received and responded to the doctrines and mindset of the fundamentalist movement in America. Chapters in the thesis cover the historic and theological context of the Free Methodist Church and the fundamentalist movement, and the way in which Free Methodists received and responded to two primary doctrines of fundamentalism: the revelation and interpretation of Scripture, and Premillennial Dispensational theology.

What I found in my analysis is that particularly as they worked towards merger with the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the FMC moved closer to fundamentalist positions, even officially embracing the position of inerrancy in their Articles of Religion for a time. However, it was clear that leaders within the FMC were never comfortable with these fundamentalist positions, and those positions were ultimately rejected by the FMC after merger with the WMC failed.

The FMC traces her roots back to John Wesley and the Church of England. Within that ecclesiological tradition, there is room for theological ambiguity that allows for varieties of interpretations. The FMC shares the catholic spirit of Wesley that centers on celebrating shared beliefs rather than focusing on differences and is thus not compatible with fundamentalism.

Acknowledgements

There are numerous people, including many who cannot be enumerated, who made this project achievable, and this undertaking would not have been possible without them.

I would like to pay my special regards to Larry Wood and Tony Lane who served as the supervisors for my thesis. Dr. Wood gave me invaluable critical feedback over the years as I met with him. His example and guidance helped me discover what it means to think like a scholar Dr. Lane likewise provided valuable critical feedback, particularly as I neared completion of my thesis. The work is significantly enriched because of their thoughtful guidance.

I am indebted to W. Richard Stephens, who read numerous versions of the thesis and gave me valuable feedback as one who was personally involved in the merger negotiations between the Free Methodist Church and the Wesleyan Methodist Connection. Ben Wayman, Craig Boyd, Andrew Russell, Steven O'Malley and Howard Snyder read early versions of proposals and chapters and gave helpful direction.

The Librarians at Greenville University were helpful and accommodating, especially Georgann Kurtz-Shaw and archivist Marilyn Starr, while Cathy Robling, director of the Marston Memorial Historical Center, provided extremely valuable assistance during my many visits at this Free Methodist Church archive. The MMHC also contributed financial assistance during several of my research trips to Indianapolis.

Dad and Mom Munshaw encouraged me to pursue further education, even though it meant moving their grandchildren far from them, and they prayed for us regularly throughout this journey. Dad and Mom Crandall (and later, Carol) were always supportive of my educational pursuits, both with their prayers and encouragement, as well as financial support. I could not have succeeded in my work without the support of both sets of parents. My siblings, Lori and Gregg and their families were also a source of encouragement through their words and prayers.

My family has been amazing and supportive through this long journey. Cody, Rebecca, Katie and David were incredibly patient and encouraging as I disappeared for long periods of time to my attic office. My wonderful wife Jennifer did not have any idea what we were getting into when we started this journey. She returned to work to help support us and has read and edited numerous versions of each chapter and encouraged me in so many ways. I dedicate this work to her.

Above all, I would like to thank God for wisdom, love, and enduring grace.

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Thesis

In 2010, the Free Methodist Church (FMC) marked her one hundred and fiftieth year of existence. Birthed amidst controversy and infighting within the Genesee (New York) conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) in 1860, the Free Methodist Church has grown to more than one million members worldwide.[1] Although the founding of the FMC coincided with the earliest stirrings of what would become the fundamentalist movement in American Christianity, this thesis will demonstrate that Free Methodist theology and fundamentalism are incompatible. While the FMC and its leadership repeatedly considered the doctrines of the fundamentalist movement, and at times briefly incorporated them into their theology and practice, they ultimately rejected fundamentalism. There is a deep need to learn from the way that the Free Methodist Church has responded to fundamentalism in the past if the FMC is to avoid moving towards fundamentalist theological positions in the future.

Much has been written about the history of the Free Methodist Church and about fundamentalism in America. The historiography of both will be examined later in this section, but this thesis is unique in offering

Introduction

It is important to understand that at the time of her founding in 1860, the Free Methodist Church was a part of the nineteenth century holiness movement in America. From the very beginning, its leaders were much more concerned with encouraging experiential Christianity as opposed to working out systematic theologies; they normally

[1] http://fmcusa.org/blog/2012/10/23/free-methodist-membership-passes-1-million/ - accessed Feb.21,2017.

promoted a second work of grace, often called entire sanctification, in which a person was instantaneously freed from the power of sin. As leaders of the future FMC prepared to found a new denomination, Benjamin Titus Roberts, the first superintendent of the FMC, expressed that "(a)ll societies and bands that find it necessary, in order to promote the prosperity and permanency of *the work of holiness*, to organize a Free Church … are welcome to send delegates."[2] The experience of entire sanctification "as a state of grace distinct from justification, attainable instantaneously by faith" was one of the doctrines that was specifically outlined as integral for those who desired to organize a Free Methodist Church.[3] In his fledgling journal, *Earnest Christian*, Roberts issued a second and similar invitation to join the new church. Again, the primary issue raised was holiness. Roberts wrote, "We recommend that those in sympathy with the doctrine of holiness, as taught by WESLEY, should labor in harmony with the respective Churches to which they belong; but where this cannot be done – where they cannot do their duty without continual strife and contention, we recommend the formation of Free Methodist Churches …."[4] In that same formative year, the FMC leaders also chose to write an article of religion concerning entire

[2] B.T. Roberts, "Notice for Camp Meeting and Convention," *Earnest Christian* 1:8, (August, 1860), 260. My emphasis. Howard Snyder opines that the Laymen's Convention held at Wayne, west of Chicago operated as an organizing committee for the new denomination, and it could equally be argued that this was the true founding of the FMC. Howard A. Snyder, *Populist Saints: B.T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 518.
[3] Ibid, 260.
[4] Roberts, "Western Laymen's Convention," *Earnest Christian*, 1:8 (August, 1860), 260. Emphasis is in the original.

sanctification,[5] adding it to the twenty-five abridged articles[6] that had been received from John Wesley by the American Methodists at the famed Christmas Conference of 1784.

This emphasis on entire sanctification was underscored in the written history of the St. Charles, IL camp meetings. Future Free Methodist leaders played prominent roles in these MEC meetings, and it was these leaders who were promoting experiential Christianity and especially the experience of entire sanctification. The first of these camp meetings was attended by B.T. Roberts, J.W. Redfield, E.P. Hart, and other future Free Methodists. In his introductory chapter to this history, J. G. Terrill notes that there had been 'considerable excitement' within the MEC concerning "some (largely the future Free Methodists) who especially advocated the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification."[7] This topic of experience and entire sanctification was arguably the fundamental issue that was dividing members of the Genesee conference.

Though the lack of emphasis on experiential Christianity within the MEC was only one of the issues over which the future leaders of the FMC were focused, it was the first one mentioned by Roberts in an article he published in the summer of 1860. Other convictions included the abolition of slavery, free pews, congregational singing without instruments, no

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[5] *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Free Methodist Church*. (Buffalo, NY: B.T. Roberts, 1860), 22. "Article XIII *Entire Sanctification.* Merely justified persons, while they do not outwardly commit sin, are nevertheless conscious of sin still remaining in the heart. They feel a natural tendency to evil, a proneness to depart from God, and cleave to the things of earth. Those that are sanctified wholly are saved from all inward sin – from evil thoughts, and evil tempers. No wrong temper, none contrary to love remains in the soul. All the thoughts, words and actions are governed by pure love.
Entire sanctification takes place subsequently to justification, and is the work of God wrought instantaneously upon the consecrated, believing soul. After a soul is cleansed from all sin, it is then fully prepared to grow in grace." Howard Snyder notes that there was some debate amongst the first FMC leaders concerning the instantaneous nature of entire sanctification, with Lauren Stiles arguing that there should be recognition that there could also be a gradual work of the Holy Spirit. Snyder, 523-524.

[6] The Church of England articulated 39 articles of religion. Free Methodists made several other adjustments to the Articles they had received and officially had 23 Articles at their founding.

[7] J. G. Terrill, *The St. Charles Camp-Meeting: Embodying its History and Several Sermons by Leading Ministers with some Practical Suggestions Concerning Camp-Meeting Management.* (Chicago: T.B. Arnold, 1883), 5.

connections with secret societies, plainness of dress, and equal representation of clergy and laity in all church councils.[8] It is imperative to understand that for the early Free Methodists, being entirely sanctified had practical implications that could be witnessed in the life of an individual. This included both the testimony of the experience as well as changes in moral behaviors.

After B.T. Roberts and other ministers were expelled from the church, there were a series of three 'layman's conventions' held where the ousted Methodists contemplated how to proceed in ministry. At the final convention, held at Wayne, IL, just west of Chicago, Roberts was elected as the General Superintendent for a new denomination and he proposed,

> Resolved, That our attachment to the doctrines, usages, spirit and discipline of Methodism is hearty and sincere. It is with the most profound grief that we have witnessed the departure of many of the ministers from the God-honored usages of Methodism. We feel bound to adhere to them, and to labor all we can, and to the best possible advantage, to promote the life and power of godliness. We recommend that those in sympathy with the doctrine of holiness, as taught by Wesley, should labor in harmony with the respective churches to which they belong. But, when this cannot be done, without continual strife and contention, we recommend the formation of Free Methodist Churches, as contemplated by the late convention held in the Genesee Conference, NY.[9]

It is clear from this that the founding Free Methodists believed themselves to be the ones who were the true heirs of the Methodist movement.

Don Dayton, a historian of evangelicalism, has helpfully pointed out that evangelicals coming from the revivalist traditions, such as Free Methodists, were not unconcerned with orthodoxy, but were more focused on a faith that is vital and

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[8] Roberts, "Notice for Camp Meeting and Convention," 260.
[9] *Minutes of the Laymen's Convention, Held in Wayne, Du Page Co., Ill., July 2, 1860.* Quoted in Snyder, 519.

transforming.[10] This is an important distinction that delineates them from many fundamentalist Christians and is integral to understand. It is not that fundamentalists are not interested in a vital faith, but rather that they also have a much greater interest in strict and literal interpretations than those of the Wesleyan traditions. The designation, fundamentalism, is often used pejoratively, and I do not mean to use it that way here. But, I do intend to delineate the ways in which fundamentalist Christianity is largely incompatible with Free Methodist theology and practice.

Fundamentalists, who arose as a movement in America in the late nineteenth century, have centered their theological inquiries around certainty and propositional truths, whereas Free Methodists trace their roots to the Church of England and the theology of John Wesley whose theological methodology (later defined as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral), utilized reason, tradition, and experience as lenses for interpreting Scripture.[11] The project of the Enlightenment period was a search for certainty and that desire for certainty was central to the theological projects of both fundamentalists and their opponents, but while this desire for certainty is not unimportant, it was not central to the Free Methodists and their forebearers. These issues will be explored further in the next chapter.

While Dayton was correct in his assertions concerning the revivalist traditions within evangelicalism and their focus on a vital life of faith, the issues concerning whether Free Methodism is compatible with fundamentalism is quite complicated. There are

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[10] Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage.* 3rd Printing Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994 (1976), 139.

[11] See particularly, Donald A.D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology.* Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2005 (1990).

different kinds of fundamentalism, though this thesis will be focused specifically on American fundamentalism as it developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even then, there are distinctions to be made between nineteenth century fundamentalism, which was largely indistinguishable from the evangelicalism of that period, and that which arose in the later twentieth century. For many, fundamentalism has become a pejorative term for Christians who are angry and backwards, but again, that is not what is meant by fundamentalism here. As significant challenges were leveled at American Protestants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Christians responded in numbers of ways, and one was to fight for the truth as they have perceived/ interpreted it. As we will explore in detail in the next chapter, fundamentalism should be understood as an outlook on the world that George Marsden describes as "militantly opposed (to) both modernism in theology and the cultural changes that modernism endorsed."[12] Readers need to understand that this defensive fundamentalist posture was the context for the development of key doctrinal formulations that can be identified as fundamentalist, two of which will be central to this thesis.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church, which will play a prominent role in this thesis, was founded less than twenty years before the Free Methodists. The reasons for these two churches breaking away from the parent Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) were exceptionally comparable. Because of the many similarities in the two denominations, this thesis will closely examine two theological issues, inerrancy and premillennial dispensationalism, and the ways in which these were handled by both churches. It is important to point out that the MEC, which later merged with the Evangelical United

[12]George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture.* 2nd Edition. (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 4.

Brethren Church in 1968 to form the United Methodist Church (UMC), evolved in a very different way than both the FMC and the WMC. This much larger Methodist Church continued on theological and ecclesial trajectories which had frustrated and marginalized the leaders of both the FMC and the WMC. In his recent account of these events, James Heidinger II has demonstrated how by the early 1900's the MEC, despite "serious attempts by prominent Methodists … to halt theological drift away from historic Wesleyan doctrine," ultimately embraced theological liberalism and the social gospel.[13] The decisions of leaders within both the FMC and the WMC must be understood within the context of this substantive theological drift of the MEC.

Dayton correctly asserts that the Holiness movement has generally been poorly represented in terms of historical presentations. He claims that Yale and Harvard have helped us to generally interpret the American religious experience, while our perspective of evangelicalism has largely been drawn from authors who have focused on a Reformed evangelicalism that has come to us through Princeton theologians.[14] None of the popular historical works from those major schools of thought have recognized the breadth and importance of the holiness movement, which Dayton argues has, over the past two centuries, grown numerically into "one of the major strands of Christianity."[15]

Dayton describes the historiography of evangelicalism as schizophrenic, noting that "(h)istorically it is better understood in terms of the Holiness movement; yet, theologically,

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[13] James V. Heidinger II, *The Rise of Theological Liberalism and the Decline of American Methodism.* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2017), xv.
[14] Donald W. Dayton, "Yet Another Layer of the Onion: Or Opening the Ecumenical Door to Let the Riffraff in," *The Ecumenical Review* 40:1 (Jan. 1988), 96. See also, Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage,* xii, 131.
[15] Dayton, 94.

it claims to be in the line of Princeton."[16] It is helpful to understand that these are the two major streams from which evangelicalism has developed: the Reformed stream and the Methodist/ Holiness stream. The Methodist/ Holiness stream, especially early on, was highly focused on evangelism and practical theology. The Reformed stream, on the other hand, had a stronger focus on intellectual work, and particularly on theology and history. It is paramount to understand that these emphases at times certainly bled into each other. In what Dayton has termed the "Presbyterianization of evangelical historiography," he has described the way in which many of the historians from the Methodist/Holiness stream have used the historiography of the Reformed stream as models for their own work. Dayton suggests that "(i)t was natural in doing so that one implicitly bought into a foreign set of theological assumptions and that the experience at Princeton should become more widely accepted as the best explanation for the existence of many churches and movements that understood themselves over against the larger mainline churches."[17]

Wolfgang Vondrey echoes Dayton's sentiments. He claims that while Wesleyan theologians of the twentieth century have 'resisted the fundamentalist tendency' to condense Wesley's three-fold principles of the authority of Scripture[18] to simply the infallibility of Scripture, fundamentalism has managed to infiltrate Wesleyan theology.[19] Vondrey posits, "the influence of the scholastic and Calvinist perspectives of the Princeton School and modern-day fundamentalism has directed parts of Wesleyan circles to forms of

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[16] Dayton, 100.
[17] Dayton, 100. In another work, Dayton points to the Wesleyan Methodist Church as well as Gordon College and Wheaton College as examples of where this has occurred. See Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage,* 128-129.
[18] Wolfgang Vondrey argues that divine inspiration, tradition and the witness of the Scriptures are the central principles of the authority of Scripture for Wesley and his contemporaries. Wolfgang Vondey, "Wesleyan Theology and the Disjointing of the Protestant Scripture Principle," *WTJ* 46:2 (Fall, 2011), 70.
[19] Vondrey, 70.

epistemology, biblical hermeneutics, and a formal rationalism unfamiliar to Wesley's intentions."[20]

One subject of particular interest to this type of argument is the ordination of women. The Wesleyan Methodist Connection (WMC) ordained women in the 1850's. Phoebe Palmer, a Methodist, wrote her defense of women's ordination, *The Promise of the Father*, in 1859. B.T. Roberts published his views on the subject in *Ordaining Women* (1894), but by a narrow vote during the 1892 General Conference, Free Methodists became one of the few holiness churches to reject women's ordination. It would take another eighty years before they finally overturned that decision. This move on the part of the Free Methodists contradicts Dayton's theory that "institutions and churches (were) backing away from this practice,"[21] and through this we see the 'Presbyterianizing' trends within the church. That said, I think that Dayton is correct in his premise here. Within the FMC, women have often had a difficult time being accepted in the role of senior pastor, and I believe that research would demonstrate that this has become worse instead of improving in the last couple of decades.[22] In fact, the decision of the FMC to ordain women may very well have been a product of the preparation for merger with the WMC.[23]

Dayton identifies the FMC as being in the vanguard of the holiness movement.[24] Its founders were unceremoniously removed from the parent Methodist Episcopal Church,

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[20] Vondrey, 70-71.
[21] Dayton, 107.
[22] This has certainly been true in the Church of the Nazarene, a holiness church with very similar theology to the FMC. See Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage,* 98.
[23] The ordination of women in the FMC is an interesting subject, but one which has received considerable attention in recent research. See especially the work of Roberta Mosier-Peterson. It should be noted, though, that opposition to women's ordination fits well with both inerrancy and the literal interpretation of Scripture.
[24] It is certainly fair to argue that the FMC is no longer really a part of the holiness movement. However, Dayton is correct that at their founding, Free Methodists were deeply interested in seeking the experience of holiness (entire sanctification). Also, B.T., and especially Ellen Roberts were deeply influenced by the ministry of Phoebe Palmer.

and while freedom from slavery, freedom in worship, free pews, freedom from secret society, and ministry to the poor were some of the staves upon which the church was founded, so too was a desire to refocus on their interpretation of Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification.[25]

The Historiography of the Free Methodist Church

This thesis fills a lacuna within the historiography of the Free Methodist Church. Some of the histories of the FMC have focused on individuals who contributed to the founding and development of the church. Some, such as the biography of B.T. and Ellen Roberts written by Howard Snyder have done an excellent job of situating these founders within their historical context. Other works have focused more on general church histories. As we shall see, these have often been insular and triumphalistic in nature. A good example of this is the centurion history of the FMC, which was written by FM bishop Leslie Marston, and which served as a textbook on the FMC in denominational schools.

While some of the histories, such as the work of Snyder, were excellent, this thesis is unique in setting up the historically situated theological developments concerning fundamentalism that led to important decisions at the denominational level within the Free Methodist Church. This is especially seen in decisions made at certain points as the FMC was closely working towards merger with the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

Likewise, while in the following chapter we will look at some of the primary studies of American fundamentalism, it is important to posit here that this thesis is unique in demonstrating the way in which a particular Wesleyan/ Holiness church has interacted

[25] Free Methodists added an Article of Religion on Entire Sanctification in their original *Book of Discipline*, something John Wesley had not seen as necessary at the founding of the MEC in the United States.

directly with key tenets of fundamentalism. Paul Bassett has previously written an article that spoke generally to the leavening of fundamentalism within many of the churches within the Wesleyan theological tradition, but this thesis goes far beyond that introduction, and offers a template for other churches within the Wesleyan tradition to investigate the ways in which their own unique denominations have interacted with fundamentalism.

While Don Dayton is generally correct in noting the dearth of scholarship concerning the Holiness movement, the history of the FMC has been explored from many different angles through the years, though it should be noted that many of the earlier studies were particularly insular in nature. Some histories have focused on the founding and earliest days of the church under leaders such as John Wesley Redfield, Edward Payson Hart, Vivian Dake and especially Benjamin Titus Roberts[26], the first general superintendent (bishop) of the FMC. The earliest FMC Books of Discipline included a historical section that outlined the Free Methodist position concerning the expulsion of these former MEC clergy members from the Methodist Episcopal Church. Benson Roberts, son of B.T. Roberts, wrote the earliest biography recounting the life of his father.

Clarence H. Zahniser also published a biography of Roberts in 1957, which was the publication of his PhD dissertation from the University of Pittsburgh. Particularly helpful for Zahniser's work was that he was the first to be given access to all of the Roberts' family papers. This was followed by James Reinhard's unpublished dissertation, "Personal and Sociological Factors in the Formation of the Free Methodist Church." Reinhard's portrayal is interesting in that it steers away from a triumphal portrayal of the founding of the FMC,

[26] Douglas Cullum helpfully lists close to twenty other biographies/ autobiographies that were written about prominent Free Methodists between 1894-1939. *Gospel Simplicity: Rhythms of Faith and Life Among Free Methodists in Victorian America.* (PhD diss. Drew University, 2002), xiv-xv.

and presents B.T. Roberts and other FMC founders as somewhat troublesome agitators within the Methodist Church. Rick McPeak focused his 2001 doctoral dissertation on what he calls the "practical theology" of B.T. Roberts, asking if Roberts could "be a legitimate source of wisdom for the custodians of his legacy," and arguing that Roberts' practical theology offers "a thorough commitment to establishing a viable theoretical basis for all action." In other words, Roberts continues to offer a very suitable course for Free Methodists to follow.[27] In 2006, FMC theologian Howard Snyder published *Populist Saints: B.T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists,* a well-researched tome that situates the Roberts' family and the early FMC leaders within their nineteenth and early twentieth century context.

Other histories have reflected on the growth and maturation of the FMC. Elias Bowen, an MEC minister who joined the FMC in 1869 or 1870, wrote the first history of the FMC, aptly titled *History of the Origin of the Free Methodist Church*, though Bowen also seemed to be defending his own decision to leave the MEC and join the fledgling FMC. B.T. Roberts closely followed Bowen with his rendering of the events leading to the founding of the FMC in his 1879 defense, *Why Another Sect*. Twenty-five years later, in 1903, Edwin Payson Hart, the second superintendent of the FMC penned his *Reminiscences of Early Free Methodism*, where he focused heavily on his personal experiences as an early leader in the western development of the FMC. This was followed shortly thereafter by J.S. MacGeary's *The History of the Free Methodist Church: A Brief Outline of Its Origin and Development.* The significance of this work is that it was written primarily for lay persons in the church and

[27] Rick Hughes McPeak, *Earnest Christianity: The Practical Theology of Benjamin Titus Roberts*. (PhD. Diss. Saint Louis University, 2001), 1

systematically described the development of the FMC both in North America and in foreign mission fields. Wilson T. Hogue followed this with his two-volume *History of the Free Methodist Church* in 1915. This became the official history of the FMC for almost fifty years; it also continued the project of defining the founding and development of the FMC as a necessary reaction to the perceived drifting from holiness of the parent MEC.[28] The FMC celebrated her centennial anniversary in 1960, and marked the event with the commissioned publication, *From Age to Age: A Living Witness,* by Bishop Leslie R. Marston. This triumphal work replaced Hogue's as the official history of the denomination. The most recent history of the FMC was David McKenna's 1996 work, *A Future With a History,* which contended, like McPeak, that there continues to be an important place of ministry for the FMC as she remembers the glories of her history and faces the realities and challenges of the present and future, reminding us that in its past a church may find a foundation for future hope.[29] There are also historians who have focused on the work of the FMC in Canada and in some other countries. While there are certainly differences between Canada and the United States, the similarities are such that considering these works contributes to a deeper understanding of the development of the FMC in North America.[30]

While each of the above histories has contributed in various ways to an understanding of the nadir and development of the FMC, there has been negligible research on the context of some of the seminal decisions in the development of the church. The

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[28] Wilson T. Hogue, *History of the Free Methodist Church* V. I & II, Winona Lake, IN: The Free Methodist Publishing House, 1938 (1915, 1918).
[29] David L. McKenna, *A Future With a History: The Wesleyan Witness of the Free Methodist Church.* (Indianapolis, IN: Light and Life Communications, 1997), 18, 15.
[30] Two primary monographs focusing on the Canadian FMC are: John Wilkens Sigsworth, *The Battle Was the Lord's: A History of the Free Methodist Church in Canada.* (Oshawa, ON: Sage Publishers, 1960) and R. Wayne Kleinsteuber, *Coming of Age: The Making of a Canadian Free Methodist Church.* (Mississagua, ON: Light and Life Press, Canada), 1980.

concentration of this thesis is on the interplay between the Free Methodist Church and American Protestant fundamentalism as the two evolved and developed.

Purpose of Study

Noted church historian Sidney Ahlstrom made the important observation that the controversies of American fundamentalist Christianity were not so much fought in the courts and halls of legislature, but within the churches.[31] This has been the experience of the Free Methodist Church, and this thesis will demonstrate that key tenets of American fundamentalism have been an important part of the conversation through the hundred and fifty plus years of her history. At times, the conversations have been impassioned because the revelation of the Bible and its interpretation are such important issues for Protestants.

This thesis examines various responses the FMC has considered and resolved, primarily during the twentieth century as the fundamentalist movement arose in American Protestantism. The primary focus will be on the FMC's treatment of Scripture and premillennial dispensational theology,[32] including the effort to merge with the Wesleyan Methodist Church, an effort which began in the early part of the twentieth century and was finally put to rest in the 1970's. In order to effectively consider this interplay between the

[31] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People.* 2nd Ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972 (2004)), 910.

[32] I recognize that the traditional five points of fundamentalism are normally identified as 1. The inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, 2. The authenticity of miracles, (sometimes substituted with the premillennial return of Christ) 3. The virgin birth of Christ, 4. The substitutionary atoning work of Christ on the cross, 4. The physical resurrection and the personal bodily return of Christ to the earth. (see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. (Oxford, OUP, 2006), 117.). Though these are the traditional five points, I will argue in this thesis that premillennial and dispensational theology became central doctrines for many fundamentalists, especially with the popularizing of Darby's dispensationalism through the Scofield Reference Bible which was first published in 1909.

FMC and fundamentalism, it is necessary to begin by tracing the development of the FMC as well as the context of thought in which it arose.

In his 1996 historical analysis of the Free Methodist Church, *A Future with a History*, David McKenna suggests that in order to understand the Free Methodist Church and write a history of her more recent days, one must understand the lives and events that shaped her. In drawing on Robert Bellah's thesis in *Habits of the Heart*, McKenna posits that in order to "provide a foundation for a 'community of hope' in the future," it is necessary to establish a "community of memory."[33] Luke Timothy Johnson has also reflected on this idea, noting that telling the stories creates a "*re-creational* role within the life of communities, shaping both the community and its understanding of reality. … Our communal story – if we can give it shape – tells others, and first of all ourselves, how we have come to be who we are. … Forgetting our past means ignorance of our present and the forfeiture of our future."[34] It seems that this is integral if the FMC is to be faithful to her past as well as seeking to be faithful to God in the future.

In approaching this thesis, I need to recognize my own personal biases and the way they influence my thinking. I have spent my life in the Free Methodist Church. However, my mother was raised in a fundamentalist Baptist Church that exemplified all of the traditional fundamentalist beliefs and practices.[35] Her family was staunchly committed to their local church, and like many fundamentalists, they were passionate about reaching the lost. While

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[33] David L. McKenna, 15-16.

[34] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture & Discernment: Decision Making in the Church*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996 (1983)), 29. Emphasis is Johnson's.

[35] For example, they taught the any moment rapture theology of John Nelson Darby, proclaimed the inerrancy of Scripture, and refused to cooperate with Billy Graham because Graham cooperated with liberals and Catholics.

my mother has served in many roles in the FMC, she continues to hold much of the theology with which she was raised.

My father served as a traveling evangelist and pastor in the FMC and also taught at Aldersgate College, a small Free Methodist Bible college. I received my undergraduate education at Aldersgate College for two years before transferring to Greenville University, where I received a degree in secondary education. I then attended seminary, earning an MDiv at Asbury Theological Seminary before pastoring in the FMC for twelve years. I have been teaching at both Greenville University (a 4 year FMC liberal arts university) and Saint Louis University (a Jesuit research university). I continue to serve as an elder in the Canadian Free Methodist Church.

In many ways, I feel uniquely qualified to speak to the issues I am addressing in this thesis. I am concerned about those on both the right and left of the theological spectrum who desire to reinterpret the history of the FMC to fit their own views. I understand that historical inquiry is a matter of interpreting the evidence, and so I would like to be clear about the methodology I will be using in my own research.

Methodology

This thesis will provide a lens for the FMC to reflect on how the history of the church has shaped who it is today. The interplay with key doctrines as well as the practical ethos of American fundamentalism has affected how many Christians, including Free Methodists, have understood and lived out their theology. In order for the FMC to develop a

methodology with which to navigate future challenges, it is necessary to understand how the church has negotiated similar challenges in the past.

Reception theory is an interpretive lens developed by German literary historian, Hans Robert Jauss, which was popularized in Germany in the late twentieth century. While he envisioned it as a tool for interpreting the reader's response to literary works, it has been used in a variety of ways, including the critique of film. The significance of Jauss' theory for this thesis is the way in which he sought to understand the socio-historical reception of texts. This includes the horizon of expectations of the reader, which include "cultural, ethical and literary expectation of readers in a particular historical moment."[36] In defining the theory, Jennifer Silva describes it as "the active role played by the spectator in constructing and interpreting the meaning of a text … (where) meaning emerges processually in the interaction between the text and the socially situated audience."[37] It is the historical and cultural context of the interaction in which the reader(s) are interacting with the 'text' that is integral to the theory.

As mentioned in the introductory paragraph, the FMC was founded in 1860. This was just prior to the time that fundamentalism was beginning to arise in America. Some scholars trace the roots of fundamentalism at least into the early nineteenth century.[38] The FMC and fundamentalism have coexisted for these past 150 years and during this time, within the context of their theological and historical development, Free Methodists have been receiving the ideas of fundamentalism. This includes written works of

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[36] The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 35.
[37] Jennifer M. Silva "Reception Theory" in *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*, Dale Southerton, ed. accessed Mar. 28, 2017.
[38] See for example, Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Fundamentalism, 1800-1930.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1970.

fundamentalists such as *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, and numerous books and pamphlets, as well as radio and television programs.

The Free Methodist Church has maintained a very close relationship with the Wesleyan Methodist Church through most of her history. The two churches worked on a merger through a large portion of the twentieth century and came close to consummating said merger on three occasions. Two considerable theological issues that were central to fundamentalism, the inerrancy of Scripture and eschatology, played prominent roles during the merger period, with the FMC changing their Articles of religion concerning both subjects before merger talks were finally scuttled in 1976. Thus, it will be important to analyze this relationship of the two churches in the consideration of how fundamentalism is incompatible with the Free Methodist Church.

For Free Methodists today, the issue of fundamentalism is two-fold: how they have read and responded to the texts and ideas of fundamentalism throughout their history; and how they will continue to do so in the future. Utilizing reception theory for historical evaluation and self-awareness could serve as an important self-critical tool as the church seeks to faithfully follow her mission and vision in a constantly changing world.

Luke Timothy Johnson reflects this theory in his work on Scripture and discernment. He contends that "(d)ecision making is a fundamental articulation of a group's life (and that) the process by which decision is reached tells of the nature of the group in a way that other forms of ritual sometimes miss."[39] In a manner similar to the Catholic Church, the FMC's governance style, or structure, is episcopal in nature. This means that there is a hierarchical structure with bishops and superintendents. However,

[39] Johnson, 15.

FMC leaders also made a choice at the founding of the church in 1860 to give an equal voice in decision-making to laity. Thus, an equal number of clergy and laity are elected to the decision-making bodies of annual (yearly) and general (quadrennially) conferences.[40] While the FMC has always allowed full adult members a vote, it is important to remember with Johnson that "groups … are conservative by nature and resistant to change (and in) group decisions … (find themselves) following the path of least resistance."[41] However, he asserts, when pushed to a decision, "(t)he threat of change forces a group to make its previously implicit choices explicit."[42] Thus, when substantial changes have been made in the history of the FMC, substantial thought has been given to the rationale of those changes.

In reflecting on Free Methodist interactions with fundamentalism, it is also necessary to take into account the documents (such as the Scriptures, *Books of Discipline*, *General Conference Minutes, Free Methodist Hymnals*) that are considered authoritative within the church, and how those documents have been interpreted historically to guide the FMC. Johnson raises the question of how much weight should be given to tradition and how much to present experience,[43] which among other things advances the question of who decided the norms for the FMC in the first place, and why, and also who will guide the decisions in the future, and by what means will those decisions be governed.[44]

Johnson firmly asserts that it is only at the local level that the church is truly community. Beyond that, it becomes an organization. He expresses that it is the local level

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[40] This decision should be seen as a response of Free Methodists to what they considered ecclesial abuse of the 'Nazarites' concerning their trials and expulsion. The 'Nazarites' and their opponents, the 'Regency' will receive further attention in future chapters.
[41] Johnson, 16.
[42] Johnson, 17.
[43] Johnson, 18.
[44] Johnson, 20. Johnson lists seven essential issues to be considered when making a decision. These are: 1. Identify the challenge 2. Define more clearly our own identify 3. Find a normative expression of our identity and where we

of the church where there is life, and that this is where doctrine should develop and decisions should be made.[45] Johnson also notes that faith is response to God. He says, "(f)aith in its proper and active sense describes the response of one person to another in trust and obedience. It is a deeply responsive hearing of another's word or call. Theological faith is the response by a human being to a call of God, that is, to the Word of God as it is revealed in the fabric of worldly existence."[46] It is within this changing world that the Free Methodist Church (and many other evangelical churches) has sought to follow the Word of God while it wrestled with significant challenges.

Limitations of the Study

This thesis focuses primarily on the action of formally elected clergy and laity in the FMC. It will not attend to the understanding of the general laity of the church; neither will it attempt to give a full account of all the forces in American society concerning Protestantism during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that produced fundamentalist positions within evangelicalism.

This thesis will cover the years 1860 – 1989 in the history of the FMC. It was during this period that the FMC and the Wesleyan Methodist Church entertained a merger on three occasions. These attempted mergers are integral to this thesis, for it was in the merger negotiations that the FMC actually changed two of their Articles of religion, both of

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find that identity (The Bible?) 4. Coordination of interpretation and who gives voice to that interpretation 5. Whose voices will be heard? – only those in the group, or also those raising the issue 6. How will we order the process of decision making? (Give it to a subgroup … bishops … gen. conf?) and finally, 7. How will the decision be expressed? (Vote? Inertia? Executive decree?)

[45] Johnson, 21-22. But, I think Johnson is wrong to a degree, because is it not the case that the larger group accepts or rejects what comes from the local church?

[46] Johnson, 23.

which aligned them more closely with the more fundamentalist leaning Wesleyan Methodists. The two issues were the inerrancy of Scripture and premillennial dispensational theology; Free Methodist engagement with these two issues, both of which were integral to fundamentalism, will be the focus of much of this thesis.

In conclusion, this thesis will focus on the formal considerations the FMC has given in its General Conference actions to the fundamentalist doctrines of biblical inerrancy and premillennial dispensationalism. While it will be necessary to demonstrate at times that interest in fundamentalist doctrines was arising from laity and clergy, this will only be to corroborate that there was a definite need for the FMC to take official action concerning these issues. Study and analysis of biblical inerrancy and other key fundamentalist positions will be necessary as these topics are treated in such documents as the reports of the Study Commission on Doctrine (SCOD), the minutes and debates of the General Conferences, and reports in *The Earnest Christian*, *The Free Methodist* and *Light and Life.* General histories of the church will be helpful wherein they treat the consideration that leaders in the church have given to the doctrines of fundamentalism.

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Chapter 2 – Historical Context

Having given a brief overview of the project and having looked at the focus, methodology, and limitations of the thesis, we will now turn to a study of the historical and theological backgrounds of Methodism and the fundamentalist movement in America. In order to demonstrate that fundamentalism is incompatible with the Free Methodist Church, in this chapter, I will explore the theological roots of the FMC, beginning with the rise of the Church of England and the ways in which it developed as a part of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Next I will examine the rise of Methodism, and here I will argue that while Wesley and the Methodists were intensely interested in preaching that all should 'flee the wrath to come' and were calling people to a deeper Christian experience, they continued to embrace the theology and praxis of the Church of England. Finally, I will explore the development of evangelicalism, and then fundamentalism as a subset of evangelicalism. Here, I will argue that the evangelicalism that informed the Free Methodist church was from a different stream than the evangelicalism which has informed fundamentalist Christianity in America, though there have certainly been connections between the different streams.

Though the Free Methodist Church and many other theological descendants of the Wesleyan revivals have become their own denominations, it is important to understand that at times, their leaders did not intend to start new churches. The desire of Wesley and other later Methodist leaders was to seek renewal within their own churches. Wesley sought to keep the Methodists within the Church of England, and only very reluctantly allowed Methodists in America to become an independent church. Likewise, in the 1850's, B.T. Roberts and other ministers pursuing reform in the Genesee Conference of the

Methodist Episcopal Church had no desire to leave Methodism, and only founded their own church after being expelled by the parent body. Either way, both of these movements that were desiring to be corrective agents ended up as their own distinctive denominations.

Don Dayton reports that Christian reform movements often "lapse(d) back into ecclesiastical structures – in part for their own failings but in part because of the unwillingness of the traditional churches to hear their witness to neglected facets of scripture and the Christian faith." He adds, "In many ways this development has been unfortunate for both sides. For obvious reasons Soren Kierkegaard reflected much on the problem of the 'corrective' – the pinch of salt or the touch of colour that finds its proportions only in the whole."[47] In other words, though one could argue that it was inevitable that the Methodists, and later the Free Methodists, would form their own denominations, it may have been healthier for both the parent churches and the newly formed churches to have found a way to have stayed together. However, the historical testimony of Protestantism is a continual fragmentation of denominational binds.

Although the American Pledge of Allegiance makes a claim that the United States is one nation under God, and although it could still be argued that the U.S. is a 'Christian nation,' there has never been one, united Christianity in the United States. Instead, there has always been a wealth of diversity within American Christianity. This stems largely from the way North America was settled and developed. In terms of European colonization, Catholics arrived first, settling in Florida and the Southwest. Soon after, disparate Protestant groups arrived and settled in the colonies before spreading across the continent.

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[47] Donald W. Dayton, "Yet Another Layer of the Onion: Or Opening the Ecumenical Door to Let the Riffraff in," *The Ecumenical Review* 40:1 (Jan. 1988), 110.

To understand the theology and the theological methodology of the Free Methodist Church, it is necessary to briefly reflect on the roots of the FMC within the Church of England. As will be frequently maintained in this thesis, Free Methodists understand themselves as a legitimate theological descendant of John Wesley, who founded the Methodist movement, but stayed within the Church of England his entire life. Late in his life, Wesley very reluctantly allowed the Methodists to become a separate denomination in the American context.

The Church of England at the time of Wesley (eighteenth century) contained room for theological variance, as can be seen in the broad diversity maintained within the 39 Articles of Religion. In the sixteenth century, the Church of England produced Articles of Religion to define their faith. These went through a series of revisions. In 1536, there were first ten Articles. In 1539, that number was reduced to six. But, under Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, the number of Articles ballooned to 42 in 1553, and these reflected a strong Calvinist bent.[48] Elizabeth I came to the throne following the death of her Catholic sister, Mary, and in a time of incredible hostility between Catholics and Protestants,[49] Elizabeth sought peace and compromise. However, as has been demonstrated, she also sought to make the Church of England as Protestant as she was able considering the circumstances. There were a number of Acts by Parliament during the reign of Elizabeth that established her authority as head of the Church. These Acts also required churches to use the Book of Common Prayer, and required ministers to subscribe to the now 39 Articles of Religion and utilize the Book of Homilies in pulpit ministry.[50] The Articles were often statements that

[48] Ibid, 5-6.
[49] For example, Foxe's extremely anti-Catholic *Book of Martyrs* was published in 1563.
[50] Heitzenrater, 8.

brought compromise, and because of this compromise, they succeeded in infuriating both Puritans and Roman Catholics,[51] although it was the fact that the Church of England maintained the liturgy and vestments of Catholicism that was particularly galling to the Puritans.[52]

Christianity in England did not necessitate that a person be particularly devout about their faith. Years of war over religion had produced a climate in England where people were fearful of those who were especially zealous for their faith. To combat this zeal, Christian teaching often focused more on the intellect as opposed to personal conviction. Over time, this lack of conviction pervaded the spiritual climate throughout England, and Heitzenrater argues that by the time of Charles II (1630-1685), not only was the court debauched, but the depravity of the court influenced a "general tenor of spiritual lethargy and moral laxity … in many parts of the country."[53]

In the eighteenth century, the nation continued to struggle with religious and political dissention. Bonnie Prince Charlie (Charles Edward Stuart), the final Catholic with any claim to the throne, was defeated in 1746.[54] The years of turmoil, with religion and politics closely tied together, had produced an intriguing environment into which Wesley was born in 1703. An act of Parliament had made the Church of England the official state religion in the early sixteenth century, and it was clearly and powerfully ensconced by the

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[51] Paul Blankenship, "The Significance of John Wesley's Abridgement of the Thirty-Nine Articles as Seen from His Deletions" *Methodist History* 2:3, 1964, 45. Heitzenrater also demonstrates how these compromises were negotiated between Protestants and Catholics, 9. *The King's Book* (1543) was one of the earliest doctrinal books of the Church of England (Heitzenrater, 5.).
[52] Blankenship, 45. Heitzenrater also demonstrates how these compromises were negotiated between Protestants and Catholics, 9. *The King's Book* (1543) was one of the earliest doctrinal books of the Church of England (Heitzenrater, 5.).
[53] Heitzenrater, 13.
[54] Note that Wesley was in his mid-forty's in 1746.

time of Wesley. Heitzenrater suggests that it is no surprise that England had developed an insular nature with its miles of coastline, and with enemies just across a narrow sea that it "would eventually develop a religious establishment that was unabashedly nationalistic, legally centered in the monarchy, and strongly anti-papal."[55]

The vast majority of those born in England in the eighteenth century were baptized into the church and considered themselves "Christian" in some sense. This was the religious context of England entering the eighteenth century and the life of John Wesley. It was the theology and praxis of the Church of England which the Methodists continued to follow, and which informed their theology in the later American context. In the next section, we will reflect on the rise of Methodism, concluding with the founding of the Free Methodist Church in 1860.

Rise of Methodism

In the previous section, we reflected on the development of Christianity in England following the Reformation. In this section, we will study the rise of Methodism, and here I will argue that while Wesley and the Methodists were intensely interested in preaching that all should 'flee the wrath to come' and were calling people to a deeper Christian experience, theologically they continued to embrace the theology of the Church of England.

Again, it is integral to consider reception theory here, and reflect on the theological and experiential theology the original Free Methodists were receiving from their spiritual forbearers. As previously mentioned, Methodism in America arose out of a movement for further reform in the eighteenth century in England. John Wesley's concern was that

[55] Heitzenrater, 3.

religion had become impersonal and formal within the Church of England, in which he was an ordained priest. He was also concerned about the scholastic nature of the Catholic Church, which he believed hindered both love of God and neighbor, as well as the Calvinism of the Reformation, which he felt placed the emphasis more on a legal, rather than love-oriented understanding of God's providence and took the focus away from the centrality of love within Christianity.[56] While a student at Oxford, Wesley was a part of a 'holy club' that focused on carrying out religious activities in a systematic manner (hence the name Methodist). These activities included daily Bible reading, prayer, fasting, and visiting the sick and imprisoned. Later on, as a young man struggling with assurance of his own salvation, Wesley was influenced by the personal piety of the Moravians whom he encountered on an unsuccessful missionary voyage to America. Returning to England, Wesley experienced having his heart strangely warmed at a Bible study in London (1738). While scholars argue over the impact of this experience, it was soon after that Wesley began preaching in the fields to mine workers. His message was aimed at those who desired to 'flee the wrath to come.' The response was enthusiastic. Unlike George Whitefield, Wesley arranged his converts into small bands where there would be encouragement and accountability to continue in the new life. This organization of converts helped bring stability to the Methodist movement. Wesleyan scholar Howard Snyder argues that Wesley was bent on "the one objective of forming a genuine people of God within the institutional church … (focusing not so much on) efforts *leading up to* a decision

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[56] Donald A.D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology.* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2005 (1990), 52-53. In his overview of Wesley's theological method, Don Thorsen helpfully explains Wesley's desire to help individuals move away from either the formal, scholastic religion of Catholicism or Calvinistic "legal-oriented (rather than love-oriented) conception of God, providence and election," and seek to live what he called 'heart religion.' By this, Wesley meant holy lives which were motivated by love of God and others. For more on this, see Thorsen, 52-54.

but on the time *after* decision."[57] We can observe this, for example, in Wesley's sermon, "The Way of the Kingdom," where he argues vehemently that real religion is far more than orthodoxy. He opines,

> I say of *the heart.* For neither does religion consist in orthodoxy, or right opinions; which, although they are not properly outward things, are not in the heart, but the understanding. A man may be orthodox in every point; he may not only espouse right opinions, but zealously defend them against all opposers; he may think justly concerning the incarnation of our Lord, concerning the ever-blessed Trinity, and every other doctrine contained in the oracles of God; he may assent to all three creeds … and yet it be possible he may have no religion at all …. He may be almost as orthodox –as the devil … and may, all the while, be as great a stranger as he to the religion of the heart.[58]

Note that this is important for understanding the difference between the doctrine of inerrancy of the later Princeton theologians and the way in which it was embraced and codified by fundamentalism and that of revivalist groups such as B.T. Roberts and the Free Methodists. As we shall see later, it was not the theology of the Genesee Methodists that upset Roberts. In part, it was what he and other concerned Methodists considered the lifeless formalism within the Methodist Episcopal Church.

It is largely accepted that Wesley was not a systematic theologian. Wesley was quite interested in what he called the experimental (we might say experiential) side of Christianity.[59] It is helpful here to reflect on the importance of experience for Wesley. As will be mentioned throughout this thesis, fundamentalists following the methodology of their Presbyterian forbearers from Princeton were very, but certainly not solely, interested

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[57] Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley.*(Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 2. Emphasis is Snyder's.
[58] John Wesley, "The Way to the Kingdom," in *The Works of John Wesley* Vol. V, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978, 78.
[59] Thorsen, 48-50. Regardless of the scholarly positions on the ultimate importance of Wesley's Aldersgate experience, it was clearly momentous for him, and demonstrates the importance of John Locke's ideas for Wesley's theology and praxis.

in propositional truths, while those who follow in the Wesleyan tradition have leaned more towards experiential truths. In his concern to help individuals to grow in love and holiness, John Wesley was willing to glean from a number of different theological sources including the early church, Luther and other Reformers, and Catholicism. Snyder has even suggested that Wesley's willingness and ability to draw from so many sources into a synthesis was a large part of his genius and originality.[60]

Richard Brantley has successfully argued that Wesley largely drew on the methodology of John Locke (1632-1704). Brantley notes that not only did Wesley draw upon Locke's view that faith and revelation are reasonable, he also looked to the experiential aspect of theology. In an early letter to his mother, Wesley wrote of a desire to 'perceive' the graces and 'be sensible of' the indwelling spirit of Christ.[61] Wesley wrote that

> Surely these graces are of not so little force as that we cannot perceive whether we have them or not. If we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us (which He will not do unless we are regenerate), certainly we must be sensible of it. If we can never have any certainty of our being in a state of salvation, good reason it is that every moment should be spent, not in joy, but in fear and trembling, and then, undoubtedly, in this life we are of all men the most miserable. God deliver us from such a fearful expectation as this![62]

Wesley clearly believed that the senses were useful in terms of finding epistemological truth; however, Gary Williams reflects an important point that would continue to have connotations for later Methodists and for those who became Free Methodists: "Wesley agreed with the empiricists that knowledge is based on the senses, but where this left the empiricists with at best indirect knowledge of God, Wesley added a sixth (spiritual)

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[60] Snyder, 143.
[61] Brantley, Richard E., *Locke, Wesley, and the Method of English Romanticism.* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1984), 27.
[62] John Wesley to his Mother, June 18, 1725, in *The Works of John Wesley*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 8-9.

sense."[63] Indeed, he suggests that for Wesley, "Faith in the Spiritual world is what sight is in the natural world."[64] It is through this spiritual sense that one could be aware of one's present salvation.

We observe this same interest in experience and the 'spiritual senses' in the 'Nazarites'[65] of the Genesee conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the late 1850's. At that time two opposing parties had emerged within the Genesee conference. Given the name 'Nazarites' by their opponents, the first group was led by Methodist ministers who believed themselves to be fighting for a return to historic Methodism. The name refers to Old Testament vows which were a sign of a deep commitment to God, and included avoiding the fruit of the vine, not cutting one's hair and not being in contact with the bodies or the graves of the dead.[66] The term is obviously used in derision, focusing on what was considered the fanatical spirituality and legalism of the group, of which B.T. Roberts was one of the primary leaders. The 'Nazarites' labeled their opponents the 'Regency,' or 'the Buffalo Regency.'[67]

In a letter written to Bishop T.A. Morris in 1856, B.T. Roberts described his own perspective of the issues in the conference. On the one side was a philanthropic form of religion and on the other, the religion of historic Methodism. Roberts wrote, "What we call religion, they call fanaticism; what they denominate Christianity, we consider formalism."[68] Roberts and the Nazarites regularly pointed to the experiences of individuals as evidence of

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[63] Gary J. Williams, "Was Evangelicalism Created by the Enlightenment?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 53:2 (2002), 287.
[64] Williams, 287.
[65] 'Nazarite' was the somewhat derogatory term that given to the Methodists who desired a return to their perception of traditional, or 'old school' Methodism in the Genesee Conference of the MEC in the 1850s.
[66] See especially the description of the Nazarite vows in Numbers 6.
[67] Snyder extensively details the conflict between the two sides. Snyder, 309-336.
[68] B.T. Roberts, "Letter to T.A. Morris, November 15, 1856." Quoted by Zahniser, 85.

God's work. We will return to Roberts and the Nazarites shortly.

When Wesley speaks of being 'sensible of' the work of God in one's life, he obviously meant that a Christian should be aware of, or conscious of, what God is doing. Brantley writes that "Wesley's desire to 'perceive' the graces … is more than merely reminiscent of Lockean sense perception. His yearning for *immediate* revelation, in other words, like his endorsement of scriptural priority in rational experience, connotes Lockean method."[69] Wesley was willing to utilize tradition, reason and experience viewed through the primacy of Scripture. Thorsen helpfully describes how Wesley desired to bring about 'heart religion,' saying,

> To accomplish this he was willing to entertain what experience has to say in deciding on a course of action, even when such a course has no explicit warrant in Scripture or church tradition. Wesley's theological method influenced the way he applied that theology to life, and his awareness of those applications (or related experiences) conversely influenced his theology. So he was willing to experiment with the unorthodox practices of outdoor preaching, extended intrachurch group meetings, singing hymns to popular tunes, and appointing lay preachers.[70]

It is important to understand this issue when thinking about Free Methodism and fundamentalism, which is the major focus of this thesis. Wesley was clearly not a Biblical literalist. What we see instead, is that for Wesley, there is a back-and-forth between Scripture and experience in the life of a Christian that can lead to a very real sense of assurance. Wesley called this experience the witness of our own spirit that we are children of God. He also pointed to Scripture as a guide to the traits that demonstrate the work of the Spirit in the life of a person. For Wesley, there was need for both an internal witness and an external demonstration. Thus, a person can directly examine for themselves

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[69] Brantley, 27-28.
[70] Thorsen, 53.

whether they are in step with the Spirit by looking at such things as love for God and others, and whether they are presently keeping the commandments and demonstrating fruits of the Spirit.[71] In his sermon, *The Witness of the Spirit,* Wesley described it thus:

> Strictly speaking, it [the testimony of our own spirit] is a conclusion drawn partly from the word of God, and partly from our own experience. The word of God says everyone who has the fruit of the Spirit is a child of God. Experience, or inward consciousness, tells me that I have the fruit of the Spirit. And hence I rationally conclude: therefore I am a child of God.[72]

Wesley expected this internal assurance of salvation for any true Christian. In his sermon entitled "*The Nature of Enthusiasm,*" Wesley defended enthusiasm, countering the opposition to 'zeal' that was such a prevalent part of much of English Christianity. He claimed,

> It is true, there is a sort of religion, nay, and it is called Christianity too, which may be practiced without any such imputation, which is generally allowed to be consistent with common sense; -- that is, a religion of form, a round of outward duties, performed in a decent, regular manner. You may add orthodoxy thereto, a system of right opinions, yea, and some quantity of heathen morality. … But if you aim at the religion of the heart, if you talk of 'righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;' then it will not be long before your sentence is passed, 'Thou art beside thyself.'[73]

That said, he also rejected the label of being an enthusiast, for many at the time used Locke's definition of enthusiasm as having a 'private inspiration,' or 'exhibiting extravagance' in their religious devotion.[74]

Indeed, for Wesley, anyone who was a true follower of Jesus should be expecting and seeking God's transformation of their heart and character. Experience

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[71] William J. Abraham, "Predestination and Assurance" in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man* ed. by Clark H. Pinnock. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 232-233.
[72] John Wesley, "The Witness of the Spirit – Discourse 2" pp.123-133 in *The Works of John Wesley* Vol. V, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 125.
[73] John Wesley, "The Nature of Enthusiasm." Pp. 467-478 in *The Works of John Wesley* Vol. V. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House), 467.
[74] Thorsen, 22.

was a key aspect of the Christian's life for Wesley. This helps us to understand why Methodists cannot be fundamentalists or Biblical literalists. Ronald Numbers, a historian of science who has written much on the crisis of evolution for fundamentalist Christians, echoes Thorsen. He points out that fundamentalists, coming from a Calvinist tradition, have staked their theology on the inerrancy of the Bible. Wesleyans, on the other hand, and especially Wesleyans from the holiness tradition, have focused on experience over exegesis. Numbers writes that "(f)or them, behavior took precedence over belief. Thus, though they instinctively rejected organic evolution, particularly as it pertained to humans, few of them assigned the issue high priority."[75]

While Wesley's message focused on fleeing the wrath to come, he also encouraged his followers to pursue personal holiness. One of his enduring publications is titled, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. Here Wesley taught that a person could be perfected in love, "bearing witness to an experience of God's love, as well as holiness of life."[76] It is this emphasis on holiness that was reflected upon in the opening chapter.

Wesley was a follower of Joseph Arminius, which means that he understood and taught that people had significant free will.[77] Wesley and the American theologian, Jonathan Edwards, were contemporaries, although Edwards was Reformed in his theology. Wesley was very interested in Edward's Account of the Revivals in America. It is interesting to recall that Edwards was deeply moved by his wife, Sarah's, personal experience during

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[75] Ronald L. Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 112.
[76] Amy Caswell Bratton, *Witnesses of Perfect Love: Narratives of Christian Perfection in Early Methodism.* (Toronto: Clements Academic, 2014), 2.
[77] Protestant Arminians followed the teachings of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch scholar, who believed in free will as opposed to predestination.

the revivals, and recorded a disguised account of her experience in his *Faithful Narrative.* Both Wesley and Edwards sought to confirm the authenticity of their revivals through their personal testimonies. Later on, Free Methodists regularly looked to testimonies, either in worship services or in their periodicals, as evidence of God's work and blessing in their midst. One example of this is that of Sampson Staniforth, an eighteenth century convert to Methodism. His testimony, like many others, was recorded in the *Arminian Magazine.* Staniforth posits, "My chains fell off; my heart was free. All guilt was gone, and my soul was filled with unutterable peace. I loved God and all mankind, and the fear of hell and death was vanished away. I was filled with wonder and astonishment."[78] Historian Bruce Hindmarsh points out that readers of the *Arminian Magazine* accepted these testimonies at "face value without worrying about the relationship between the life represented and the life lived in the flesh."[79] Hindmarsh makes an important point concerning this type of testimony, and it is one that Wesley, Edwards, and the later Free Methodists all struggled to understand. He points out that in these testimonies, "we realize again how creative and significant is the act of interpretation in selecting, arranging, and presenting events—even the events of one's own life."[80]

Rem Edwards helpfully demonstrates that Jonathan Edwards was a compatibilist. This means that while a person's eternal destiny is predetermined, that person is still totally responsible for that destiny. The view maintains that predestination and responsibility for one's sins are compatible and not conflicting. Wesley, on the other hand,

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[78] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.), 1. He is quoting from *Arminian Magazine* 6 (1783), 72.
[79] Hindmarsh, 3.
[80] Hindmarsh, 3.

held that humans had the freedom to choose right or wrong, and that a person is completely accountable for knowingly making their choices. He believed that if an individual did not really have the freedom to make real choices, then they would not be morally accountable for those choices. Rem Edwards argues that for Wesley, if we are predestined in all our behaviors, then God has programmed those choices into us from time immortal, and thus all evil must originate from God, and not from the individual. Edwards concludes, "This would make God a devil, as Wesley *correctly* maintained."[81] While Wesley taught that God was sovereign, he believed that God chooses to limit His power because of his love, mercy and justice so that we might have real power to make real choices.[82]

Though Wesley was intent on remaining within the Church of England, it is important to recognize other significant influences on Wesley's theology and practice. The influence of Moravian pietists began on Wesley's missionary venture to Georgia. In the oft told narrative, Wesley marveled at the assurance of the German Moravians during a storm in the Atlantic, while he, himself was terrified. He made friendships with Moravian leaders, and one important influence on his life and theology was their emphasis on the witness of the Spirit that a person was a child of God. Wesley believed that the Moravians exemplified the spirit and practices of primitive Christianity.[83]

Wesley was deeply influenced by the great theologians of antiquity, especially the eastern Fathers. In a lengthy letter to Conyers Middleton, dated January 4, 1749, Wesley responded to Middleton's criticism of the fathers writing, "…I exceedingly reverence them, as well as their writings, and esteem them very highly in love. I reverence them, because

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[81] Rem B. Edwards, *John Wesley's Values – and Ours.* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2012), 71-72.
[82] Edwards, 72.
[83] Heitzenrater, 60.

they were Christians, such Christians as are above described. And I reverence their writings, because they describe true, genuine Christianity, and direct us to the strongest evidence of the Christian doctrine."[84] He continued by describing how impressed he was with the way the fathers were able to back up their arguments before getting to the heart of what impressed him the most. He declared, "… I reverence these ancient Christians (with all their failings) the more, because I see so few Christians now; because I read so little in the writings of later times and hear so little of genuine Christianity; and because most of the modern Christians (so called), not content with being wholly ignorant of it, are deeply prejudiced against it, calling it 'enthusiasm' and I know not what."[85]

In being attracted to Christian antiquity, Wesley was reflecting a cultural phenomenon. Ted Campbell maintains that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the literature and language of antiquity was being valued by both conservative and liberal scholars,[86] and "far from being a subject of merely historical interest, had been a focal point for theological, ecclesiastical, and moral discourse for more than a century."[87] Concerning this impact, Arthur Meyers writes:

> (I)n (his) personal life style Wesley emulated the Early Church Fathers. … His devotion to the ascetic life; his limitation of his expenditures that he might use his income to help his movement; his concerns for strong unified leadership; his charismatic teaching and preaching all reflected emphases of the Fathers. It can be observed that we now know this particular perception of Christianity existed especially in the earliest Greek and Latin Christian communities and tended to disappear, after 325 A.D., when the affluence and political power of Imperial Roman association and Greek cultural influence

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[84] John Wesley, "Letter to The Reverend Dr. Conyers Middleton," in *The Works of John Wesley* Vol. X, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 79.
[85] Wesley, 79.
[86] Ted Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change.* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 10.
[87] Campbell, 21.

began to affect Christianity.[88]

One of those who affected Wesley was Macarius the Great, and it is probable that Wesley's interest in the teachings of Macarius was enhanced by the Moravians who served as a "model and an example for its struggle for holiness and perfection."[89] Wesley's own comments on Macarius are enlightening. Three times in his journal dated July 30, 1736, he noted, "I read Macarius and sang."[90]

Wesley's Methodist movement quickly grew, and he was soon organizing bands all over England as well as training ministers to lead these bands.[91] Though as demonstrated, Wesley was influenced by both the Moravians and Christian antiquity, he had no desire to split from the Church of England. He encouraged the Methodists to continue to attend services and receive the sacraments at their local parishes. This worked tolerably well during Wesley's lifetime, especially in Anglican England. However, Methodism's existence under the umbrella of the Church of England became untenable in the context of Revolutionary America, where there was growing sentiment against anything associated with the British Establishment in America, including the Church of England.[92]

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[88] Arthur Christian Meyers, Jr., *John Wesley and the Church Fathers.* (unpublished PhD diss., St. Louis University, 1985.), 29-30.
[89] Meyers, 19.
[90] John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* V.1 (Whitefish, MO: Kessinger Publishing, 2006.), 254.
[91] It was Elie Halévy that popularized the theory that "the stabilizing influence of evangelical religion, particularly of Methodism," helped to spare England from a similar revolution to what France experienced. Elie Halévy, *The Birth of Methodism in England.* Translated and edited by Bernard Semmel. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971.
[92] Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an American Culture.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 62-63. Andrews is clear that Anglicanism in America suffered in America, but it suffered regionally. It also suffered through the churches inability to replace incumbent ministers who had died. He also notes that 63 of the 286 Anglican clergy in America were loyalists. Heitzenrater adds that Wesley had encouraged Methodists in America to be peacemakers, and was himself a loyal Tory. However, the shortage of ministers meant that many Methodists were not being baptized or having access to Communion. Heitzenrater, 259, 285-286. All contributed to the need/ desire for a Methodist separation from the Church of England.

Other problems existed for Methodists in America. Many regions suffered from a shortage of Anglican priests, making it difficult for countless Methodists to receive the sacraments. Thus, the Methodists in America appealed to Wesley for independence from the Church of England. Wesley hesitantly agreed to this request, ordaining Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury as the first General Superintendents of the nascent Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) in America. The church officially began at the famed Christmas Conference in 1784. As earlier noted, Wesley chose to abridge 25 out of the 39 Articles of Religion from the Church of England to guide the new American church. He also adapted the Book of Prayer for the American context.[93]

Methodism thrived in America under the leadership of Francis Asbury, who served as General Superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1784-1816. By the late nineteenth century, over seventy-five percent of all Methodists were American, while only ten percent of the world's population of Methodists resided in England.[94] Abel Simpson's 1868 history of Methodism purports to record the official membership numbers from the Annual Conferences of the MEC. He lists 4,921 members in 1776, and an astounding 130,570 only thirty years later in 1806. By 1866, there were over a million members, not including those of the MEC South.[95] David Hempton notes that historians usually multiply those numbers by 3 to 5 to account for those who were merely adherents and not members within the church. This means that there were between 3 to 5 million people attending

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[93] Heitzenrater, 289-290. He includes helpful description here of the changes made for the new American MEC, including the reduction and revision of some of the Articles of Religion and the revised *Book of Common Prayer.*

[94] David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit.* (New Haven, CI: Yale University Press, 2005), 4. Heitzenrater demonstrates that it is in 1790 that Methodist membership in America surpassed that of Methodist membership in Europe. *Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 264.*

[95] Abel Stephens, *A Compendious History of American* Methodism. (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1867), 607.

Methodist Churches in America by the mid-point of the 19th century.[96]

While the MEC's numerical growth was impressive, the church experienced several significant challenges. Since the time of Constantine, prosperity has often been a bane for the church, and this was true for the American Methodists.[97] Wesley taught his followers to 'earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.' At first Methodists in America took all three of these invectives seriously, but soon discovered that hard work and frugality brought wealth and success. Many Methodists began enjoying the fruits of their labor and living much more comfortable lives instead of giving their excess wealth to the poor. The MEC had been a church of the poor, but soon found itself a middle- to upper middle-class church in America.[98]

Wesley also opposed slavery, an issue which the founders of the FMC also fought against. He published a treatise, *Thoughts on Slavery,* in 1774, and the last letter he ever wrote was an encouragement to the abolitionist William Wilberforce to continue to oppose the slave trade in Africa.[99] The original Methodists in America were also opposed to slavery; however, the track record of Methodist leaders of the time was far from perfect.[100] As the movement grew, especially in the south, slave owners were joining the church (and wealthy southern Methodists were purchasing slaves). Some Methodist leaders, such as

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[96] Hempton, 1-2.
[97] For example, early church historians have argued that Constantine's favoring of Christianity led to a wealthy church and a watered-down faith that asked very little of people in terms of real commitment. See for example, Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
[98] See Hempton, 7
[99] Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism.* (London: Epworth Press, 1989, (2002)), 362.
[100] John Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury & the Methodists*. (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 150. For instance, he described the relationship between Asbury and Harry Hosier, an African American preacher who often traveled with him. Hosier sometimes posed as Asbury's servant and Coke describes Hosier as Asbury's black. Wigger argues that this is different than the way that Asbury treated other preachers that sometimes travelled with him.

Francis Asbury, sought to keep slavery out of the MEC, but they were ultimately unsuccessful. In fact, as early as 1785, Thomas Coke faced opposition for an anti-slavery sermon he preached in Virginia.[101] The fact that Methodism had become respectable and comfortably middle class may have contributed to its ambivalence toward slavery in both the north and the south.[102] As Richey, Rowe and Schmidt describe it, the MEC continually raised to power individuals who would be willing to compromise on the issue,[103] largely to save the church from division and keep affluent slave holding members mollified. In other words, at Annual and General Conferences, the MEC regularly elected to leadership positions, candidates who would not cause consternation amongst the affluent slave holding members.

The 1830's brought a deeper divide in the church (and in America) as abolitionists began a more concerted effort for change. The regional make-up of the MEC, with conferences having a fair amount of autonomy, contributed to disparate regional views on slavery within the MEC.[104] Richey, Rowe and Schmidt note that there were numbers of issues dividing the Methodist Church including those that were "constitutional, ecclesial, and theological or political, sectional, and ethical (over slavery and race)."[105] However, slavery was the most divisive of these issues.

In 1834, the General Conference of the MEC strongly urged ministers and laypersons to refrain from involvement in abolition movements and associations.[106] The 1840 General

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[101] Wigger,, 151. Wigger describes how attendees stalked out of a service where Coke preached and desired to flog him when the service was over.
[102] Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America: A History Vol. 1*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 174.
[103] Richey, et al, 175.
[104] Richey, et al, 176.
[105] Richey, et al, 178.
[106] Richey, et al, 179.

Conference of the MEC was also a win for supporters of slavery as the church affirmed ownership of slaves by church members. In 1842, ministers Orange Scott and La Roy Sunderland joined others who had just previously resigned from the MEC over issues of slavery, governance and holiness and organized the Wesleyan Methodist Connection (WMC). By their inaugural General Conference in 1844, the WMC had approximately fifteen thousand members, and were strongly influencing northern conferences of the MEC to support abolition.[107] We shall see in later chapters that the WMC has had a long and close connection to the Free Methodist Church since her founding, and has impacted the way in which she has processed issues concerning the American Fundamentalist movement.

Approximately ten years after the formation of the WMC, a group of Methodist pastors from the Genesee Conference in New York began advocating for change. There were a number of issues at stake. Once again, a key issue was slavery, although there were other matters of import. These Methodist pastors were strongly opposed to secret societies such as Freemasonry,[108] were concerned about discriminating against the poor and thus opposed the popular custom of pew rentals,[109] desired what they considered freedom in worship, and were interested in what they perceived to be a correct Wesleyan interpretation of entire sanctification.

Led by Benjamin Titus Roberts, these ministers opposed what they perceived as the

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[107] Richey, et al, 181.

[108] Those who became Free Methodists were not the first, or only Methodists to oppose Free Masonry. William Sweet records an example from 1825 of a Methodist minister who was refused ordination for becoming a Free Mason. Sweet records in a footnote that while the Methodist Church as a whole refused to condemn it, there were individual conferences that were opposed to it, and that there was also an anti-Masonic crusade in politics as well. William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier: 1783-1840 Vol. IV: The Methodists.* New York: Cooper Square Publishes, INC., 1964 (1946), 284.

[109] Roberts and the other Free Methodists were correct in arguing that the MEC had previously opposed pew rental. Sweet records two instances from the journal of James Gilruth where free seats were encouraged as required in the Methodist BOD, Sweet, 393, 424.

gentrifying of the church, a drifting away from traditional Methodism.[110] They felt the success, wealth, and privilege of Methodists, especially in the cities, contributed to a church that was interested in attendance numbers, wealth and status. Compromises were being made with the world on a number of issues and Snyder describes the problem as "(John Wesley) Redfield's and (B.T.) Robert's opposition to the growing fashionableness and fashion consciousness of urban Methodists, which both saw as inconsistent with biblical holiness and as a defection from genuine Methodism."[111] The wealth and fashion of those attending Methodist churches in the city were marginalizing the poor, something Roberts found intolerable.[112]

B.T. Roberts was born in 1823 and came into the Genesee conference in 1848, a young man excited about the God's direction in his life. He was ordained deacon at the Rushville Conference by Bishop Waugh in 1850.[113] There was already strife in the MEC over issues of holiness before Roberts' ordination. For example, in 1845 Bishop L.L. Hamline voiced his concern in a book supporting the doctrine of perfect love. He argued that the doctrine had become 'mere speculation' to most Methodist ministers. Obviously, if the ministers themselves were not seeking, practicing, and professing Christian perfection,

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[110] Howard A. Snyder, *Populist Saints: B.T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 219. Robert's concerns about the MEC dated back at least to 1852.
[111] Snyder, 239. The founding of the Free Methodist Church has been given in detail by numerous Free Methodist authors as well as MEC historians at the time. Some of the most significant studies include: James Allen Reinhard, *Personal and Sociological Factors in the Formation of the Free Methodist Church, 1852-1860*. (PhD diss. University of Iowa, 1971), Rick Hughes McPeak, *Earnest Christianity: The Practical Theology of Benjamin Titus Roberts*. (unpublished dissertation, Saint Louis University, 2001) and Howard A. Snyder, *Populist Saints: B.T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).
[112] Snyder, 239.
[113] Clarence Howard Zahniser, *Earnest Christian: Life and Works of Benjamin Titus Roberts.* (Circleville, OH: Advocate Publishing House, 1957), 42-43 (quoting from the Minutes of the Genesee and East Genesee Conference, Sept, 1850, 7.)

how could they possibly expect to see their parishioners experiencing it.[114] Jones notes that Hamline was a part of a minority within the MEC who were vigorously proclaiming the importance of the doctrine of perfect love.[115]

Key vehicles for promoting Christian perfection were the journal, the *Guide to Holiness* which began publication in 1838,[116] and the work of Phoebe Palmer. Palmer established her Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness which was incredibly influential both within and outside of the MEC. Similar meetings spread throughout the country, and in 1858, Palmer's husband, Walter, purchased the *Guide to Holiness* and Phoebe took over as editor.[117] Ellen Roberts attended a class taught by Walter Palmer, and sat in on at least one meeting led by Phoebe.[118] Snyder notes that B.T. Roberts approved of the ministry of Phoebe Palmer, but was apparently not completely happy with all of the results of her ministry, writing "(p)ride and worldly conformity are utterly inconsistent with real holiness. Whosoever is not sufficiently consecrated to God, to lay aside their 'gold, and pearls, and costly array' for Jesus' sake, may presumptuously talk of enjoying full salvation, but it is impossible for them to exercise saving faith in Christ."[119]

Roberts originally began training in law, but it was not long before he felt that God was calling him into ministry. About his determination to be a minister of the gospel, there can be little doubt. In an oft-quoted description of this period that Roberts later published

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[114] Leander Lycurgus Hamline, "Bishop Hamline's Recommendation," in George Peck, *The Christian Doctrine of Christian Perfection*. (New York: Lane and Tippett, 1845), vii-ix. Quoted in Charles Edwin Jone, *Perfectionist Persuasion: The Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1936.* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1974), 2.
[115] Charles Edwin Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion: The Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1936.* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1974), 2.
[116] Jones, 2. This was originally entitled the "Guide to Christian Perfection"
[117] Jones, 2-3.
[118] Snyder, 61-61.
[119] Snyder, 596, quoting Roberts, "Holiness in New York," 98.

in the *Earnest Christian*, he wrote about his future,

> Two paths were distinctly marked out before me. I saw that I might be a popular preacher, gain applause, do but little good in reality, and at last, lose my soul; or, I saw that I might take the narrow way, declare the whole truth as it is in Jesus, meeting with persecution and oppression, but see a thorough work of grace go on and gain heaven. Grace was given to make the better choice. I deliberately gave myself anew to the Lord, to declare the whole truth as it is in Jesus, and to take the narrow way. … I received a power to labor such as I had never possessed before."[120]

It took Roberts only five years to begin to sow trouble for himself within the conference. He noted that during a missionary convention in Buffalo, where he was at this time pastoring, three church members came to speak with him about concerns they had regarding his ministry. The first told him that he was holding the standard of religion too high. There is arguably some truth to this assertion. Only a week after this accusation, in reaction to poor responses at his revival meeting, he chose to preach a pointed message from James that "whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."[121] The second objector did not like the measures that Roberts used in his revival meetings. By this, it can be assured that this opponent did not approve of the histrionics that were a part of these services, such as shouting and being slain in the Spirit. The third objector argued that we should grow into holiness. This is opposed to the theology of Phoebe Palmer, who taught that one could and should be sanctified immediately after laying one's heart on the altar.[122]

For Roberts, convictions must be accompanied by action. Snyder notes that B.T. Robert's diary records him visiting the Buffalo, New York jails on a number of occasions,

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[120] B.T. Roberts, "A Running Sketch," *Earnest Christian* 9:1 (January, 1865), 6.
[121] James 2:10 (KJV)
[122] Zahniser, 57.

opening his pulpit to abolitionist preachers (including females), and raising money to support a former slave and help free his family. [123] This fits well the argument of Don Dayton that the revivalist strain of evangelicals in America were strongly focused on Christian faith that brought vitality and transformation both to individuals and to society.[124]

It is also clear that Roberts was preaching a stringent view of salvation and sanctification, one that received opposition from within his own parish in Buffalo as well as from powerful opponents such as John Robie, an ordained Methodist minister and the editor of the Buffalo Christian Advocate.[125] Snyder helpfully reports that the MEC was transitioning to a middle-class church, especially in the cities. This gentrification of the church brought tension to those tying simplicity in dress, freedom in worship, etc. to an earlier and truer Methodism.[126]

In the 1850's, two opposing parties had emerged within the Genesee conference. The first group was led by Methodist ministers who believed themselves to be fighting for a return to historic Methodism. Their opponents gave them the name Nazarites, which refers to Old Testament vows which were a sign of a deep commitment to God, and included avoiding the fruit of the vine, not cutting one's hair and not being in contact with the bodies or the graves of the dead.[127] The term is obviously one of derision, focusing on what was considered the fanatical spirituality and legalism of the group. B.T. Roberts was one of the

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[123] Snyder, 230.
[124] Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage.* 3rd Printing Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994 (1976), 138-139.
[125] Snyder, 238, 240.
[126] Snyder, 241.
[127] See especially the description of the Nazarite vows in Numbers 6.

primary leaders of this group which labeled their opponents the 'Regency.'[128] Ultimately, Roberts and the Nazarites opposed secret societies, pew rentals, slavery, and choirs, which conflicted with the local practices of the Methodist Church and particularly the Regency.

In a letter written to Bishop T.A. Morris in 1856, B.T. Roberts described his own perspective of the issues in the conference. On the one side was a philanthropic form of religion and on the other, the religion of historic Methodism. Roberts wrote, "What we call religion, they call fanaticism; what they denominate Christianity, we consider formalism."[129] Roberts and the Nazarites regularly pointed to the experiences of individuals as evidence of God's work.

Much like Wesley, Roberts believed that the experience of the Holy Spirit was an important part of the lives of Christians. Roberts believed in the camp meeting and the way that God worked through revivals to quicken Christians whose hearts had become spiritually dead through formalized religion. He wrote an article for the *Northern Christian Advocate* in 1853, where he described his experience at the Portville Camp Meeting. His description was similar to many accounts of older Methodist revival meetings, including that "the woods almost constantly reverberated with the cries of the saints, the groans of the penitent, and the shouts of the redeemed … some, in their agony, lay upon the ground all night, groaning and praying for pardon."[130] Roberts noted also that camp meetings helped remind all that "in the presence of God, worldly distinctions are lost."[131] Here, the rich and the poor are equal. Amidst what may have been rightly seen as a time of

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[128] Snyder extensively details the conflict between the two sides. Snyder, 309-336.
[129] B.T. Roberts, "Letter to T.A. Morris, November 15, 1856." Quoted by Zahniser, 85.
[130] B.T. Roberts, "Untitled Article" *Northern Christian Advocate*, XII (July 20, 1852), 1. Quoted by Zahniser, 49.
[131] Ibid, 50.

declension in the Genesee Conference, Roberts was witnessing what he perceived to be an authentic work of God in and through the camp meetings and the revival meetings that he and other Nazarites were holding. Doug Frank helpfully points out,

> In any age, I would suggest, revivalism is closely associated with an inordinate attention to appearances. A revival is the most visible and obvious and seemingly irrefutable outcropping of a spiritual reality. In revivals, men and women may actually *see* God at work, may quantify and gauge that work empirically. In hard times for Christians, revivals encourage the believer to think that all is not lost, and perhaps even though the vessel is wrecked, he has a powerful ally on his side who can still flex his muscles by bringing people to visible manifestations of guilt and repentance.[132]

James Reinhard aptly demonstrates that the Nazarites were agitating enough that tensions and conflict were inevitable.[133] The situation came to a climax in 1858, leading to the expulsion of Roberts and other members of the Nazarite group. When ecclesial appeals to the MEC were unsuccessful, the expelled members met at Pekin, New York in 1860, where they formed the Free Methodist Church.

The Free Methodist Church grew quickly in North America in the latter half of the nineteenth century, spreading across the country. This period also brought an interest in missions, and the FMC swiftly expanded its reach to Africa, India, China and other parts of the world.

In his centennial history of the FMC, Bishop Leslie Marston reflected on what he considered the theologically conservative, yet fully Wesleyan, nature of the FMC. He noted that Free Methodist bishops in 1907 proclaimed that the FMC had "unfalteringly borne

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[132] Douglas Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century.* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 61.

[133] James Allen Reinhard, *Personal and Sociological Factors in the Formation of the Free Methodist Church, 1852-1860*. (PhD diss. University of Iowa, 1971). This was the crux of Reinhard's dissertation which deviates from the triumphal nature of many of the official histories of the church.

faithful testimony through all the land to the great fundamental truths of Christianity, and particularly regarding the privilege and obligation of believers to be sanctified wholly in the present life."[134] It is important to reflect here that many holiness churches have focused more on practical theology than theological dogmatism. Marston also remarked on the pastoral address of the bishops to General Conference in 1894. There, the bishops instructed the pastors that, "while we would be severely orthodox, we would do well to remember that orthodoxy cannot inspire and maintain spiritual life, but that our spiritual life must intensify and maintain our orthodoxy."[135] This is very close to what we observed earlier from Wesley, and is important because it demonstrates that Free Methodists have historically been much more interested in practical theology than in propositional truths or systematic theology, which has been an integral part of the theological concerns of Calvinists such as the Princeton theologians whose work so informed later fundamentalists.

In spite of this interest in practical theology, there is also evidence that there were Free Methodists attracted to fundamentalism. At the 1923 General Conference, the FMC sought to build a tighter connection with her affiliated colleges. This is significant because many schools from other denominations had experienced profound theological drift. Marston notes that this Conference "also adopted resolutions against erroneous teachings in the attempt to fortify the church against contemporary influences opposed to evangelical faith, declaring its 'utter dissonance with evolution, theistic and atheistic, Higher Criticism,

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[134]Leslie Ray Marston, *From Age to Age: A Living Witness.* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1960), 297. Marston is quoting the Bishop's Address of 1907, but does not give other information in a footnote.
[135] Marston, 297. Again, other than noting that it was from the bishop's address, Marston does not footnote his source.

Modernism, German Rationalism, and the whole trend of modern theology,' and pledging resistance to such influences wherever in evidence. The resolutions further approved the efforts of the Honorable William Jennings Bryan and others, 'to reestablish public faith in the scriptural account of creation and the origin and development of man.'"[136] Ron Numbers, a historian focused on creationism, has demonstrated that holiness churches, while opposed to evolution, were hardly in the vanguard in the fight against it.[137]

Marston makes one final point that is worthy of reflection. Speaking of the early 1920's, he writes, "This was the period of great activity of conservative and fundamentalist forces, and these resolutions placed the Free Methodist Church uncompromisingly in opposition to liberal theology and naturalistic philosophy. But while always conservative in doctrine, the Free Methodist Church has never been characterized in any general sense by the temper of a belligerent fundamentalism."[138] To what extent Marston is correct in this assertion is a primary focus of this thesis. As we shall see later in this chapter, the fundamentalist impulse can in fact be traced even to B. T. Roberts, the primary founder of the FMC who, at times, used what could be described as a fundamentalist rhetorical style in his attacks on his opponents.[139]

The American Religious Context

In the last section, we examined the rise of Methodism. Theologically and methodologically, the Methodists followed the lead of John Wesley. While seeking to

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[136] Marston, 297-298. Again, Marston does not cite his source.
[137] Numbers, 115. Numbers does note that Free Methodists did publish a number of anti-evolution articles in *The Free Methodist* in the 1920's.
[138] Marston, 298.
[139] It would be anachronistic to label Roberts as a fundamentalist, for it was only late in his life that American Protestant fundamentalism was beginning to truly flourish.

refocus Christians on experiential Christianity, Methodists did not embrace the Calvinist theology of the Reformers either in Europe, or later in their American context. The Wesleyan revivals in England have been termed evangelical, and can be viewed as one of the streams through which evangelicalism came to America. In this section, I will argue that the evangelicalism that informed the Free Methodist church was from a different stream than the evangelicalism which has informed fundamentalist Christianity in America, though there have certainly been connections between the different streams.

The Protestant Church of America found itself deeply challenged in many areas as it entered the second half of the nineteenth century. Fundamentally, these challenges were the result of how the churches understood history and revelation. Larry Wood traces epistemology and the rise of the historical consciousness to roots in the Hebrew religion as early as the second millennium B.C.E. He argues that it was the Hebrews who first developed a subject/ object distinction in terms of a God who acts in time and space. This is different than the mythology of the ancient world that conflated the ideas/ experience of thought and being as well as subject and object.[140]

Epistemology and ontology have been deeply affected by this rise in historical consciousness. The period prior to Descartes is often referred to as the pre-modern period, a time when the church largely controlled knowledge both in theology and the sciences.[141] The Cartesian shift that began early in the 17th century brought a focus on critical reason as a means of describing all truth, or "giv(ing) a universal account of the way the world really

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[140] Wood, 3-4.

[141] Nancy C. Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press Internationa, 1996), 4. Murphy notes that Descartes (d 1650) is the father of the modern period for philosophy, while recognizing that Schleiermacher is often considered the first modern theologian, though he was writing 150 years after Descartes's death.

is."[142] In what is described as the Modern period, Wood maintains that Christian theology was "profoundly transformed by the rise of this critical thought, especially as it was formalized in Kant's critical philosophy,"[143] which Wood describes as the "highpoint of Enlightenment thought."[144] Kant's dualistic separation of "phenomena (things as they appear) and noumena (things as they really are) led him to a skeptical conclusion about knowing the world beyond the five senses."[145] Like Descartes and others, Kant questioned how one could rest their faith and future in history, since historical accounts relied on sensory data. Likewise, how could one believe with any certainty in the miracles of the Bible, including the virgin birth, the many miracles of Jesus, or resurrection of Christ? C.S. Lewis clearly implies that for many, stories including Jesus' resurrection and his ascension where he floated away only to be hidden by a cloud are embarrassing and difficult to believe.[146] Wood asserts "the basic premise of this new Kantian-based theology which is classically called modernism or liberalism, was that Jesus is not a divine person, but another human being with a high degree of God-consciousness who is a model of faith for those who seek to follow in his steps."[147]

Mark Noll contends that as early as the seventeenth century, American evangelicals began to largely reject the skeptical enlightenment of Voltaire and Hume and the revolutionary enlightenment of Rousseau, Godwin and Tom Payne; however, they embraced the didactic enlightenment of Scotland. Scottish thought espoused common

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[142] Laurence, W Wood, *Theology as History and Hermeneutics: A Post-Critical Conversation with Contemporary Theology.* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2005), vii.
[143] Ibid, 3.
[144] Ibid, 2.
[145] Ibid, 2.
[146] C.S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study.* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), 176-177. Of course, Lewis is setting up a problem for his readers that he subsequently addresses.
[147] Wood, 3.

sense principles, and American Protestant educators and ministers were at the forefront of using these principles.[148] Among other things, Scottish Common Sense Realism postulated that anyone, regardless of education, could understand the world around them through their senses and an internal moral compass, and it also asserted that "the proper reading of the Bible was the plainest one, and therefore readily accessible to the sincere and discerning reader."[149] It "placed the Scriptures within reach of the masses, and nineteenth century Americans responded by interpreting the Bible for themselves absent the filters of history and tradition."[150] This means that there have arisen numerous streams of interpretation in American Christianity. It is important to make a clear differentiation here. On the one hand, evangelicalism continued the Protestant emphasis on Scripture alone and Biblical inspiration. However, Fundamentalist literalism was something different. Sandeen describes this new literalism as focusing "quite specifically (on) the interpretation of prophecy and contrasts with the figurative or symbolic manner of interpretation."[151]

Originated by Thomas Reid and disseminated by Dugald Stewart in Scotland in the mid eighteenth through the early nineteenth century, Common Sense Realism played a major role in Western thought for over a century.[152] This philosophy was carried to America by a fellow Scotsman, John Witherspoon, when he became president of Princeton in 1768. Joined in his efforts by Charles Hodge, Common Sense Realism soon spread

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[148] Mark A Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 84-85. See also a helpful discussion of Scottish Common Sense Realism on pp.14-20 of George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* 2nd Ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2006).
[149] Randall Balmer, *Evangelicalism in American*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 19-20.
[150]. Balmer, 20.
[151] Ernest R. Sandeen, "Towards Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism," in *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* Martin E Marty ed., Book 10 Modern American Protestantism and Its World, (Munich: K. G Saur, 1993), 22.
[152] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "Scottish Philosophy and American Theology" pp. 174-184 in *American Church History: A Reader.* Henry Warner Bowden and P.C. Kemeny, editors. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 174.

through the United States, as Princeton graduates became influential pastors, academics, and professors.[153] Ahlstrom postulates that the real value and popularity of this Scottish philosophy was that it clearly distinguishes a dualism between the Creator and the creation, which necessitated revelation.

At a time when German and French 'infidelity' was the overwhelming theological thought at many American universities, Scottish philosophy offered reason, affirmation of science and natural theology, and a defense against relativism and romanticism.[154] However, Ahlstrom contends that the movement stifled any kind of theological dynamic, and this lifelessness contributed to an inevitable theological turn by the end of the nineteenth century.[155] Those who became fundamentalists, who were continuing to hold strongly to orthodoxy and apologetics, were not so ready to abandon Scottish Common Sense Realism.

In Europe, however, skeptical Enlightenment thought significantly impacted European theology for two hundred years before this theology began to make its way to America, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century. Von Greyerz notes that Enlightenment thought, except in France, was not wholly critical of religion and argues that it was actually a very Christian movement in Germany, England, Scotland Switzerland, Austria, and Italy. Its significance, he asserts, is that it "does represent a break in that its rationalism powerfully reinforced the trend toward the separation of religion and daily life that had begun among the educated classes in the late seventeenth centuries."[156]

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[153] Ahlstrom, 176.
[154] Ahlstrom, 180-181.
[155] Ahlstrom, 182.
[156] Kaspar von Greyerz, *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Europe: 1500-1800.* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 3-4.

The Enlightenment brought a whole new way of conceptualizing the world. Science was no longer an accumulation of knowledge. There was now a critical aspect of reflection on the experimental evidence of the sciences that sought to produce universal laws.[157] This new scientific method was also being used to evaluate the written word of past texts, such as the Bible. It is integral to understand the impact of this new approach to theology in order to appreciate the reaction of conservative evangelical Christians in America against the progressive movement (Modernism), beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing today.

The Enlightenment raised important questions concerning what could actually be known from historical records. These questions included the reliability of the content of written records and what could be learned from them, which in turn raised doubts about the validity of the revelation of God through his written word, the Bible. For example, in the eighteenth century, David Hume wrote that miracles could not have happened in history, because we do not observe them today. Thus, the miracles of Jesus, the virgin birth, the resurrection, the return of Christ, and the need for Christ's atoning work on the cross all came under attack. John Wesley was aware of these challenges and rejected the extreme skepticism of Hume and John Locke, but as Thorsen correctly notes, Wesley's focus on the experimental (experiential) nature of one's faith demonstrates "a willingness to admit the hypothetical nature of human knowledge."[158]

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[157] Wood, *God and History,* 51.
[158] Thorsen, 48.

American Evangelicalism

The Free Methodist Church (FMC) around which this study centers is evangelical in nature. The term 'evangel' means good news, but American evangelicalism is complex.[159] Don Dayton posits that there are generally three movements that are associated with evangelicalism. The first pertains to the Reformation as it developed in Germany, and also as it spread through Europe in the sixteenth century where most Protestants were called evangelical, especially because of an emphasis on teaching the "Gospel."[160] The second movement consists of the pietist/conversionist revivals of the eighteenth century under leaders such as John Wesley, George Whitefield, and Jonathan Edwards, and the third movement is fundamentalism, which has dominated much of twentieth century evangelicalism.[161] Dayton also claims (with many others) that there is incredible diversity within those labeled as evangelicals, perhaps more diversity than commonality. He writes,

> I am inclined to think that the demand for the label *evangelical* has its roots not in the commonalities of a certain subcluster of churches, but more in the power politics of the neo-evangelicals after World War II. Those in the movement wanted to claim as large a power base as possible for the ecclesiastical struggles in which they were engaged. This led to the forging of

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[159] For the complexity of the history of evangelicalism, see for example, Kenneth Hylson-Smith, "Evangelicals" pp. 436-438 in *Encyclopedia of Christianity,* edited by John Bowman. (Oxford: OUP, 2005), Lukas Vischer, "Evangelical" p. 212 in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity.* V. 2. E-I, edited by Erwin Fahlbusch, Jan Milic Lochman, John Mbiti, and Lukas Vischer, translator and English language editor, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, statistical editor, David B. Barrett. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company & Leiden: Brill, 2001 (1986)), E.A. Livingstone, ed. pp. 583-584 in "Evangelicalism" in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church.*3rd edition, (Oxford: OUP, 2005), Harriet A. Harris, "Evangelical Theology" pp. 197-200 in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, edited by Trevor A. Hart. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

[160] See for example, Vischer, 212.

[161]Donald W. Dayton, "Some Doubts About the Usefulness of the Category 'Evangelical.'" Pp.245-251 in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism.* Donald W. Dayton and Johnston, Robert K., editors, (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 245. William Abraham echoes these three categories of Dayton, though he substitutes conservative evangelicals for fundamentalism as the third category. See William J. Abraham, *The Coming Great Revival: Recovering the Full Evangelical Tradition.* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 72-73.

> certain alliances that had varying degrees of historical and theological justification. Whatever justification such coalitions may have had at the time (and one must be skeptical about the grounding at that point), trajectories that may have converged for a moment now have diverged sufficiently to reveal that such associations are not viable. We are living through the dissolution of such coalitions, in a way that calls into question the continuing usefulness of the label *evangelical* as a historical and theological category.[162]

Dayton notes that many who have written on evangelicalism have structured the histories they have written around Princeton University, and the work of scholars such as Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, A.A. Hodge, and B.B. Warfield who sought to defend orthodoxy and the Bible against biblical criticism.[163] However, this is misleading. He also notes that evangelicalism cannot be understood as merely 'orthodox' or 'conservative' Christianity.[164]

Whereas Dayton clearly sees the roots of evangelicalism in Europe, Randy Balmer, who was educated at Princeton, demonstrates the more stereotypical definition of evangelicalism when he writes,

> Evangelicalism itself, I believe, is quintessentially a North American phenomenon, deriving as it did from the confluence of Pietism, Presbyterianism, and the vestiges of Puritanism. Evangelicalism picked up the peculiar characteristics from each strain – warmhearted spirituality from the Pietists (for instance) doctrinal precisionism from the Presbyterians, and individualistic introspection from the Puritans – even as the North American context itself has profoundly shaped the various manifestations of evangelicalism: fundamentalism, neo-evangelicalism, the holiness movement, pentecostalism, the charismatic movement, and various forms of African-American and Hispanic evangelicalism.[165]

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[162] Dayton, 250-251. Dayton, noting the complexity here, begins to decry the usage of the term, evangelical, writing, "…I find myself unable to make a common label 'evangelical' describe the range of movements covered in this volume. I, therefore, avoid the word whenever possible and even regret that it must be used in the title of this book. I would rather call for a moratorium on the use of the term, in the hope that we would be forced to more appropriate and useful categories of analyses," 251. Thorsen agrees, noting that there are many ways that evangelicalism can be defined and desires that the definition be broad and accepting. Thorsen, 8.

[163] Donald W. Dayton, "Yet Another Layer of the Onion: Or Opening the Ecumenical Door to Let the Riffraff in," *The Ecumenical Review* 40:1 (Jan. 1988), 97.

[164] Dayton, "Yet…", 99.

[165] Randall Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism.* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), vii-viii.

Notice that while both admit to the variety within American evangelicalism, Dayton has focused his definition of evangelical on the desire to bring together disparate elements within evangelicalism in the latter part of the twentieth century for political purposes. These relationships have become largely untenable, and thus, Dayton believes the term is no longer viable. I would argue against Dayton that, while complex, 'evangelical' can still be helpful in describing the various historical movements to share the 'good news' on the Continent, in England, and in America. Evangelicals have historically held to a number of key theological positions. In her definition of evangelicalism, Harriet A. Harris helps to focus on some of its principle components. She posits:

> Its main characteristics include: emphasizing the authority of Scripture over against reason, tradition and ecclesial authority; prioritizing the experience of becoming a Christian and knowing Jesus as one's personal saviour, not over against right belief – the importance of which is taken very seriously – but over against the sacraments and ecclesial structures; stressing conversion, evangelism and missionary work, and the particularism of Christ's saving work; and focusing on sanctification through holy living along with a corresponding rejection of Christ's presence in the sacraments. Prominent internal disputes have arisen over the nature of biblical authority, the relation between divine grace and free will, and eschatology.[166]

Here we have the essential foci of American evangelicalism in which fundamentalism has flourished.

According to George Marsden, evangelical became the name that described the revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that occurred in both North America and Britain. Similar to Harris, Marsden argues that this current within America Christianity includes the preaching of Christ's death on the cross as necessary and central for an individual who trusts personally for forgiveness and salvation. Historically, it has included

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[166] Harris, 198. See also D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism: A History from the 1730s to the 1970,* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

biblical preaching and dramatic conversions under such preachers as John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and many others. Marsden also notes that evangelicalism is not attached to one denomination, but rather that virtually all denominations in America have been influenced by evangelicalism.[167]

In its various streams and through its various organizations, evangelicalism grew. Often parachurch organizations brought evangelicals together to work for common causes. Erich Geldbach notes the pronounced variety that makes up evangelicalism including church denominations, numerous parachurch organizations, educational institutions, conferences and publications.[168] By the mid-point of the twentieth century, conservative evangelicals, especially under the influence of Billy Graham, were focusing on a positive evangelical message that avoided the legalism and controversial issues that defined fundamentalism. Sometimes calling themselves neo-evangelicals, they founded the National Association of Evangelicals (1943), started schools, including Fuller, Gordon-Conwell and Trinity, and publishing houses including Baker, Eerdmans and Zondervan, and in 1956 began to publish what quickly became the flagship periodical of their movement, *Christianity Today*.[169] *Christianity Today* was the dream of Billy Graham, and Marsden claims that Graham wanted to "plant the evangelical flag in the middle-of-the-road, taking the conservative theological position but a definite liberal approach to social problems."[170]

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[167] George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 2.
[168] Erich Geldbach, "Evangelical Movement" pp. 216-219 in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity.* V. 2. E-I. edited by Erwin Fahlbuscg, Jan Milic Lochman, John Mbiti, and Lukas Vischer, translator and English language editor, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, statistical editor, David B. Barrett. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company & Leiden: Brill, 2001 (1986)), 217-218.
[169] Mark A. Noll, American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 18-19.
[170] Christian Smith *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 12 (Citing Marsden, 58.)

Concerning the American context, Randy Balmer argues persuasively that evangelicalism took on its own tenor in conjunction with the Stone-Campbell revival and the publication of "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery" in 1804. American evangelicals began to turn their focus towards a primitive New Testament Christianity; a restored Christianity.[171] This, Balmer claims, has led to the endless reinvention of evangelicalism in America, with evangelicals "most often claiming inspiration solely from the Scriptures, often explicitly disavowing any connection whatsoever with tradition."[172]

While there is clearly overlap in the ways in which different historians define evangelicalism, there are also some differences. It is important to note that the American evangelical movement, with all of its variation, is the context in which the Free Methodist Church was developing in America. The FMC developed in a distinctive way, and Dayton has intimated that there are two main streams of evangelicalism in America. The first is that of the reformed Princeton theologians with their Calvinist theology who trace their roots to the Puritans and ultimately to the largely Calvinist Reformation. The second group are those who trace their roots to the evangelical revivals in England under John Wesley. This difference is key in understanding the DNA of both sides, and also in interpreting why fundamentalism is incongruent for the FMC.

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[171] Balmer, *Evangelicalism in America*, 15-16.
[172] Balmer, 19.

American Protestant Fundamentalism

There are many types of fundamentalism in the world, and so it is important to denote that this thesis is solely interested in the fundamentalism associated with American evangelicalism, the way it arose and affected the nineteenth and twentieth century American religious landscape, and ultimately affected the Free Methodist Church. The fundamentalist movement in American Protestantism is closely linked to evangelicalism. In fact, it would be anachronistic to label any American religious movement as fundamentalist before the twentieth century, though as we will see, the roots of American fundamentalism stretch back to at least the eighteenth-century. George Marsden claims that, "(fundamentalism) was originally just the name for the militantly conservative wing of the evangelical coalition … include(ing) militant conservatives among Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Disciples, Episcopalians, holiness groups, Pentecostals, and many other denominations."[173] He also points to three key theological traits that are the 'distinctive doctrines' of the fundamentalist movement, all of which have challenged the thinking of leaders and laity within the FMC. Marsden's three traits are:

> The divinely guaranteed verbal inerrancy of Scripture, divine creation as opposed to biological evolution, and a dispensational-premillennial scheme that explained historical changes in terms of divine control. In America, where fundamentalism originated, adherence to the first of these teachings became a test for the purity of denominations, the second a symbol for efforts to preserve the Christian character of the culture, and the third a basis for fellowship among fundamentalists themselves.[174]

These are all traits that the FMC struggled with in this American evangelical context.

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[173] Marsden, *Understanding*, 3.
[174] George A. Marsden, "Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon, A Comparison with English Evangelicalism," in *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism.* Vol. 10 of Modern American Protestantism and Its World, Martin E. Marty, ed. (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1993), 37.

Much has been written about the fundamentalist movement, particularly after the Scopes trial of 1925, and as we consider some of the ways the term has been described historically, I would suggest that it consists of both mindset and doctrine. Early studies saw the movement as a brief but dying reactionary response to modernism. H. Richard Niebuhr famously wrote, "… fundamentalism was closely related to the conflict between rural and urban cultures in America. … Furthermore, fundamentalism in its aggressive forms was most prevalent in those isolated communities in which the traditions of pioneer society had been most effectively preserved and which were least subject to the influences of modern sciences and industrial civilization."[175]

Sandeen counters Niebuhr's popular thesis with the claim: "The leadership (of Fundamentalists in the late 19th century) was concentrated in urban centers, particularly in the Philadelphia-New York-Boston area with lesser centers in Chicago, St. Louis and Los Angeles. The South was almost unrepresented."[176] Later historiography has revealed a much deeper and more sophisticated movement, which began to emerge in the mid-nineteenth century and continues today.[177] Dayton distinguishes an important difference

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[175] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Fundamentalism," *Encyclopedia of Social* Sciences, (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1931), 527. See also a good discussion of the historiography of fundamentalism in Marsden, *Fundamentalism,* 4. Stan Ingersol has a helpful discussion on the historiography of fundamentalism in his article on fundamentalism in the Church of the Nazarene. Stan Ingersol, 123-141, "Strange Bedfellows: The Nazarenes and Fundamentalism," WTJ 40:2 (Fall, 2005). 123-129.

[176] Ernest R. Sandeen, "Towards Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism," in *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* Martin E Marty ed., Book 10 Modern American Protestantism and Its World, (Munich: K. G Saur, 1993), 19-36, 30. Sandeen argues persuasively that many of the Fundamentalists were from the northeast and were highly educated, 36.

[177] Some of the many important works on Fundamentalism include: Stewart G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism.* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock (2008)), 1931, Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008 (1970)), Douglas W. Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century.* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion Vol.1 The Irony of it All: 1893-1919*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986). (Marty also edited the 5 volume series, *The Fundamentalist Project*), George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism.* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991, Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The*

between fundamentalists who have come from the Presbyterian/ Princeton tradition and those whose backgrounds are Wesleyan/ Holiness. He writes, "the Presbyterian fundamentalists were self-consciously anti-critical, while the holiness folk like many popular movements … were more 'pre-critical'. The difference is important – it is easier to grow out of the latter, as many groups are doing today, finding that the fundamentalist experience was a passing movement in their history and not their real identity."[178] It is important to reflect on whether this was true of Free Methodists.

A more general definition of fundamentalism that helps us to understand the mindset of fundamentalists has been proposed by Peter L. Berger, who describes fundamentalism as "*the attempt to restore or create anew a taken-for-granted body of beliefs and values.* In other words, fundamentalism is always reactive, and what it reacts against is precisely the aforementioned relativization process."[179] Fundamentalists fight for what they see as the one right interpretation of Scripture. It is important for this thesis to recognize that Wesley did not share this fundamentalist temperament. He was much more ecumenical in spirit. While B.T. Roberts could be belligerent at times as he attacked his opponents publicly in the papers, he was more concerned with fighting for vibrant faith than for orthodoxy. Dayton points out that this had also been true for Wesley, who wrote, "neither does religion consist in orthodoxy or right opinions. ... A man may be orthodox in every point. … He may be almost as orthodox as the Devil … and may, all the while, be as

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Reawakening of American Fundamentalism. (Oxford: OUP, 1997), George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture.* 2nd Edition. (Oxford: OUP, 2006).

[178] Donald W. Dayton, "Yet Another Layer of the Onion: Or Opening the Ecumenical Door to Let the Riffraff in," *The Ecumenical Review* 40:1 (Jan. 1988), 101.

[179] Peter L. Berger, "Introduction" in *Between Relativism and Fundamentalism*. Peter L Berger, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 7. Emphasis is Berger's.

great a stranger as he to the religion of the heart.[180] In his sermon, "The Catholic Spirit," Wesley writes:

> Every wise man, will allow others the same liberty of thinking which he desires they should allow him; and will no more insist on their embracing his opinions, than he would have them to insist on his embracing theirs. He bears with those who differ from him, and only asks him with whom he desires to unite in love that single question, 'Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?' … I dare not therefore, presume to impose my mode of worship on any other. I believe it is truly primitive and apostolical; but my belief is no rule for another. I ask not therefore, of him with whom I would unite in love, Are you of my church, of my congregation? Do you receive the same form of church government and allow the same church officers with me? Do you join in the form of prayer wherein I worship God? I enquire not, Do you receive the supper of the Lord in the same posture and manner that I do? Nor whether in the administration of baptism, you agree with me in admitting sureties for the baptized; in the manner of administering it; or the age of those to whom it should be administered. Nay, I ask not of you, whether you allow baptism and the Lord's supper at all. Let all these things stand by. We will talk of them if need be, at a more convenient season. My only question is this, 'Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?[181]

This clearly does not align with the constant bickering over "correct" interpretations on minutiae that we see regularly within American fundamentalism. Thorsen comments on what we call the ecumenism of Wesley, noting correctly that Wesley's attitude reflected the growing religious tolerance within England (and also throughout the continent) after more than a century filled with wars of religion.[182] Thorsen and Outler both point out that this tolerance will have to allow for some degree of pluralism. This is where things can get uncomfortable for many Christians, and certainly for fundamentalists. Thorsen adds that "(b)y allowing his Methodists to 'think and let think,' Wesley accepted some theological

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[180] Dayton, *Discovering,* 138-139. Dayton is quoting Wesley's sermon "The Way to the Kingdom."
[181] John Wesley, "Catholic Spirit" in *Sermons on Several Occasions.* (London: Epworth Press, 1977. (1750)), 446-447.
[182] Thorsen, 44-45.

pluralism as a consequence of catholic or universal love."[183]

This helps us understand why Wesleyanism and the teachings of the Free Methodist Church do not and must not align with fundamentalism. For Wesley and his descendants, reason, tradition, and experience must all be interpreted through the lens of Scripture.[184] Though he added experience to the mix[185], Wesley followed the example of the great Anglican theologians, such as Richard Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, Robert Sanderson and many others who preceded him in the *via media* between Roman Catholicism's emphasis on tradition and the Protestant Reformers' focus on the literal interpretation of Scripture.[186] This freedom and the focus on practical theology within the Church of England lent itself well to diversity of interpretation.[187] Rather than systematic theology, Anglicans focused on what Paul More has opined as "not so much finality as direction."[188] This lack of certainty obviously would not fit well with the literal exactitudes desired within later fundamentalism. That would begin to change through further advances in Anglican theological methodology during the seventeenth century, when reason ascended to primacy and more and more often Christianity came to be viewed as 'a formalistic affirmation of correct doctrine.'[189] Still, some such as William Law, who had a tremendous influence on both of the Wesley brothers and their interest in holiness, continued to seek to

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[183] Thorsen, 44.
[184] The term 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral' was coined by Albert Outler, and its methodology for Wesley outlined in detail by Thorsen.
[185] Thorsen notes that experience was 'tacitly assumed' in much of the writing of early Anglicans, and he demonstrates the importance of experience, even if not explicit in Anglican theological methodology. Thorsen, 31.
[186] For a helpful description of Wesley's theological forbearers, see Thorsen, 14-18.
[187] Thorsen, 18.
[188] Thorsen, 19 – quoting More
[189] Thorsen, 23.

balance tradition, Scripture and reason in the midst of the ascent of reason.[190]

Wesley clearly reflected the ethos of the Church of England in embracing unity and that 'Catholic spirit' and as Thorsen has noted, "(h)e permitted a wide spectrum of theological opinions, preferring to avoid the static extremes of dogmatism."[191] In speaking of the *via media* of Anglican theology (in the way it existed at the time of Wesley),[192] McAdoo writes that it "was not in its essence compromise or an intellectual expedient but a quality of thinking, an approach in which elements usually regarded as mutually exclusive were seen to be in fact complimentary. These things were held in a living tension, not in order to walk the tight-rope of compromise, but because they were seen to be mutually illuminating and to fertilize each other."[193] This living tension of ideas does not easily fit with later fundamentalist hermeneutics, as it was very non-authoritarian.

To fully understand how reason has influenced modernism and the way that fundamentalists read the Bible, it is necessary to examine briefly the rise of modern thought. Historians have long struggled to make sense of the rise of fundamentalism in America. Sandeen tied its roots to millenarianism and corrected the popular opinion that fundamentalism was merely an uneducated rural movement. However, both Noll and Marsden have correctly noted that there has been a strong anti-intellectual and anti-educational bent to fundamentalism.

Pre-modern Christians tended to read the Bible in a way that was somewhat simplistic. While there were certainly a variety of hermeneutical tools in the Ancient world,

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[190] Thorsen, 25.
[191] Thorsen, 26.
[192] See Ch. 1 for an explanation of the idea of the Church of England as a *via media.*
[193] Thorsen, 31. – quoting McAdoo.

such as allegory, there was a pre-modern literalism that abounded. The belief was that the Bible and the historical events recorded in the Bible could be regarded as accurate.[194] This is different than the literalism of the enlightenment and post-enlightenment period. The literalism that this modern age celebrated was conceived of as an ability to find and define objective truth. This was the project of the historical critical hermeneutic which has informed fundamentalist thought. In other words, fundamentalists have shared the same modernist interpretive principles as those of the Biblical scholars with whom they were fighting. They believed that reason was the avenue to objective truth. In fact, both progressive evangelicals and their conservative and/ or fundamentalist opponents could be categorized as foundationalists. Nancy Murphy describes foundationalism as

> the theory of knowledge, based on the metaphor of knowledge as a building, that requires all beliefs to be justified by tracing them to a special category of beliefs that cannot be called into question … (adding) (m)y thesis is that foundationalism has contributed to the split between liberal and conservative theologies by forcing theologians to choose Scripture or experience as the source of this special, foundational class of beliefs. Conservatives have chosen Scripture; liberals, characteristically, have chosen experience.[195]

Those who come from a Wesleyan tradition should find both Scripture and experience informing their theology. This bifurcation within evangelicalism began to become clear in the response and focus of evangelicals as the twentieth century dawned. While fundamentalists focused on defending conservative interpretations of Scripture, progressive evangelicals accepted the modernist teachings of the Bible critics. They also focused their energies more on meeting the great crises in the cities, embracing the 'social

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[194] Laurence W. Wood, *God and History: The Dialectical Tension of Faith and History in Modern Thought.* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2005), IX.
[195] Murphy, 2.

gospel' movement under the leadership of Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch.

Though Wesley deeply valued reason, he (and his Methodist descendants) believed that it must be subject to Scripture. It is essential to note that Wesley followed Richard Hooker (1554-1600) and other Anglican theologians in seeking a *via media* between what Donald Thorsen has called 'episcopal structures' of Roman Catholicism and the 'system-building tendencies' of Continental Protestantism. Anglicans believed both extremes were a detriment to the development of "a vital understanding of Christian belief."[196] The task of reason in the modern age was to find and define objective truth. Both fundamentalists and progressives have shared this same modernist lens and interpretive principles in their theological methodology. For example, progressives have argued that reason shows us that the Bible is often not true, whereas for fundamentalist reformed Christians, this methodology can easily facilitate an emphasis on propositional truth. This is in contrast to the methodology of the so called "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" which invites readers to sit under the authority of Scripture while using tradition, reason and experience to guide Christians to both experiential and propositional truths.

Evangelicals responded in very different ways to the challenges raised in the nineteenth century. Many evangelicals, such as the influential preacher Henry Ward Beecher, accepted the criticisms of the Bible and the new theology which sought to merge Christianity and culture. Others were deeply alarmed.[197] Those who were becoming

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[196] Thorsen, 6-7.

[197] Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary.* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2010), 14. Of those deeply alarmed, Kinghorn cites Henry Clay Morrison, Methodist pastor and founder of Asbury Theological Seminary. Morrison also founded a paper, *The Old Methodist*, with a desire to call Methodists back "to the 'old paths' of Methodist doctrine and experience." Kinghorn is quoting from Morrison's *Life Sketches and Sermons* (Louisville: Pentecostal Publishing Co., 1903), 33. Kinghorn also notes that Morrison desired to

fundamentalists were finding new ways to respond to the challenges. These responses included a very literal reading of Scripture, which they postulated as inerrant (at least in the original autographs),[198] as well as new means to educate young adults. Bernard Ramm argues that the "fundamentalists' solution was simply to ignore the Enlightenment and to continue their work as if it never occurred. This route commits them to the strategy of obscurantism. Evolution, modern geology, scientific anthropology, and biblical criticism are subjected to continuous castigation."[199] Ramm fails to see that the project of the fundamentalists is actually quite similar to the modernists in its quest for one truth.

So, the question again is whether or not Free Methodists were fundamentalists from the beginning. Their earliest leaders certainly exemplified some of the traits, if not all of the doctrines of later fundamentalists. Perhaps it would be most helpful to consider the proposal of Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby in their monumental work, *The Fundamentalist Project*, and compare it to the earliest days of the Free Methodist Church. Marty and Appleby delineate the opponent of fundamentalism as 'Modernism' and define it as "a code word for the set of forces which fundamentalists perceive as the threat which inspires their reaction. Modern cultures include at least three dimensions uncongenial to fundamentalists: a preference for secular rationality; the adoption of religious tolerance with accompanying tendencies toward relativism; and individualism."[200] Opposing modernism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were fundamentalists.

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see a seminary arise which would counter higher criticism and focus on "theological orthodoxy and emphasize the spiritual formation of future ministers.", 22

[198] Martin E. Marty, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, Vol 10 in Modern American Protestantism and Its World. (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1993), xii.

[199] Bernard Ramm, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology.* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1983), 43.

[200] Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, "Introduction" in *Fundamentalisms Observed.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), vii.

Again, in the *The Fundamentalist Project*, Marty and Appleby start with a broad definition of fundamentalism before pointing out five qualities that they believe exemplify fundamentalists. Their definition is very helpful for the comparisons between the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Free Methodist Church that we will be looking at in the next two chapters. In differentiating fundamentalism from conservatism or traditionalism, the authors define those who adhere to a particular fundamentalist movement as persons who "no longer perceive themselves as reeling under the corrosive effects of secular life. On the contrary, they perceive themselves as fighting back, and doing so rather successfully."[201]

Marty and Appleby note that fundamentalists are militant.[202] They are 'fighting back.' They "begin as traditionalists who perceive some challenge or threat to their core identity, both social and personal. They are not frivolous, nor do they deal with peripheral assaults. If they lose on the central issues, they believe they lose everything. They react, they fight back with great innovative power."[203] The authors point out that not only do fundamentalists fight back against perceived attacks, they also 'fight for' a belief system or a worldview that they have inherited. In the case of Roberts and the Nazarites, we see this type of proto-fundamentalist impulse evidenced in the way that they defended themselves as the rightful inheritors of John Wesley's Methodism. Note again Roberts' words at the 1860 Layman's Conference as the FMC was being founded:

> Resolved, That our attachment to the doctrines, usages, spirit and discipline of Methodism is hearty and sincere. It is with the most profound grief that we have witnessed the departure of many of the ministers from the God-honored usages of Methodism. We feel bound to adhere to them, and to labor

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[201] Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman, "Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim," in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, "Introduction" in *Fundamentalisms Observed.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), vii.,255.
[202] As has been documented in the previous chapter, George Marsden also pointed out that militancy is a defining factor of those who could be characterized as fundamentalists.
[203] Marty and Appleby, ix.

> all we can, and to the best possible advantage, to promote the life and power of godliness. We recommend that those in sympathy with the doctrine of holiness, as taught by Wesley, should labor in harmony with the respective churches to which they belong. But, when this cannot be done, without continual strife and contention, we recommend the formation of Free Methodist Churches, as contemplated by the late convention held in the Genesee Conference, NY.[204]

It is not so much that the early Free Methodists embraced fundamentalist positions on issues. It is more that they were guilty at times of exhibiting the militancy of the later fundamentalists as they fought against what they perceived as clear declension within the Methodist Episcopal Church that they loved.

McKenna helpfully summarizes both the concerns expressed by Roberts in "New School Methodism" and then the decision of the 1860 General Conference. Roberts charged the Buffalo Regency with:

- subordinating devotion to beneficence in doctrine;
- combining regeneration and sanctification into one experience;
- distrusting the profession of deep Christian experience;
- displacing the class meeting, love feast and prayer meeting with social parties;
- building elaborate churches with rented pews and professional musicians to attract a fashionable audience;
- encouraging by silence, the adornment of gold and costly apparel; and
- selling pews and holding bazaars as the substitute for biblical stewardship.[205]

When the FMC leaders were expelled from the church, they felt that they were the true defenders of 'old school Methodism.' They were deeply concerned with the liberalism they felt was infiltrating the church; a liberalism which was producing a cold, formal religion. These early Free Methodists focused on worship and holiness, but were accused by their

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[204] *Minutes of the Laymen's Convention, Held in Wayne, Du Page Co., Ill., July 2, 1860.* Quoted in Snyder, 519.
[205] David L. McKenna, *A Future with a History: The Wesleyan Witness of the Free Methodist Church: 1960-1995 and Forward.* (Indianapolis, IN: Light and Life Communications, 1997), 23-24.

opponents of making religion "a system of outward symbols, of material ceremonies and corporal manifestations, of animal influence and nervous sensations."[206] The critique from their opponents culminated with the charge that Free Methodists "considered plainness in dress of greater moment than uprightness of character; … that an ornamental ribbon or flower upon a lady's bonnet was, in their eyes, an enormity greater than the sin of lying; and that wearing a ring or bracelet they thought was more dangerous and damning than covetousness or slander, and generally they preached with more powerful vehemence against superfluity of outward apparel, than against the breach of the ten commandments."[207]

The division in the Genesee Conference concerning the type of worship and practice the Nazarites were promoting is demonstrated in an article from the *Buffalo Advocate*, which Zahniser reminds us later attacked the Nazarites. The author writes,

> 'I believe in religion, but I do not believe in making such an ado about it. And this noisy religion, this loud praying and preaching, and shouting, I detest.' You do? But are you sure that this noisy religion is not of God? You have no right to disapprove what God approves. If you do, how can he look with approbation upon you? He cannot. It becomes you, therefore, to be exceedingly careful that you do not find yourself fighting against God in this matter.[208]

I would suggest that the issue here is not so much the theology and praxis of Roberts and the Nazarites, although that was certainly a challenge for some of their opponents. Instead, the rhetorical devices that Roberts and the Nazarites used to promote their 'old school' Methodism would have been exceedingly frustrating for his opponents and for leaders in

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[206] Clarence Howard Zahniser, *Earnest Christian: Life and Works of Benjamin Titus Roberts.* (Circleville, OH: Advocate Publishing House, 1957), 87 (quoting Roberts, *Why Another Sect,* 114-117.)
[207] Ibid, 87.
[208] Buffalo Advocate, (April 16, 1857). Reprinted by Zahniser, 92.

the conference that had to sort out the conflict. While David McKenna does not deny that personalities played a significant part in the conflict that developed, he argues first that the two sides were in place before Roberts arrived in Genesee. Second, McKenna raises what he claims to be a fundamental fact of history: "When the enthusiasm generated by the movement of God's Spirit is stifled within the established church, new forms for its expression will be found."[209] So, if we are seeking to be fair to the story of Roberts in the Genesee Conference, it is important to hear both sides. There is clear evidence that Roberts was popular and that his work as a pastor was successful. He was also most certainly using means that some of the pastors did not like. To be fair, men like John Robie, editor of the *Buffalo Advocate*, were harsh in their attacks on Roberts and the Nazarites. However, Roberts also seemed easily goaded into fights, and was happy to engage in those fights publicly, which gave him, the MEC, and other ministers in the conference a black eye.

The difference in focus between the two groups anticipates the break between progressives and conservatives a generation later.[210] Progressives really focused on the social gospel, while conservatives were more focused on defining holiness and seeking to lead holy lives. For example, the focus of the Regency was much the same as the social gospel emphasis of Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps*, which was first published in 1896 and had sold over twenty million copies by the mid 1930's. Sheldon was pastor in Topeka, Kansas, and sought to challenge his congregation to live as Jesus did.[211] The congregants were to read one chapter each Sunday night with the purpose of stimulating them to move

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[209] McKenna, 24.

[210] In fact, this difference continues to manifest itself as one core difference between the United Methodist Church and the Free Methodist Church.

[211] Charles Sheldon, *In His Steps.* (Chicago: The John C. Winston Company, 1937 (1896)). In the 1990's the ethos of *In His Steps* was revived in the What Would Jesus Do movement, complete with bracelets as reminders of one's commitment to follow Jesus. In fact, *What Would Jesus Do* was actually subtitle to *In His Steps*.

out of their spiritual lethargy.[212] The book was a novel based on I Peter 2:21, which says, "For here unto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow in his steps."[213]

Over time, numbers of Bible institutes and colleges were founded to counter the higher criticism and liberalism that were pervading many of the institutions of higher learning in America,[214] with Moody Bible Institute being the most famous. Another such institute, Asbury Theological Seminary, was founded in 1923 for the purpose of fighting against this Modernist thought and to hold to what they believed to be the fundamental doctrines of the faith. Though very specific, this is an important narrative to share because of the connections between ATS and the Free Methodist Church. The core of Asbury's beliefs, as published in the seminary's first bulletin read:

> Asbury Theological Seminary regards it fundamental to maintain in all its teachings the doctrines of the faith which have come down to us from the Apostles and the Fathers, the faith that has been tested through the age, the faith that gave birth to the Reformation and that in the latter days brought on the great Evangelical Revival in the days of John Wesley. All our teachings will range around the Bible as an inspired book; around the Cross as the center of Redemption's plan; around Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Son of God who died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God. In these days of tragic unbelief we must build a School of Theology at Asbury where

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[212] Friend of the author, "Foreword" to *In His Steps,* 6, 1-2.
[213] I Peter 2:21 KJV.
[214] Kinghorn, 31. Moody Bible Institute, Nyack College, Oberlin College, and Asbury College are a few examples of schools founded to buttress conservative theological positions. Kinghorn also cites a 1933 study by Winfred E. Garrison that is worth noting here, as it speaks to the theological climate, not only in which Asbury Theological Seminary was developing, but also the theological state generally of graduate schools of theology. –

- "85% of America's seminary students did not believe the Genesis account of creation.
- 71% did not believe that God performs miracles today.
- 90% did not believe in the existence of Satan.
- 95% thought that the Bible contains fictitious legends and mythology.
- 76% did not believe that Christ's death on the cross is essential for personal salvation.
- 76% rejected the existence of hell.
- 69% did not believe in the future resurrection of the body.
- 99% did not believe that Christ will return to reign over the world.
- 90% did not believe in the virgin birth of Christ." Kinghorn, 54-55.

> Divinity students will grow in Faith and Grace as well as in intellectual attainments, and where they can acquire a sound Theological training consistent with a sound Gospel faith.[215]

In the early 1940's, the Free Methodist Church desired to build its own seminary, but did not have the resources. The church was courted by Asbury Seminary's president, J. C. McPheeters, beginning in 1944; in 1946 the FMC's John Wesley Seminary Foundation was established, and twenty-nine Free Methodist students enrolled at Asbury Theological Seminary.[216] In his history of ATS, Kinghorn notes one of the reasons that the FMC was interested in an alliance with that seminary was that numbers of Free Methodist students were attending the Bible Seminary, a seminary in New York with unofficial Presbyterian ties, and some were converting to Presbyterianism.[217] The arrangement between ATS and the FMC gave Free Methodist students a conservative Wesleyan seminary option, and this arrangement continues today.

Kinghorn also describes a doctrinal conflict that arose in 1948 when FM Bishop Leslie Marston's son-in-law began to question some of the teachings of Claude Thompson, a new professor at ATS. This would mushroom into a major problem for ATS over the next decade. During the early stages of this conflict, Marston wrote, "If this problem becomes acute, it is bound to affect our [Free Methodist] denominational relationship [with the Seminary] adversely. We have bonds that can easily be severed and there may be many

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[215] As quoted by Kinghorn, 64. The new seminary's motto – 'The Whole Bible for the Whole World.' Kinghorn gives numerous examples of individuals connected with Asbury Theological Seminary citing concerns about modernism. Some of these were carried in H.C. Morrison's, *The Pentecostal Herald,* as well as in the ATS *Bulletin*. Morrison was the founder of Asbury Theological Seminary. These jeremiads lamented that Asbury was the lone Methodist Seminary staying true to a 'Wesleyan interpretation of the Scriptures,' Kinghorn, 75. At the time of ATS becoming an independent school, the trustees "charged Morrison's committee to 'guard positively against every form of modern [theological] liberalism,'" Kinghorn, 83.

[216] Kinghorn, 143-144.

[217] Kinghorn, 143.

who will be unable to see why we should continue for even another year [in] a relationship which involves us in such basic doctrinal confusion."[218] In fall of 1949 George Turner, a Free Methodist professor, was involved in attacks on Thompson's theology. Turner was one of 'The Nine' at ATS who led the charges against Thompson, which ultimately led to Thompson's resignation and the suspension of accreditation of ATS due to the inability of the ATS president, board, and trustees to deal with the situation in an effective and concise manner.[219] What is of course interesting here is that ATS was a school that the FMC chose to align with, knowing that ATS was founded to compete with modernism, and also that it was Free Methodists who were at the heart of this crusade against Claude Thompson.

That same year (1948), Carl F.H. Henry's book, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, was reviewed in *The Free Methodist.* The reviewer agreed with Henry's criticism of the fundamentalists' disengagement with 'social evils.' He thought that this book would have a valid place for Free Methodists, who he calls 'holiness Fundamentalists.' But the reviewer adds that another reason that fundamentalists should have an uneasy conscience is because of their lack of emphasis on 'heart holiness.'[220]

American religious fundamentalism is rooted in reason and modernism. Though Wesleyanism, with its four-fold methodology of reason, experience, tradition and Scripture does not naturally align with fundamentalism, at times in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Free Methodists were being strongly tempted to embrace some key

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[218] Kinghorn, 162, 165-166. Kinghorn is quoting a letter from Marston to Asbury's president, J.C. McPheeters dated Dec. 21, 1949. Though through several meetings with Thompson, McPheeters found him orthodox in theology, Marston wrote yet again asking for Thompson's dismissal. Placed on an investigative committee by the ATS board of trustees, Marston concurred with the committee's view that Thompson's views were theologically acceptable.

[219] Kinghorn, 167, 193-194.

[220] G. Ray Phillippi, "Review of *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism." The Free Methodist* 81:1 (Jan. 6, 1948), 13-14.

tenets of it. Over the next chapters, we will investigate two key doctrines of fundamentalism, the revelation and interpretation of Scripture and the doctrine of premillennial dispensationalism, and explore to what level the Free Methodist Church embraced or rejected those doctrines at her highest decision-making levels.

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Chapter 3 – Free Methodists and the Bible: Revelation and Interpretation

In the last chapter, we closely examined evangelicalism and fundamentalism, noting especially that there are different streams through which evangelicalism formed and has developed in America. We also observed how fundamentalism has developed largely, but not exclusively through a Presbyterian/ Princeton stream of Calvinist theology, and assessed how that theology is incompatible with Methodism, which developed within the Church of England. In this chapter, we will be considering an integral aspect of fundamentalism: the revelation and interpretation of Scripture. We will consider the history and theology of inerrancy as it evolved over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a tenet of fundamentalism as Christians responded to the challenges raised against the Bible during that period.,[221] consider the literal interpretive methodology of fundamentalists, and examine a case study which focuses on inerrancy and its place within the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Free Methodist Church. It is imperative to see how Free Methodists have 'received' the theology of inerrancy from several sources, and within a community of memory, and how the FMC has handled inerrancy in the past. This should inform Free Methodists as they consider ideas raised through inerrancy and literal interpretations of Scripture. I will argue in this chapter that the nineteenth-century doctrine of inerrancy, as a major tenet of fundamentalism, and the interpretive

[221] Note that it was a generally held principle throughout at least the first fifteen-hundred years of the church that the Bible was without error. It was not until the challenges brought about by Enlightenment thought (which will be looked at later in this chapter) that it was necessary to articulate theological positions that defended the authority (and inerrancy) of Scripture.

methodology of biblical literalism, often employed by fundamentalists, are not compatible with Free Methodist theology and practice.

The inerrancy of the Bible and literal interpretation of the Scriptures are arguably the primary theological doctrines that define fundamentalists. That said, there is an important distinction to be made between theories of revelation such as inerrancy and methodologies of biblical interpretation. Each, of course, intrinsically influences the other. Conservative evangelicals in the late nineteenth century and through the twentieth century were deeply concerned about attacks on the veracity and the authority of the Bible. Free Methodists shared many of these concerns, but while they entertained and then briefly adopted an inerrant statement on the Bible, the FMC never completely embraced the doctrine of inerrancy. I will briefly detail some of the significant historical and theological developments that are integral to understanding my thesis of why fundamentalism is incompatible with the FMC.

The Bible as sola scriptura

In 1517, Martin Luther famously nailed his 95 thesis statements to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenburg, Germany. Though this was not the first attempt to reform the church, it was certainly the most significant.[222] The resulting break from Catholicism was soon followed by reforms across Europe led by John Calvin in France, Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland and Henry VIII (and Thomas Cromwell) in England.[223] Many issues contributed

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[222] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity V.II The Reformation to the Present Day.* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 9, 14-17. In the 14th century, John Wycliffe and Jan Huss sought reform for the church via a return to the sources of the Christian faith; especially Scripture. Desiderius Erasmus also sought reform and immediately preceded Luther in the early 16th century. Erasmus, who focused on an inner obedience to God, was deeply respected.

[223] The Reformation in England was triggered by Henry VII's desire to secure an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon by Pope Clement VII. Clement's refusal in 1534 led to a split between England and Rome, with the king being named head of the church.

to these reformations, but at the core was the place of ultimate authority within Christianity: the Bible or the Church. For the reformers, it was the Bible. Indeed, in Luther's final response at his trial before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms (1521), he appealed to the authority of Scripture, claiming, "My conscience is a prisoner of God's Word. I cannot and will not recant, for to disobey one's conscience is neither just nor safe. God help me. Amen."[224]

Luther's understanding of *sola scriptura,* or "the Scripture Principle" was not simplistic. Wolfgang Vondey contended that Luther believed the 'Word' of God "referred to a complex relationship of Jesus Christ, the biblical texts, and the proclamation of the gospel, all of which can be designated as 'Word' without contradiction and form, but one Word of God in different dimensions."[225] For Luther, the authority of the Scriptures was integral, but must be paired with the "liturgy of the Word as a 'living voice' in the Christian life that is not only read but seen, heard, and experienced. Luther's Scripture principle did not reject the judgment of the theological tradition, but demanded that all doctrine conformed to the witness of the Spirit in Scripture."[226] There was no desire here on the part of the reformers to encourage individual Christians to read and interpret the Bible individually.[227] As will be demonstrated, this is much different than the biblical literalism of the later fundamentalists.

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[224] As quoted by Gonzalez, 35.
[225] Wolfgang Vondey, "Wesleyan Theology and the Disjointing of the Protestant Scripture Principle," *WTJ* 46:2 (Fall, 2011), 74-75.
[226] Vondey, 76.
[227] Matthew Knell, *Rediscovering the Reformation: Learning From the One Church in its Struggles.* Monarch Books, 2019, Kindle edition, Introduction, Location 65.

The Roman Catholic Church placed Scripture and the traditions of the church as equal authorities in guiding Christianity. N.T. Wright notes that in the medieval period, four different senses of Scripture were recognized; literal, allegorical, analogical and moral. Theoretically, different interpretive lenses helped to substantiate the authority of Scriptures, especially concerning those passages that were considered difficult.[228] Up through the Middle Ages, allegory had been a favored interpretive lens of many theologians in the Church.[229] This, coupled with the Catholic appeal to tradition, had become the primary interpretive framework for the Bible by the sixteenth century. According to Wright, "(t)his meant that anything which could be regarded as well established in ecclesial tradition, even if there was nothing about it in the Bible, and even if it appeared to go against some of the things which the Bible itself said, could be taught as authoritative and backed up with clever allegorical exegesis."[230] The reformers focused on a *more* literal type of scriptural interpretation, but one that still took into account the traditions of the church and the experience of the preached word and the experience of the believer. What this meant for them in terms of Scripture was "*the sense that the first writers intended."*[231] Thus, if a particular passage was believed to be intended as a metaphor, then that is how it should be understood. For example, when Jesus takes the bread and says, "This is my body," the reformers did not need to woodenly read this as literally meaning that the bread was the

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[228] N.T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture.* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 68-69. Robert McAfee Brown, citing St. Thomas Aquinas, identified four meanings that could be found in the text. These were literal, allegorical, moral and eschatological. *The Spirit of Protestantism.* Oxford: OUP, 1961 (1865), 68.
[229] Brown, 68.
[230] Wright, 71. See also, Brown, 68.
[231] Wright, 73. Italics are Wright's emphasis.

body, as was taught in the doctrine of transubstantiation. They could, and did, interpret this as metaphor.[232]

Weak and at times corrupt leadership in the Catholic church during the early medieval period allowed for abuses in Church teaching and practices. The Scriptures were largely available only in Latin, and the Church carefully guarded interpretations.[233] Those protesting the perceived abuses of the Church believed that Scripture should have a greater priority, or even primacy in church doctrine and authority and that all should be able to access and interpret the Scriptures for themselves.[234] Martin Luther translated the Bible into German, thus placing it into the hands of the laity. Though this was not the first attempt to translate the Bible into the vernacular, previous attempts were at times met with hostility and even death.[235]

The issue of the primacy of Scripture in the church has been both beneficial and problematic for Protestants. While focusing on the authority of Scriptures helped to reform theology and also prevent abuses such as those that had crept into the Catholic Church,

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[232] It is important to note here, as Wright does, that the literalism of the reformers is different than the literalism of the later fundamentalists, who attempted to use the idea of the Scriptural literalism of the reformers to support their own reading of the texts. See Wright, 73-74.

[233] One can argue that there were some clear benefits to the control that the Church had over interpretation. The Scriptures are complex and can be easily misinterpreted and abused. We are also witnesses to the ceaseless multiplication of Protestant denominations, much of which can be traced to variant interpretations of Scripture.

[234] Vondey, 73-74.
This is a subject we will return to later in the chapter, but note that Justo Gonzalez has argued that Luther believed the "Bible was the Word of God because in it Jesus, the Word incarnate, comes to us. … Final authority rests neither in the church nor in the Bible, but in the gospel, Jesus Christ, that had made both the Bible and the church." Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity V.II The Reformation to the Present Day.* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 48.

[235] Tony Lane, "The Crown on English Bibles: The King James Version was the Culmination of 200 Turbulent Years of Bible Translation," *Christian History* 43:XIII, No.3, 6-9. It can reasonably be argued that William Tyndale (1536) was executed for his work translating the Bible into English, though there were clearly other important issues, including the integral issue of whether Scripture or the Church had supreme authority, an issue that would shape the Protestant Reformation. Meanwhile, John Wycliffe's body was dug up and burned 43 years after his death (1384) and his ashes were thrown into a river.

putting Scriptures in the vernacular also allowed everyone the opportunity to interpret Scripture for themselves, which, especially in the later American context, caused a great variety of interpretation, as well as questions over whose interpretations were most valid.[236] This, of course, has led to many problems within Protestantism, including the ceaseless fracturing of denominations that continues to this day.[237] However, there have been efforts over time to unite denominations. Though this has been more common within progressive denominations which have been more open to looking past 'minor' theological differences, there have been exceptions. One such instance was the proposed merger of the Free Methodist Church and the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Though they talked about and worked towards merger for almost sixty years, a primary reason they were unable to consummate a merger was their view of Scripture, and particularly the issue of inerrancy and the interpretation of Scripture, the subject on which this chapter is focused.

Merger and Inerrancy – A Case Study

The Wesleyan Methodist and Free Methodist Churches have come close to merging on three occasions. Studying the proposed merger and the issues that ultimately lead it to be unsuccessful sheds light on the ways in which the two churches have handled fundamentalist doctrine and also how fundamentalism is incompatible with the FMC. The history of the two churches are deeply intertwined. Some of the early Free Methodist ministers occasionally served in Wesleyan Methodist churches.[238] My focus is not so much

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[236] Lane, 6.
[237] Stewart G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1971(1931)), 8. Cole, and many other modern scholars, have noted this important difference concerning the key point of authority and interpretation for Catholics (Church) and Protestants (Scripture).
[238] For example, Leslie Marston's father pastored at times in both denominations. George L. Ford, *Like a Tree Planted: The Life Story of Leslie Ray Marston*. Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1985, 16-17.

on what the Wesleyans were doing, but more-so how this attempt at merger forced the FMC to think carefully and make decisions on these two key doctrines of fundamentalism

On Oct. 27, 1976, at the third seating of the Board of Administration of the Free Methodist Church (FMC), merger talks between the FMC and the Wesleyan Methodist Church (WMC) were officially put to rest.[239] This was the third attempt at merger between these two bodies, both of whom had separated from the parent Methodist Episcopal Church over slavery and perceived issues of declension in the parent body (particularly concerning the doctrine of holiness).[240] The 1976 decision was particularly painful, bringing to termination a process that had practically begun with a joint commission between the two bodies which was set up and which began to meet in 1943.[241] Merger had almost succeeded in the early 1950's with the publication of a joint hymnal, *Hymns of the Living Faith*, and a Book of Discipline, but the Wesleyans decisively voted against the merger in 1955.[242]

Throughout the twentieth century, leaders within both churches had recognized the deep similarities and kinship between the two denominations. There was certainly cooperation and cross pollination between the churches. For example, while Free Methodist bishop, Leslie Marston's parents were Free Methodists, his father sometimes pastored in Wesleyan Methodist Churches.[243] The first conversations on merger originated

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[239] This is from page 157 of the Board of Admin. Minutes – This book of minutes includes those dating from July 1, 1974- Aug. 24, 1979.
[240] *Doctrines and Disciplines of the Wesleyan Methodist Church.* (Ann Arbor, MI: N. Sullivan:-Printer, 1842). The 1842 Wesleyan Book of Discipline notes three principle reasons for their secession from the Methodist Episcopal Church. These are: slavery, governance (power of the clergy,) and "The promotion of true Christianity," or Scriptural holiness, p. 3-5
[241] The FMC began to pursue this on recommendation of the 1943 General Conference. *Minutes of the June 14th , Sixteenth Sitting of the 1943 General Conference*, p.700-701. The first merger talks between the two churches actually began over thirty years previous to the 1943 general conference.
[242] Robert Black and Keith Drury, *The Story of the Wesleyan Church.* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2012 (2018)), 174.
[243] Ford, 16-17.

in 1903. Free Methodist bishop, Wilson T. Hogue was a visiting delegate to the Wesleyan General Conference that year and suggested that the two churches consider merger. Though there was discussion by both churches for years, merger talk was put aside for a time in 1919.[244] In 1943 leaders in both churches began to take more serious action on the issue of a merger. A joint commission was formed, and after a few years of discussion, developed a report that was published and presented to both churches in 1947. This report identified seven areas as potential problems for any plan of union. These were:

1. Pastoral placement and superintendency
2. Educational institutions
3. Doctrinal standards
4. Ordination
5. Conference boundaries
6. Missions
7. Corporate problems

After exploring the differences within these areas, the commission noted that there needed to be future conversations, but their ultimate recommendation was: "Following long study and conference on the question of church union it is our consensus that merging of the two denominations is possible if there be the will to union among our respective groups."[245] They also included a proposed tentative plan of union. As mentioned, the work advanced to the point of outlining a planned name (The United Wesleyan Methodist Church of America), a joint book of discipline, a joint hymnal, and a constitution.[246]

Both in the 1950's and then again in the 1970's, merger seemed imminent, but there were a couple possible hitches. The first was the relationship of the denominations to their

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[244] Black and Drury, 116, 136.
[245] *The Tentative Report of The Joint Commission of The Wesleyan Methodist Church of America and The Free Methodist Church of North America on Church Union.* (Syracuse, NY: The Wesley Press, 1951). p.6.
[246] Ibid, 11-35.

colleges, which was noted in the report from 1947. The Wesleyans owned their schools, while the Free Methodists did not.[247] The authority of the Scriptures, and whether they were inerrant, was the other major significant issue forestalling the potential merger. The *Mid-Week Reminder* #552 of the Greenville FMC, dated May 14, 1974, provides us a window into the debate. There, future bishop Donald Bastian made observations about the merger meetings he had attended. He described the committees of the two churches as "churchmen at their staunchest." He noted that "the debate was careful and respectful," and that there were a few intense moments. Finally, he stated, "The doctrinal issue that excited the greatest debate was the statement on the Scriptures." Bastian asserted that a compromise statement on Scripture was reached, but for the Wesleyans, a final decision on the statement would have to be ratified at their 1976 General Conference, as they had determined that an adequate statement on Scripture was "a prerequisite for eventual merger at their last general meeting."[248]

In the midst of the merger negotiations, Dr. W. Richard Stephens, a Free Methodist member of the Committee on Merger Exploration (C.O.M.E.), was invited to apply for the position of provost at Wheaton College. Concerns arose within Wheaton over Stephens' position on Scripture, and Stephens was encouraged to read Clark Pinnock's work on inerrancy and respond to it.[249] In a letter to Dr. Arthur Volle, longtime faculty member at Wheaton, dated April 16th, 1973, Stephens presents the Free Methodist position well, and

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[247] While this was certainly an important issue that caused some consternation for the Committee on Merger Exploration (C.O.M.E), it is not relevant to the issue of inerrancy, which is the focus of this chapter.
[248] Donald Bastian, This was his pastoral address in the Mid-Week Reminder, a one page weekly in church circular of the Greenville, FMC dated May 14, 1974. No. 552.
[249] Early in his academic career, Pinnock was a strong advocate for Biblical inerrancy, which included his publication, *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility* (1967). He later modified his views on Biblical authority.

because of his prominence in the FMC, it is helpful to consider his letter in full here.

Stephens wrote,

> After reading the inerrancy sections you mentioned in Mr. Pinnock's booklet, I think, if I understand him, that I agree with his intention relative to the Scriptures. As I see it, his intention is to affirm that the Scriptures do in fact contain those truths of God which he inspired certain men to write for our edification, instruction, and ultimate redemption. I do not doubt at all that God our Father represented accurately his true nature – truth and love – and intentions – care and redemption – in those natural and special disclosures He shared with the Biblical writers. My understanding of God is that he does not err nor is He fallible. These are not the attributes all men share and it is the absence of these attributes which taint all men that do. It appears that Mr. Pinnock and I further agree, as I understand him, that the truths of God relative to His will for man, contained in the Scriptures, are not themselves errorful or fallible. Hence, the Scriptures are a reliable and absolutely necessary record for knowing about God's creative and redemptive activity as manifested in Jesus of Nazareth, called the Christ.
>
> At points, Mr. Pinnock seems to imply that God set aside all of the darkness of the glasses through which Biblical writers saw and read our Father's self-disclosures. Therefore, he seems to conclude that the original autographs were free from error of any kind. Since Mr. Pinnock admits that we do not have the originals, this must be a statement of belief about an empirical matter but without any empirical way of checking its veracity. I guess, Dr. Volle, I differ with Mr. Pinnock in that I describe the inerrancy to God's truths and not to the human vessel, the written language. However, the few errors do not mar the authority of the Scriptures. And I say again, that merely because I cannot affirm the total and complete linguistic inerrancy of the autographs, having never seen them, does not mean that I find the Scriptures lacking authority relative to man's redemption in Jesus. To the contrary, the Scriptures are so uniquely divine in their essential message that my experience of God through faith in Him based on the Scriptures is rewarding beyond imagination. In fact, I stake my life with the Father of whom the Scriptures speak.
>
> It is easy to be argumentative with Mr. Pinnock, and I have tried not to be. But I must point out that his tendency to equate Truth only with a written proposition confounds me as a follower of Jesus. Jesus' own statement "I am the way, the

> Truth, and the life," as well as John's "The Word became Flesh," seem to suggest that Truth in the Christian view can be nonpropositional. May I say that I am vitally interested in the Truth, both propositionally and incarnationally. When we educate ourselves and our students, through the Spirit's help, to organize our lives around the Truth, then we are prepared to become redemptive leaven, light, and salt in our world. We must put on Christ.
> Let me say, Dr. Volle, that I do appreciate your concern that Wheaton's faculty and administrators be doctrinally sound, as you define it. I, too, am vitally interested that our Christian colleges be Christian, and this is imperative for the faculty and administration. If it appears that my language formulations, as a non-theologian, when compared to yours at Wheaton, do not point to a common faith in a common reality, then I will certainly understand. I do not want to be a diseasing element to any college I might identify with.[250]

Stephens was not hired at Wheaton, but was later hired at Greenville College (now University), a Free Methodist school where he served as president from 1977-1993.

Throughout the merger negotiations in the 1950's, a collaborative *Book of Discipline* was produced by the joint merger committee. However, the Article on Scripture was an important point of contention and the Wesleyans decisively voted against merger with the Free Methodists in 1955.[251] Following the failed merger attempt, the Wesleyan Methodists formulated a new statement of their own on Scripture which strengthened their position on inerrancy.

The final attempt at merger was again stalled by the aforementioned concerns of the Wesleyans concerning the relationship of their churches to their colleges, as well as the statement on Scripture. At their 1972 general conference, a motion came to the floor to preserve the 1955 statement on Scripture. There,

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[250] Lloyd H. Knox, ed., *A River of Streams: Writings of W. Richard Stephens. Eighth President of Greenville College.* (Greenville, IL: Greenville College, 1991), 117-118.
[251] Black and Drury, 193, 227.

Wesleyan superintendent emeritus, Roy Nicholson argued passionately that the strong and comprehensive language on inerrancy from 1955 be retained. Though he was opposed by those who sought to sustain merger hopes, the motion passed. If merger were to come to fruition, it would be the Free Methodists who would have to acquiesce. The Wesleyans were unwilling to accept a compromise statement on Scripture, preferring their more robust statement on inerrancy. However, in anticipation of the merger, in 1974 the FMC had made the compromise (inerrant) position their official Article of religion. While many FMC leaders were not satisfied with the inerrant position, it was the official statement of the church for more than 15 years, and many within the church did desire and support a strong statement on inerrancy. Free Methodists voted in 1974 to wait until the 1976 Wesleyan general conference before approving merger, but in 1976, the Wesleyans voted to bring an end to the negotiations. Perhaps merger fatigue had set in,[252] but by 1976, the will to merge was no longer pursued by either church.[253]

It seems clear in this instance that while the FMC struggled with whether to maintain a conservative view on Scripture, or whether to compromise with the Wesleyans and accept an inerrant position, the Wesleyans were definitely *fighting* for what must be seen as the fundamentalist position in this instance. There is no question, as we shall see, that there were Free Methodists who desired the FMC to embrace the fundamentalist

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[252] Ed. "Free Methodist Conference Report" *Convention Herald*, Sept. 1969, p.5. The *Convention Herald*, a publication of the Interchurch Holiness Convention published a brief article and quote one from *Christianity Today* about the potential merger. The CH notes that FM's had cooled to merger because the Wesleyan Methodist/ Pilgrim Holiness merger had left the Wesleyans "dead in the water." This is certainly an odd outsider take.

[253] Black and Drury, 227-228. Note that the Wesleyans had already worked through a successful merger with the Pilgrim Holiness Church in 1968.

positions on this and other issues. Something to keep in mind as these two churches, so similar in history, theology, and doctrine, met is George Marsden's description of fundamentalists as 'militant' in their 'fierce opposition' to modernism.[254] The issue of inerrancy, he later adds, became a firm test of the faith for fundamentalists.[255] So, we see here in this case study the Wesleyans exemplifying both the fundamentalist mindset and doctrine. At the end of this chapter, I will return to the attempted merger and look in more detail at the Articles of both churches concerning Scripture and their significance.

Inerrancy in American Christianity

In the previous section, we were introduced to the issue of inerrancy and examined a case study which considered the different ways in which the Free Methodist Church and the Wesleyan Methodist Connection (Church) have received Biblical inerrancy during their attempts to merge. In this section, we will more closely explore the issue of Biblical inerrancy and the way in which the doctrine developed in America.

The Bible cannot simply be read and understood without interpretation. The question of what exactly the Bible is, what it means for it to be authoritative, how it is to be interpreted, and whose interpretation should be authoritative are tremendously important for Christians to consider. Fundamentalist Christians cannot consider the Bible to be fully authoritative and trustworthy unless it is inerrant. While there are important nuances concerning inerrancy within fundamentalism, it remains one of the key components that shapes the way fundamentalists approach and interpret the Bible.

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[254] George M Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 4.
[255] Ibid, 239.

Between 1910 and 1915, a series of articles entitled *The Fundamentals* was printed and sent to ministers, missionaries and other Christian leaders. These articles sought to defend Christianity against the various concerns raised by modernism. The first volume of *The Fundamentals* largely focused on attacking abuses within biblical criticism and defending traditional, conservative views on the inspiration of Scripture. For example, the first article published in the first edition of *The Fundamentals* was an attack on higher criticism. In speaking of the authorship of the Pentateuch, Dyson Hague, an Anglican rector and lecturer at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto demonstrates one of the great concerns of fundamentalists, writing,

> If there were three or four, or six, or nine authorized original writers, why not fourteen, or sixteen, or nineteen? And then another and more serious thought must follow that. Who were these original writers, and who originated them? If there were manifest evidences of alterations, manipulations, inconsistencies and omissions by an indeterminate number of unknown and unknowable and undateable redactors, then the question arises, who were these redactors, and how far had they authority to redact, and who gave them this authority? If the redactor was the writer, was he an inspired writer, and if he was inspired, what was the degree of his inspiration; was it partial, plenary, inductive, or indeterminate? This is a question of questions: What is the guarantee of the inspiration of the redactor, and who is its guarantor? Moses, we know, and Samuel we know, and Daniel we know, but ye anonymous and pseudonymous, who are ye? … a mutilated cento or scrap-book of anonymous compilations, with its pre- and post- exilic redactors and redactions, is confusion worse confounded.[256]

Hague also points out that the most serious consequence of the conclusions of higher criticism concerning the Old Testament is that they oppose what he considers the full acceptance by Jesus of the Old Testament, including Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. In fact, Hague argues, if one accepts the conclusions of higher criticism, then either Jesus

[256] Dyson Hague, "The History of the Higher Criticism," pp. 9-42 in *The Fundamentals*. V. I edited by R.A. Torrey. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003 (1917)), 31.

knew that what he was teaching regarding the Old Testament was false, but still he taught it as truth, or he demonstrates that he is not omniscient, in that he accepted as truth the fables and myths of the Old Testament. If we cannot trust Jesus as a teacher on these more mundane issues, how can we trust what he teaches us of doctrinal truth and as a revelation of God?[257] Clearly, the conclusions of higher criticism were troubling for conservative Christians, and especially for those who held to an inerrant view of the Scriptures. As will be demonstrated, Free Methodists did share many of these same concerns

In a later chapter of *The Fundamentals*, W. H. Griffith Thomas, also of Wycliffe College, notes that both the Bible and Jesus are called the Word of God. He points out that Jesus, as the Word, "is the personal and visible expression of the invisible God," much as a word is used as a means of expressing a thought, even if it cannot do so purposely.[258] Thomas reasons that Jesus, as the Word, "reveals God and conveys God's will to us in such a way as to be inerrant and infallible. As the incarnate Word, He is infallible."[259] From this, Thomas concludes that if Jesus is to reveal God, then everything he says, every assertion that he makes, must be true. Further, he reasons, the things that Jesus said about the Old Testament must also be true, writing,

> But what we do say is that anything in the Old Testament stated by our Lord as a fact, or implied as a fact, is, or ought to be, thereby closed for those who hold Christ to be infallible. Criticism can do anything that is not incompatible with the statements of our Lord; but where Christ has spoken, surely 'the matter is closed.'[260]

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[257] Hague, 34-36.
[258] W.H. Griffith Thomas, "Old Testament Criticism and New Testament Christianity," pp. 127-148 in *The Fundamentals*. V. I edited by R.A. Torrey. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003 (1917)), 144.
[259] Thomas, 144.
[260] Thomas, 145.

Thomas is clear that Jesus held a 'deep reverence' for the Old Testament. It is very important to note Thomas' argument here that one cannot say that Jesus was limited in his knowledge during his earthly life, and merely held the prevailing Jewish views of the Old Testament common in his day. For, to Thomas, Jesus was 'the Word,' and as mentioned earlier, the Word "claimed to speak from God, and … everything He said had the Divine warrant."[261] For those who accept this argument, one primary result is that Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is affirmed. So, too, opined Thomas, were the books in question at that time, including Isaiah, Daniel, Jonah, and the miracles, all of which he believed that Jesus clearly affirmed as historical.[262]

Free Methodists were certainly not unaware of the concerns being raised by biblical criticism. One example comes from the minutes of the Washington Conference of the FMC. Regarding historical criticism, the Conference reports,

> In the religious world of literature the last two decades especially have witnessed a marvelous revolution, which is now sweeping forward with increasing power. Under the withering effects of this destructive criticism thousands of heretofore orthodox Christians, in the ranks of both the ministry and laity, are being swept from their moorings, out into the fog banks and maze of an uncertain faith touching the fundamental and cardinal truths of the Bible and our holy religion. … Much of the class of literature, which a decade or two ago ministered to a rugged moral and religious faith and character, now eliminates religion and deals with socialistic questions and New Thought problems. If the standards maintained by us as setters forth of the Pauline doctrines of spiritual religion , so specifically and systematically defined by the immortal John Wesley in the eighteenth century, are correct, then there is grave cause for alarm touching the great falling away from the faith, as seen in the vast number of publications which make up so much of the religious literature of the twentieth century. The foregoing facts cause us to rejoice most heartily in being able to commend to

[261] Thomas, 147.
[262] Thomas, 146.

> the public the Free Methodist publishing house in Chicago, Illinois, which does not handle in its stock, or publications any that are not in the strictest sense orthodox.[263]

The role of Reformed thought is essential in the elaboration of the inerrant position as it developed within the American context in the nineteenth century as a response to challenges to the authority of the Bible.[264] Reformed theologians have focused on the total depravity of humans and the absolute sovereignty of God. Total depravity means that humans will always be sinful and flawed, so much so, that many from the Reformed tradition believe that humans cannot choose God, but instead must be chosen by God (predestination). On the other hand, while Wesleyan-Arminians believe that humans are depraved and in need of God's grace, they also believe in prevenient grace; that the Holy Spirit is at work in the hearts and lives of all people, drawing them to God, and that humans have both the freedom and the ability to accept or reject God's grace.[265] Dennis Bratcher helpfully spells out the implications of Reformed theology on an understanding of what the Bible is:

> Because of the total depravity of humanity, the emphasis on the complete and absolute sovereignty of God comes to the foreground. From the Reformed perspective, God's sovereignty is understood as the absolute of everything, described in terms of "omni," (all), infinity, perfection, and similar superlatives. God's sovereignty in this absolute sense extends even to human decision and the flow of human history. Nothing occurs in God's creation without God specifically willing that it should occur. Human freedom is subsumed within God's sovereignty or denied altogether.[266]

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[263] Editor, "Minutes of the Nineteenth Annual Session, held at North Yakima, Washington, April 28-May 3, 1914" pp. 5-15 in *Conference Minutes, 1914.* Chicago, IL: The Free Methodist Publishing House, 1914, 11.
[264] Certainly, Christians throughout history have held a robust, and even inerrant view of Scripture. What I am referring to here is the defense of the position of inerrancy that developed in North America as a response to the challenges being raised by higher criticism.
[265] Dennis R. Bratcher, "Thinking about the Bible Theologically: Inerrancy, Inspiration, and Revelation," in *Rethinking the Bible.* Richard P. Thompson and Thomas Jay Oord, eds, (Nampa, ID: SacraSage Press, 2018), 51.
[266] Ibid, 51.

Free Methodists do subscribe to the doctrine of original sin, but they interpret it in a different way than those of the Reformed tradition. In 1860, Article VII of the FMC, *Of Original or Birth Sin,* states,

> Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam, as the Pelagians do vainly talk, but it is the corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil and that continually.[267]

In the mid twentieth century, Bishop emeritus Don Bastian reflected on this Article in a book produced for prospective members. He wrote,

> This article … does not reflect high Calvinism which holds that man 'is wholly deprived of original righteousness.' It is more nearly aligned with the Church of England which is not so sweeping in its doctrine of natural depravity. Methodism holds to a doctrine of total depravity, but it defines total depravity in terms of its extent rather than its intent. That is, man is totally depraved in that every part of his being is affected by sin, but he is not totally depraved in that he is as wicked as he could be. … But the redemptive work of Jesus Christ effected a partial restoration which is to the whole human race an unconditional benefit of the Atonement. And, since Christ was the 'lamb slain from the foundation of the world,' that benefit has stood above the human race from the very moment of the Fall, thus holding man in a redeemable relationship to God. This is what is meant by the term, *prevenient grace*, a grace which goes before man's personal faith for salvation and which holds him in a savable relationship to God.[268]

It is important to understand this distinction between Wesleyans (Free Methodists) and those of the Reformed tradition concerning the effects of the Fall, and in this instance the way that an understanding of the Fall affects an understanding of the inspiration of Scripture. If we look at the very next Article in the 1860 Free Methodist Book of Discipline,

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[267] *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Free Methodist Church.* (Buffalo: Published by B.T. Roberts, 1860), 20.
[268] Donald N. Bastian, *The Mature Church Member.* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1963), 31-32.

we see further how Reformed and Wesleyan theologies contribute to this understanding. In Article VIII - Of Free Will, we read,

> The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and works to faith and calling upon God, wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasing and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ enabling us, that we may have a good will, working with us, when we have that good will.[269]

Note that much like with the article on original sin above, Bastian points out the Methodists hold that all people have a "capacity for spiritual life." The atoning work of Christ affects all and gives the ability to choose to respond to God freely. Bastian continues,

> The result of all this is that though man is a sinner by nature, he is at the same time personally responsible for every act of sin he commits. Whenever he does what he knows to be wrong he is guilty because he knows at the same time that he did not have to do what he did. This is a testimony to the freedom of his will.[270]

This importance of the sovereignty of God guides the way in which the later fundamentalists defend Scripture. Bratcher writes,

> Many applied the ideas of God's total control to Scripture. This naturally leads to believing that *God* must have written Scripture. God could *never* trust sinful, flawed, and imperfect humans with Scripture, because they would introduce errors and destroy its reliability …From this conclusion came the idea of inerrancy that emphasizes God's control of the production and preservation of the Scriptures, with the attendant theories of inspiration that would support such a view (dictation and some forms of verbal inspiration).[271]

It is also important to think about revelation in a more generic sense. The Bible is a record for Jews and Christians of the revelation of God. It is "the witness that the community of

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[269] *Doctrines and Discipline*, 20-21.
[270] Bastian, 33.
[271] Bratcher, 51. (Emphases are in the original). Obviously, no one believes God took pen and papyrus in hand and wrote the Scriptures, but rather the idea here is that God closely guided every aspect of the production of the Scriptures.

faith has given about revelation."[272] The primary point of revelation is God. Revelation is a means to understand and know God. It is focused on relationship as opposed to propositional truth. God chose to reveal Godself in time and space, and the Scriptures are a means of recording and also of reflecting on God's self-disclosure via the community of faith (both Israel and the church). Bratcher reminds us that "(w)e have no direct access to those events. We only have mediated access through the witness of the community."[273]

In a helpful critique of the way in which fundamentalists read the Bible, Kathleen Boone argues that for many, giving in on this issue of inerrancy opens the door to all sorts of other concerns. Boone muses,

> Suppose God's text has, through human agency, become untrustworthy or corrupt. Suppose important aspects of the creation narrative are inevitably 'lost in translation' from ancient Hebrew to English? Suppose the Bible is not a coherent, divinely inspired book at all, but a collection of humanly written texts which are a mosaic witness to Judeo-Christian religious belief. If any of these suppositions is the case, it is obvious that I can no longer open the King James Version here on my desk and read with total confidence, knowing that each and every word is the very word of God.[274]

By the second half of the nineteenth century, questions such as these were making their way to America through German higher criticism and Darwin's theory of evolution. In 1869, Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. predicted that American Protestantism, which was clearly the dominant religious position in America, was going to crumble. The Protestant hegemony was based on a blend of faith, science, Scripture, shared morality and civilization. But Holmes believed that this was all going to collapse, as the Bible could no

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[272] Ibid, 55.
[273] Ibid, 56.
[274] Kathleen C. Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism.* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 23-24.

longer stand up to scientific standards.[275] He wrote, "The truth is staring the Christian world in the face, that the stories of the old Hebrew books cannot be taken as literal statements of fact."[276] Holmes did add that he did not believe that the church would give any kind of 'honest avowal' to the truths raised through Biblical criticism.[277]

Criticism of the history and the science of the Bible were perceived by many conservative Christians as attacks on the Bible. Important German theologians who were using the historical-critical methods included Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1835), David Strauss (1808-1874), whose *Life of Christ* was translated into English by popular novelist George Eliot, and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). They were building off the work of Immanuel Kant, and Kant's denial of the ability to have 'objective knowledge of supersensible objects.' Schleiermacher taught that we can only know God through experience in the 'immediate self-consciousness.' All Christian doctrines arise from out of these experiences and can only be 'second order' knowledge. It is not through Scripture, dogma, or rational understanding that a person knows God. It is through an awakening to one's dependence on and relation to Christ.[278] We will return to this question of what and how one can know, and how it relates to a fundamentalist's understanding of Scripture later in this chapter.

George Marsden argues that for many conservative Protestants, the "authority for their whole belief system seemed to rest on this authority (the truth of the Bible). If the

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[275] George A. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture. 9th ed. (New York: OUP, 2006), 17.
[276] Oliver Wendell Holmes, "To Frederic H. Hedge," dated Dec. 8, 1869 in *Life and Letters of Oliver Wendell Holmes*. Vol. 2, John T. Morse, Jr. editor. (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1896), 296.
[277] Holmes, 296-297.
[278] Jacqueline Mariña, "Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst," pp.1131-1132 in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity."* Edited by Daniel Patte. (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 1131-1132.

Bible were not true, then on what did Protestantism, the religion of *scriptura sola*, rest?"[279] N.T. Wright adds that over time, what developed in Protestant Christianity is "a great gulf between those who want to prove the historicity of everything reported in the Bible in order to demonstrate that the Bible is 'true' after all and those who, committed to living under the authority of scripture, remain open to what scripture itself actually teaches and emphasizes."[280]

Even before historical criticism had made any significant inroads in America, the issue of slavery had Christians in America reflecting on the way in which they interpreted the Bible. E. Brooks Hollifield notes that slavery "compelled some theologians to recognize that they had to choose between biblical literalism and a form of interpretation that took into account historical criticism, the social and cultural context of the Biblical writing, diversity and development within the canon, and the force of presuppositions in biblical scholarship."[281] He also demonstrates the way in which a Baconian literal interpretation of Scripture only ended at an impasse with both sides holding firmly to their preferred inductive interpretations.[282]

William Ellery Channing's 1835 publication, *Slavery*, argued that the general tenor of the teachings of the New Testament led to an opposition to and subversion of slavery, and that this tenor should be held superior to the few passages which were being used to support slavery. Indeed, he argued that the apostle Paul was unable to fully oppose slavery in his historical context without seriously undermining his opportunities to teach and

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[279] Marsden, 37.
[280] N.T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture.* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 95.
[281] E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 495.
[282] Holifield, 497.

spread Christianity.[283] Holifield helpfully posits that this lead to a "commonplace of abolitionist argument that not everything in the Bible had equal authority.[284] This was obviously considered a problematic development by many conservative Christians who would soon be seeking to buttress the authority of the entire Bible against liberalism.

Inerrancy was not a completely new concept in the nineteenth century. However, because of the challenges being raised against Scripture, theologians at Princeton University crafted a carefully worded statement on inerrancy that they believed to be in line with the traditional teachings of historic Christianity. They claimed that the text, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, was "absolutely errorless," and Marsden rightly points out that the fact that many Protestants were making inerrancy a central doctrine demonstrates that this was the definitive point of defense in the struggle against the challenges of modernism.[285]

Claude Welch has detailed that during the late nineteenth century crisis over Biblical authority, "many conservative revivalist groups were looking for a lifeboat and climbed aboard the Princeton theology to ride out the storm. They stayed on board this lifeboat so long that many forgot that they didn't really belong there and gradually took their identity from this shared experience. Thus contrary to most interpreters of the history, many evangelical groups were not originally committed to 'inerrancy' formulations of the doctrine of Scripture but began to adopt them under this influence."[286] As has been

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[283] Holifield, 497-498.
[284] Holifield, 497-498.
[285] Marsden, 37-38. Marsden also notes that for many conservative evangelicals, affirming inerrancy became the test of whether one was really a Christian. See also, 239.
[286] Donald W. Dayton, "Yet Another Layer of the Onion: Or Opening the Ecumenical Door to Let the Riffraff in," *The Ecumenical Review* 40:1 (Jan. 1988), 100. Dayton does not cite Welch, but does note that he is indebted to Welch for this proposal.

documented, it would be in a later 'battle for the Bible' period that Free Methodists would briefly adopt an inerrant statement on Scripture under the influence of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection during merger negotiations.

From 1871 to 1873, Charles Hodge published his three volume *Systematic Theology.* Hodge was a highly visible theologian at Princeton Seminary and taught thousands of students preparing for ministry over more than a quarter of a century. Later evangelicals, including fundamentalists, adopted some of his ideas, so it is important to consider his teaching on inspiration and inerrancy in some detail.

In terms of their inquiries concerning biblical revelation, the early nineteenth-century Princeton theologians, including Archibald Alexander (1772-1851), Samuel Miller (1769-1850), Charles Hodge (1797-1878), and Joseph Addison Alexander (1809-1860) were not at first responding to the concerns raised by evolution, but rather the challenges posed by the growing awareness of other ancient histories from Africa, Asia and the Americas.[287] As with other challenges to theology in the American context, this issue had already been confronted by European scholars in the early modern era. At Princeton, differences in methodological practices led to significant dissimilarities in the ways that these theologians approached both Genesis and the other ancient histories.[288]

Hodge first makes a distinction between revelation and inspiration, noting that revelation is focused on the communication of knowledge, while the purpose of God's inspiration is to "secure infallibility in teaching." So, for example, the history books of the Old Testament, though inspired, were not a revelation in the same way as the prophetic

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[287] William VanDoodewaard, "Genesis and Ancient History at Princeton Seminary (1812-1851) *The Westminster Theological Journal,* 80:2 (Fall, 2018), 261.
[288] Ibid, 261.

works, but they were inspired, and that is what keeps them from any error.[289] Hodge denied the idea of the mechanical dictation of Scripture, noting instead that while God was inspiring the authors of Scripture, they wrote using their own voices, some more and some less educated. Concerning the infallibility (inerrancy) of Scripture, Hodge wrote, "… all the books of Scripture are equally inspired. All alike are infallible in what they teach. And secondly, that inspiration extends to all the contents of these several books. It is not confined to moral and religious truths, but extends to the statements of facts, whether scientific, historical, or geographical. It is not confined to those facts the importance of which is obvious, or which are involved in matters of doctrine. It extends to everything which any sacred writer asserts to be true."[290] Hodge continued by arguing for a plenary, or full, view of inspiration; that each and every word is inspired by God. Hodge did acknowledge that the authors of Scripture were people of their time concerning knowledge of science, philosophy and history. The issue for many Christians today, as Bernard Ramm correctly points out, is that Hodge believed that even though the authors of Scripture did not have full knowledge of these things, "they were supernaturally protected from error, so even in these matters they make true statements."[291] Hodge resumes his argument for the infallibility of the Scriptures by noting, "(i)f they are a revelation from God, they must be received and obeyed; but they cannot be thus received without attributing to them divine authority, and they cannot have such authority without being infallible in all they teach."[292] This, I believe is the crux of the argument for those in favor of inerrancy, both for Hodge,

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[289] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995 (1872)), 155-156.
[290] Hodge, 163.
[291] Bernard Ramm, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology.* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1983), 44. See also Hodge, 165-166.
[292] Hodge, 166.

and for generations of conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists that followed him, including a full generation of pastors that he trained at Princeton.

Grant Wacker, Randy Balmer and Joel Carpenter all point to a desire for a pure, or primitive, Christianity that had emerged as a reaction to the various challenges posed to American evangelicals in the nineteenth century. This can be seen, for example, in the Stone-Campbell movement in the early nineteenth century where the intramural fighting within denominations was eschewed. Christians left their denominational churches to join the "Christians" whose theology purportedly derived from the New Testament alone (especially the first couple chapters in Acts).[293] So, too, can this desire for a pure Christianity be found among fundamentalist Christians. Carpenter notes that fundamentalists found hope especially in the New Testament epistles, where early Christians were struggling to live out their faith in a secular world. This seemed to them to mirror the challenges in their own situation, where their faith seemed continuously under duress.[294] It is without question that many of the core values of conservative Christianity, both theologically and morally, were under fire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it was hardly surprising that conservative Christians would react to challenges to the authority of the Scriptures with considerable zeal.

Dispensational theology, which we will discuss in a later chapter, also played an important role in the way that fundamentalists approached and read Scripture. For dispensational theology to make sense, the Bible needed to be scientifically and historically

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[293] Randall Balmer, *Evangelicalism in America*. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 19.
[294] Joel A. Carpenter, Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism. (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 69.

accurate, and its prophecies must be understood to be literally fulfilled, many in the eschaton.[295]

There were certainly some in the FMC, including individuals in positions of power, who were reading Scripture with this type of literalism. This is demonstrated by the following vignette. While a student at a Free Methodist Bible College, I took a class on the minor prophets with a theologian trained at one of the more 'liberal' Methodist Universities. This professor warned that some of us might find what he was teaching to challenge the ideas with which we were raised. But, he asked us to hang in there with him, and talk to him if we had any questions or concerns. He raised the idea that some 'messianic' passages had immediate messages for the people of Israel and Judea that would have challenged and encouraged them to return to right covenant relationship with God. He explained that the prophetic messages needed to be understood within their historical context first, before we might consider whether they might be also speaking to a future day. These 'new' interpretations were too much for at least one student in the class who was visibly upset. This student complained to her parents, who were deeply distressed and took their concerns to the college board of trustees. The professor was subsequently fired over the issue.

Ernest Sandeen points to three primary tenets of the theory of inerrancy that were developed and promoted by the Princeton theologians of the nineteenth century. These are that "the Bible was 1) verbally inspired, 2) inerrant in its every reference, statistic, and

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[295] Carpenter, 71. Carpenter also helpfully notes that dispensationalism's teachings actually did mirror many of the events that occurred in the early twentieth century, including "the decline of Christianity's cultural influence, the apparent spread of spiritual deadness within organized Christianity, the rise of world-threatening dictatorships, and, not least, the Jews' persecution and their movement to restore a Jewish state in Palestine.", 71.

quotation, 3) when first written down on the original autographs. … This doctrine did not exist in Europe or America prior to its formulation in the last half of the nineteenth century. It has become an essential ingredient in the theology of Fundamentalism."[296] More recently, Pinnock and Callen present what they call a more nuanced understanding of inerrancy as "the belief that Scripture never leads one astray in regard to what it intentionally teaches."[297] They maintain that the early church fathers "everywhere and always presuppose the divine authorship of the Bible."[298] They likewise assert that, "the entire ecclesial project in the sixteenth century was founded on the assumption of the infallible teaching of the Scriptures – as opposed to numerous errors that had crept into the church's traditions."[299]

One question that had arisen through the enlightenment project is that of what exactly can be counted as history, which was fundamental to the argument of whether the Bible could be trusted as a historical document.[300] In the latter part of the nineteenth century, as attacks upon the Bible increased, inerrancy became an ever more important battleground for conservatives, with a variety of opinions on how to even define the issue. In 1835, David F. Strauss published *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined.* Using historical criticism, Strauss denied the miracles of the Bible, calling them myths and argued that,

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[296] Sandeen, "Towards a Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism" in *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* Volume 10 of Modern American Protestantism and Its World, (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1993), 27 Sandeen believes strongly that Fundamentalism was a joint effort … a sort of divided partnership between dispensationalists and Princeton theology (that was being carried across the country by ministers and evangelists trained at Princeton, 27.
[297] Clark H. Pinnock and Barry L. Callen, *The Scripture Principle: Reclaiming the Full Authority of the Bible.* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2009 (1984)), 11.
[298] Pinnock and Callen, 12.
[299] Pinnock and Callen, 12.
[300] Laurence W. Wood. *God and History: The Dialectical Tension of Faith and History in Modern Thought.* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2005), ix.

"orthodox belief cannot be supported in the light of the rise of modern historical consciousness."[301]

The noted fundamentalist R.A. Torrey (1856-1928) maintained that, "No one, as far as I know, holds that the English translation of the Bible is absolutely infallible and inerrant."[302] So, if a fundamentalist as prominent as Torrey, a lieutenant of D.L. Moody and editor of *The Fundamentals*, does not maintain that the Bible is absolutely infallible and inerrant, then what is the inerrancy for which fundamentalists are arguing? Ultimately, it was the belief that the autographs, the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts which we do not possess, were completely inerrant in their wording and in all that they conveyed. George Marsden notes that Biblical inerrancy became popular in the mid to latter part of the 1880's. Tying it to dispensational theology, Marsden maintains that it "was to become a code word for much of the fundamentalist movement, (and) had a scientific quality that was related to the view of truth as directly apprehended fact."[303] Marsden explains how this fit into the 'Newtonian' view of the physical universe. "Created by God, it (the universe) was a perfect, self-contained unity governed by exact laws which could be discovered by careful analyses and classification."[304] Thus, "Scripture was looked upon as the compelling perfect design of God, (where) every detail was significant. Hence, even though the Bible was not intended to teach science, God has guided even the poetic language so as to anticipate scientific discoveries."[305] Truth, therefore, was revealed as one read the Bible

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[301] Wood, x.
[302] Reuben A. Torrey, Difficulties and *Alleged Errors and Contradictions in the Bible,* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1907), 17.
[303] Marsden, 56-57.
[304] Marsden, 57.
[305] Marsden, 57.

literally.[306] Note how this is reflected in Hodge's description of inerrancy that we considered earlier.

A significant difficulty for adherents of inerrancy is the complexity involved in the development of the canon of Scripture. Individual books obviously did not appear in the same way as books today. We often do not know the names of the authors of Biblical books, nor exactly when they were written. Many books clearly developed over long periods of time and included the works of scribes who not only copied manuscripts, but sometimes edited and interpreted the texts, seeking to make them relevant. Then, too, there is the issue of the numerous versions of the Biblical texts and the fact that there are sometimes substantive differences between them.[307] Writing about the Dead Sea Scrolls, W. Randolph Bynum notes, "For the Old Testament in general and for the Book of the Twelve in particular, the history of the biblical text from these manuscripts demonstrates the unmistakable presence of multiple textual traditions from 150 bc through ad 100. There is little to no indication that one type of text was preferred over another. This did not seem a problem for the Qumran community or Judaism in general in the pre-canonical era." Bynum further adds, "These issues continue to affect the biblical text, both in early church times (i.e., the era of the writing of texts that would later comprise the New Testament) and into the era of the standard text and a recognized canon."[308] It is easy to understand why this might be concerning for those who desire to uphold an inerrant position. The complexity of

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[306] See also, Wright, 92-94.
[307] The task of lower criticism includes comparing variants and manuscript traditions.
[308] W. Randolph Bynum, "What the Dead Sea Scrolls Can Tell Us About Contemporary Biblical Issues," pp. 13-23 in *Rethinking the Bible*. Richard B. Thompson and Thomas Jay Oord, eds. (Nampa, ID: SacraSage Press, 2018), 16-17.

the development of Biblical books can also be concerning for conservative Christians who are merely desiring to uphold the idea of the authority of the Scriptures.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls provides us with manuscripts much more ancient than were previously available for modern scholars and translators. This includes completely new information that was not available in the standard Hebrew text. Bynum notes that the New Revised Standard Version is using these older manuscripts for its translation, and thus arguably manuscripts that should be closer to the autographs, and this must certainly be problematic for fundamentalists.[309]

This section has focused on the rise of inerrancy in American Christianity, specifically looking at the way the doctrine developed and the effects it has had on theology. In this next section, we will examine the way in which John Wesley and his heirs within the Free Methodist Church have understood Scripture.

Scripture: John Wesley and Free Methodists

After examining the way that inerrancy developed within American Christianity, we now turn specifically to the positions of John Wesley and then the Free Methodist Church concerning the Bible. The authority and interpretation of Scripture is foundational to how a church forms its beliefs, and Free Methodists believe that they should trace their doctrines back to the teaching of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement. Leaders of the Protestant Reformation were largely responsible for placing the Bible back into the hands of the laity. The message of the reformers, *sola fide* (faith alone), was matched with an equal message of *sola scriptura*. These beliefs were, of course, the integral issues in the

[309] Bynum, 19.

Reformation. The Catholic Church responded that the Bible alone was not a complete protection from doubt. Richard Simon's *A Critical Study of History* (1678) was particularly strong in using Cartesian doubt to argue against the Protestant notion of sola scriptura. He pointed to some issues that might cause concern including the charge that the "original texts have undergone serious changes with the result that our present texts are replete with errors."[310] By denigrating the Scriptures, even to a limited degree, Simon purposed to buttress the authority and interpretation of the Roman Catholic Church concerning theology and the Bible.[311]

As the founder of the Wesleyan/ Methodist movement, John Wesley's position on Scripture matters deeply for Free Methodists, considering that the earliest founders of the Free Methodist Church were especially concerned with perceived declension within the Methodist Episcopal Church. For example, in their first *Book of Discipline*, Free Methodists added an article of religion concerning entire sanctification. While Wesley apparently did not see the need to add a statement on entire sanctification in the abridged Articles of Religion he passed on from the Church of England to Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke for the founding of the Methodist Church in America, it was seen by Free Methodists as an important enough doctrine that they remedied Wesley's 'error' in neglecting to include this article. It is important to note, however, that it was not only the Articles of religion that were passed down as authoritative to the Methodists in America. So, too, were the writings

[310] As quoted in Wood, *God and History*, 66. This is part of an extremely helpful chapter on Cartesian Historiography.
[311] Wood, *God and History*, 67.

of Wesley and John Fletcher. For example, Francis Asbury had his ministers read Fletcher's *Checks to Antinomianism* as a part of the Methodist course of study in America.[312]

There are different interpretations of Wesley's position on Scripture and inerrancy. For example, in a recent study, Charles White has argued that "the source of the current Wesleyan concern for inerrancy is indeed the Wesley brothers themselves, and that they well understood the attacks on the Bible that led some to reject its authority."[313] Others, though, such as George Turner, R. Larry Shelton, and Rob Wall have argued that Wesley either was not interested in the issue of inerrancy, or that the proposal of inerrancy is anachronistic to Wesley and his eighteenth century context.[314] White notes that many "Wesleyans believe inerrancy to be a Calvinistic graft on the pure Wesleyan stock." White strongly disagrees with these Wesleyan scholars, maintaining that while Charles Wesley never used the word 'inerrant,' he did use the term 'unerring' "with exactly the same meaning as 'inerrant' … twelve times in his published hymns and poems."[315]

By the time of John Wesley, English translations of the Bible, including the Authorized version (KJV), were readily available. Wesley clearly had a high view of the authority of Scripture. In the oft-quoted preface to his sermons, John Wesley claimed to be a man of one book.[316] However, Wesley was not disclaiming the importance of other literature. He wrote extensively himself, and he provided a reading list for his Methodist

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[312] Laurence W. Wood, *Pentecost & Sanctification in the Writings of John Wesley and Charles Wesley.* Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2018, 137.
[313] Charles Edward White, "Shooting Down Ducks: Two Canards about the Wesley Brothers and the 18th-century Conflict over Scriptures" This was a paper delivered at the Nov, 2013 meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society1.
[314]White, 2.
[315]White, 3.
[316] John Wesley, "Preface" to his sermons in *Wesley's Works.* Vol.5. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 3.

pastors. Rather, we should see Wesley rhetorically using this expression as a means of communicating to his pastors and followers the importance of Scripture.

Samuel Rogal, who has written extensively on the Wesleys and the Methodist movement, surmised that by the time Wesley was 81, his "command of the language of Scriptures could well have been classified as instinctive …"[317] With a desire to stimulate further research, Rogal's project focused on the Wesley brothers' "heavy reliance upon and utterance of the language and substance of Holy Scriptures," agreeing with Albert Outler that "Wesley's … grasp of Scripture amounted to his being something of a concordance …."[318] However, though the Wesley brothers clearly had a deep love for Scripture and used it extensively, this does not begin to prove that they held an inerrant view of Scripture. Wolfgang Vondey suggests that Wesley's high regard for Scriptural authority was devised from three principles; the divine inspiration of Scripture, the traditions of the church and the witness of the Spirit.[319] Paul Bassett argued that the key theologians of the Wesleyan movement in the twentieth century resisted a tendency of fundamentalists to condense those three principles to one source, the inerrancy of the Scriptures.[320]

Those who would claim that Wesley had an inerrant view of Scripture do have some strong evidence for their arguments. In his journal dated July 24, 1776, Wesley reflected on a tract by a Mr. Jenyn, in which Jenyn denied that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and claimed that the authors made mistakes. Wesley's response: "Nay, if there be any

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[317] Samuel J. Rogal, "The Bible Told Them So: A Look at the Wesleys' Reliance upon the Scriptures,"133-148 *Methodist History* 56:3 (April, 2018), 145.
[318] Rogal, 148. He is quoting from *The Works of John Wesley. Volume 3: Sermons III,* 71-114. Ed. Albert Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 63: n.7.
[319] Vondey, 70.
[320] Paul Bassett, "The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement: 1914-1940," *WTJ* 13 (Spring, 1978), 68ff.

mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth."[321] This seems a pretty robust argument in favor of Wesley as an inerrantist. So does a lengthy letter Wesley wrote to the bishop of Gloucester. There, he answered the bishop's assertion that "'God directed the writers, that no considerable error should fall from them.' (with the remark) 'Nay, will not the allowing there is any error in Scripture, shake the authority of the whole.'"[322] Yet, in his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, commenting specifically on II Timothy 3:16, Wesley writes, "The Spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote it, but continually inspires, supernaturally assists, those that read it with earnest prayer."[323] Note here that Wesley affirms that the inspiration of the Spirit is something that was both active in the writing of the Biblical texts, but also in the reading and interpretation of those texts. Randy Maddox and Richard Thompson helpfully note that getting to 'the deep things of God' takes reading the Bible with assistance of the inspiration of the Spirit.[324] Writes Maddox, "(T)he definitive revelation of God may come to us through Scripture but still be immediate because the Spirit who originally addressed the spiritual senses of the writers will also open our spiritual senses to perceive and attest to the truth they expressed."[325] Thus, the truth of the Scriptures does not come best through a simple literal interpretation of passages, but through inspiration of both the text and the reader. In fact, Thompson argues that

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[321] Wesley, Wesley's Works. Vol. 4. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 82.
[322] Wesley, "A Letter to the Right Rev., the Lord Bishop of Gloucester" in *Wesley's Works.* Vol. IX. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 150.
[323] Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament.* (London: Epworth Press, 1958), 794.
[324] Richard P. Thompson, "Authority is what Authority Does: Rethinking the Role of the Bible as Scripture," pp. 35-47 in *Rethinking the Bible*. Richard B. Thompson and Thomas Jay Oord, eds. (Nampa, ID: SacraSage Press, 2018), 41. See also, Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology.* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 31.
[325] Maddox, 31.

approaches to biblical study over the past several hundred years, while seeking an authoritative interpretation of biblical texts and authority for the Bible, actually can leave the Scriptures 'dead and ineffective' without the work of the Spirit in the individuals and communities reading and interpreting the texts.[326]

Wesley was also critical of others who claimed to read the Bible only. In his *Minutes on Several Conversations*, he notes the importance of "read(ing) the most useful books, and that regularly and constantly. Steadily spend all the morning in this employ, or, at least, five hours in four-and-twenty." When one pastor maintained that he read only the Bible, Wesley responded sarcastically, "Then you ought to teach others to read only the Bible, and, by parity of reason, to hear only the Bible: But if so, you need preach no more. Just so said George Bell. And what is the fruit? Why now, he neither reads the Bible nor anything else. This is rank enthusiasm. If you need no book but the Bible, you are got above St. Paul. He wanted others, too." To those who claimed, "'But, I have no taste for reading', (he responded) 'Contract a taste for it by use, or return to your trade.'"[327]

Still, as reason and focus on natural theology began to grow in England, Wesley apparently felt the need to speak out in support of the inspiration of Scripture. He wrote a short article entitled, "A Clear and Concise Demonstration of the Diving Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures," in which he lists four pillars that he believes demonstrate God's inspiration of the Bible: 1. The power of God demonstrated in the miracles of the Bible. 2. Divine understanding as demonstrated by the prophecies. 3. God's goodness, as demonstrated by the goodness of the doctrine taught in the Scriptures, and 4. Divine

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[326] Thompson, 42.
[327] Wesley, "Minutes of Several Conversations" in *Wesley's Works.* Vol. VIII. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 315.

holiness demonstrated by the moral character of those who wrote Scripture. Wesley concludes his short essay by arguing that the Bible must be from God, for if it were merely from good persons, or angels, then it would be full of lies such as "Thus saith the Lord," while if it were merely from bad men or demons then it would not forbid sin, command duty, and condemn evil people to hell for all eternity.[328] While it is clear here that Wesley was interested in defending Scriptural authority, I believe Thorsen is correct in suggesting that Wesley was more interested in the content and message of the Gospel through Scripture then he was in theories of inspiration.[329]

There is still debate over whether Wesley was an inerrantist. The Wesleyan Theological Society felt the controversy over the issue strongly enough to hold a panel in 1968 to discuss inerrancy, and several articles in the Spring 1968 edition of the Society's journal focused on the debate. It should be noted that the WTS is arguably the primary avenue where Free Methodists (and other Wesleyan academics) present articles arguing Wesleyan history and theology.

Following the tumultuous decade of the 1960's, inerrancy once again became a hot button issue in the church. Harold Lindsell, the author of *Battle for the Bible*, claims that Wesley held an inerrant view of Scripture, citing the aforementioned response to Mr. Jenyn. Although Wesley had a very high view of Scripture, it is anachronistic to suggest that his view was echoed in the bibliology of nineteenth and twentieth century fundamentalists. Indeed, Wesley lived one hundred years before inerrancy became a real issue in the church,

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[328] Wesley, "A Clear and Concise Demonstration of the Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures" p. 484 in *Wesley's Works.* Vol XI. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 484.
[329] Donald A.D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology.* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2005 (1990), 42.

when Enlightenment thought was only just beginning to raise questions about issues of historicity. Immanuel Kant was a younger contemporary of Wesley, but his *Critique of Pure Reason* was published in 1781, when Wesley was already seventy-eight years old and had many other issues to focus on, including the continued growth of the Methodist movement, and what to do with about the challenges to Methodism on the American continent.

Wesley was a priest of the Church of England, and thus accepted the 39 Articles of Religion. These Articles, dating back to 1562, were for the purposes of "the avoiding of diversities of opinions and for the establishing of consent touching true religion."[330] They included a statement on Scripture, which Wesley later passed on to the American Methodist Episcopal Church in the 25 Articles in 1784.

With the founding of the FMC in 1860, its leaders chose to make some substantial changes, dropping their inherited Articles from 25 to 23, but as noted before, adding one on entire sanctification.[331] Concerning the Scriptures, the founders of the FMC chose to retain unrevised Article V – The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation, and Article VI – Of the Old Testament.[332]

> Article V reads:
>
> V. The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation. The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man,

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[330] "Articles" http://www.churchofengland.org accessed July 22, 2015.

[331] *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Free Methodist Church – 1860.* (Buffalo, NY: Clapp, Matthews & Co's Steam Printing House), 1860, 17-26. Snyder has a helpful discussion on FMC adaption of the Articles of Religion, Howard A. Snyder, *Populist Saints: B.T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 523.

[332] Article VI has also been retained through all three churches (Church of England, Methodist Episcopal & Free Methodist), and reads as follows.

VI. Old Testament. The Old Testament, is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and New Testaments everlasting * life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man. Wherefore they are not to be heard who feign that the old fathers did look" only for transitory promises. Although the law given from God by Moses, as touching ceremonies and rites, doth not bind Christians, nor ought the civil precepts thereof of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet, notwithstanding, no Christian" whatsoever is free from the obedience of the commandments which are called moral."

> that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture, we do understand those canonical books, of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church. The Names of the Canonical Books. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, The First Book of Samuel, The Second Book of Samuel, The First Book of Kings, The Second Book of Kings, The First Book of Chronicles, The Second Book of Chronicles, The Book of Ezra, The Book of Nehemiah, The Book of Esther, The Book of Job, The Psalms, The Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher, Canticle, or Songs of Solomon, Four Prophets the greater, Twelve Prophets the less: All the books of the New Testament, as they are commonly received, we do receive and account canonical.[333]

Having an article of religion pertaining to any issue is important. As quoted above, it can serve as a tool for avoiding diversity of opinion, and potential contention within a church. It can also serve as a mooring for a church during times of turmoil and questioning, which was the climate in which the FMC was born.

George Eliot translated David Strauss' influential *Das Leben Jesu* (*The Life of Christ*) into English in 1844. Ten years later, she translated Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums* (*The Essence of Christianity*). Strauss' project was the use of historical critical tools to examine carefully the literal life of Christ. While he was clearly not the first to critically examine the Gospels, he argued that while higher criticism "has long been applied to particular parts of that history, (it) is here only extended to its entire tenor. It is not by any means meant that the whole history of Jesus is to be represented as mythical, but only that every part of it is to be subjected to a critical examination, to ascertain whether it have not some admixture to the mythical."[334] Feuerbach was even more critical, largely painting

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[333] See *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church - 1856*. (Cincinnati: Swormstedt & Poe, 1859), 16-17, and *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Free Methodist Church – 1860.* (Buffalo, NY: Clapp, Matthews & Co's Steam Printing House), 1860, 18-20.

[334] David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus*. Translated by George Eliot. (London: Chapman Brothers, 1846.) p.ix-x.

God as a human abstraction that meets the needs of human nature. God is seen as a projection of humanity's inner nature. With the translation of these two works which were very critical of historic Christianity, Susan Hill argues that George Eliot was "virtually single handedly responsible for bringing German Higher Criticism into the English-speaking world and, hence, helping to articulate the Religion of Humanity so prevalent in nineteenth century discourse."[335]

Almost at the same time that the alarming results of higher criticism were entering the American consciousness, evolutionary theory was climaxing. In 1859, just a year prior to the founding of the Free Methodist Church, Charles Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species*, which seriously challenged the Biblical account of a seven-day creation. There was no choice but for churches to grapple with these issues and respond. They could not be ignored if a church hoped to stay relevant.

The 1860 Course of Study for those preparing for ministry in the Free Methodist Church included the reading of numerous books over a period of several years. At that time, college was not normally an option for most ministers, and so many used this Course of Study option as preparation for pulpit ministry. Though the official article of religion on Scripture was not an inerrant statement, the reality is that FM ministers were at times being trained with an inerrant view of Scripture and literal interpretations of the texts. *Binney's Theological Compendium* was an early book being used in the course of study. Its aim was "to lay the foundations of a firm belief in the Christian religion, and in particular to

[335] Susan Hill, "Translating Feuerbach, Constructing Morality: The Theological and Literary Significance of Translation for George Eliot." *American Academy of Religion,* Vol. 65 No. 3. Sept 1, 1997, 636.

furnish young people with the chief grounds of their faith."[336] Binney argued for the need of the revelation of God through the Bible, noting, "… it is the Bible alone which makes us to differ from all these nations. Without it, we should soon be like them – ignorant, superstitious, impure, and cruel."[337] Binney then opined about means that God used to reveal Godself: "Revelation is distinguished into ORAL and WRITTEN. By oral is meant *traditional*, or such as is transmitted by word of mouth from one age to another. Such were the revelations made to the patriarchs, and the longevity peculiar to the age served to preserve them from being corrupted. These original truths were handed down to Moses, who, by the direction of God on Sinai, finally wrote them in five books, called the Pentateuch."[338] Binney also noted that the great ages of the Patriarchs made it easier for them to pass on these oral traditions. "Moses was contemporary with the contemporaries of Abraham; Abraham with Noah; and Noah with the contemporaries of Adam. In this way, under the divine guidance, the important facts of the antediluvian world were probably gathered by Moses. Respecting those which took place prior to man's creation, there must have been *direct* communication from God."[339] This clearly demonstrates a literal interpretation of the Pentateuch, which was common until the mid-nineteenth century. It is true that the non-literal interpretations of the biblical critics were the innovations during this period, but it was many of those who became the fundamentalists who fought to hold to the literal interpretations of these texts.

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[336] Amos Binney & Daniel Steele, *Binney's Theological Compend Improved*, (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, NY: Hunt and Eaton, 1875), 3. Note that Daniel Steele was a classmate of B.T. Roberts, and wrote a very critical critique of the Plymouth Brethren and Premillennial eschatology.
[337] Binney & Steele, 18.
[338] Binney and Steele, 18-19.
[339] Binney and Steele, 19. (Their emphasis on direct.)

Binney continued on to the manner of inspiration, stating that there were (at the time) two opinions concerning the way in which Scripture was written. First is that God inspired the writers, who used their own words and phrases, but were kept from theological error. The second, he called verbal inspiration (an inerrant view): "every word was suggested to them by the Spirit of God." He noted several Scriptures that he believed supported the second view, but he also made a very telling assertion - "Both views secure the Scriptures from all error. A UNIFORMITY OF STYLE AND MANNER in the different writers was by no means *essential* to this kind of inspiration, which is called plenary; that is, full. God may speak in as great a variety of styles as the thirty-five or more different writers of the sixty-six books of the Bible. The *peculiar style* of each writer, instead of being removed, was probably enriched, and appropriated to his own design by the Holy Ghost."[340] Binney also was very traditional with his dating (even though the scholarship of historical criticism was already available), citing Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, and denoting that Malachi was the last book of the Old Testament and was written by 420 B.C.

What this tells us is that there were generations of Free Methodists training for leadership as ministers, teachers, and class leaders that were being taught a very literal reading of Genesis, which would have been common for the period. One example of this concerns evolution, one of the most controversial theories facing Christians in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many or even most of those early Free Methodists in the pew on Sunday mornings and in Bible studies were being molded through the preaching ministry of pastors weaned on Binney's Compendium. It is

[340] Binney and Steele, 22-23 – Again, their emphasis

important to note here, though, that there is a difference between being taught and holding conservative views on theological issues, and being a fundamentalist fighting for an inerrant view on the Scriptures. Also, just because one is an inerrantist does not mean that she holds to a literal seven-day creation, as that is a question of interpretation, though most inerrantists were biblical literalists. Of course, most Christians at the time interpreted the first few chapters of Genesis literally, and it was only when the crisis grew over the popularization of Darwin's evolutionary theory that this became more of an issue. One of the problems for a church that is not fundamentalist is that educating pastors, and through them a host of lay people, with an unfiltered dose of a source like Binney's Compendium is that it plants seeds that could later grow into fundamentalism.

While evolution became the primary issue of contention between fundamentalists and modernists in the 1920's, the conflict really dealt with the understanding and interpretation of Scripture. Certainly, the issue that drew the most public interest was how best to interpret Genesis 1. Was the story intended to be taken literally? Was it a truth story that demonstrated how the ancient Hebrew people understood themselves among the nations in which they lived and warred? Most conservative Christians believed in a literal seven-day creation when Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. An ever-widening gulf grew between scientists and progressive Christians who believed in some type of evolution and those who believed in the seven-day creation. The conflict climaxed with the very public Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925, which ended with the humiliation of fundamentalist and conservative Christians.

Ron Numbers, a historian of the development of evolutionary theory points out that most holiness churches were opposed to evolution but were very focused on what they

considered to be the eminently more important task of evangelism.[341] These holiness Christians were often more interested in experience than they were in exacting exegetical work, and unlike the fundamentalists were seldom on the front line in the fight against evolution. Free Methodists were similar in this regard to other holiness churches, but often did hold conservative/ fundamentalist positions on theological issues. B.T. Roberts, a founding father within the FMC, penned a long article in his magazine, *Earnest Christian*, in which he freely admitted to an old earth that had undergone immense change. Writes Roberts,

> God teaches us a different doctrine. He tells us, in his legible tracings upon tables of stone, that the Earth has been the theatre of mighty revolutions. Its physical appearance, its climate and soil, its vegetable productions, and the animals that live upon its surface, have undergone the most striking changes, at successive and well-defined periods of time. These changes have not been gradual and silent, like the faint glimmer of dawn for the full-orbed sun, but sudden and startling as an earthquake, and attended with the most terrible convulsions.
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> To reject the well ascertained facts of Geology, because that science in its infancy was marshalled against the Bible is to imitate those whose conduct Paul condemned as superstitious and not pious, who refused to eat suitable meat, because, before it sold in the market, it had been offered in sacrifice to idols. – The cause of truth suffers greatly from such a course.
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> Geology plainly teaches that the Earth had existed for ages before it was fitted up for the habitation of man. The climate was much warmer than it is at present; even the frigid zones bearing plants far exceeding in size those now found in tropical regions… .
>
> Amid this luxuriant vegetation crawled reptiles of the most gigantic magnitude. The Megalosauras, a carnivorous animal of the crocodile species, was larger than the Rhinoceros, and from forty to fifty feet long. The Iguanodon, the largest reptile of the former world had a body from seventy to one hundred feet in length…! But these, amid convulsions that have torn the rock-ribbed hills and shaken the earth to its centre, have passed away. Islands have raised their heads, and continents have been elevated from what was once the bed of the primeval ocean.[342]

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[341] Ronald L. Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 112.
[342] B.T. Roberts, "The Future of the Earth" *Earnest Christian* V:1 (January, 1863), 5.

Roberts goes on to describe how he believes that God worked at destroying and creating the earth on numerous occasions, with each successive creation being more advanced. Thus, while Roberts' view allows room for creation to have taken place over a tremendous amount of time, he denies credence to natural evolution. He quotes the 104th Psalm to support his claims. There we read, "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth."[343] Roberts comments, "This language applies much more appropriately to the successive creations to which we have referred, than to the production of animals by natural generations."[344] Robert's theology is typical of the gap (or ruin and restoration) theory of creation which posits that there are two creations, the creation 'in the beginning', and a later creation (or restoration) of Eden. This was the theory of creation which later circulated among fundamentalists and conservative Christians through the Scofield Reference Bible.[345]

The Illinois conference of the FMC passed a resolution in 1903 that forbade the teaching of theistic evolution, and Alexander Beers (1862-1921), an ordained FMC pastor and president of Seattle Pacific College (an FM institute of higher learning) delivered a scathing response to theistic evolution: "Take all the books and make a pyramid as high as the snowy crest of Mt. Rainier, take all of J.D. R(ockefeller)'s oil and pour it over them and set fire to it. Take all the promises of the blessed old Book and read them during the conflagration, then join in singing, 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow."[346]

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[343] Psalm 104:29-30 KJV
[344] Ibid, 6.
[345] Numbers, 113.
[346] Alexander Beers, "Lecture on Evolution" in Adelaide Lionne Beers, *The Romance of a Consecrated Life: A Biography of Alexander Beers.* (Chicago: The Free Methodist Publishing House, 1922), 318. This comes from an extract on a lecture given on evolution which is not dated, but obviously preceded his death in 1921.

Beer's argument is twofold in his essay concerning evolution. First, he noted that evolutionists purport that there is consensus among scientists of his day that evolution is true. Beers rebuts this by arguing that the whole of historical thought through all branches of science and beyond have accepted that God has created the world. He writes, "The greatest writers and historians of the world, both ancient and modern, have given all but unanimous verdict in favor of the Christian's Bible., the Christian's Christ and the Christian's heaven. If you are contented to wade in the shallow pools of the evolutionists, who never get in ankle deep, I prefer for my own company the association of these mountain-minded philosophers, statesmen, journalists, orators, poets and reformers …."[347] Beer's second point is that after looking at the evidence, he believes that there is no confirmation that any species have evolved and improved.[348] How competent Beers was in his examination of the evidence can only be conjecture at this point.

It is also significant that throughout the 1920's, according to Ron Numbers, *The Free Methodist* published numerous articles against evolution, including a piece by the father of flood geology, George McCready Price. Other holiness churches including the Church of the Nazarene, the Wesleyan Methodists, and The Pilgrim Holiness Church were similar to the FMC in their attacks on evolution.[349] Within the Holiness world, Asbury Theological Seminary was at the center of the conflict against evolution and higher criticism of the Bible, and it is important to note that this is where many Free Methodists were going to be trained for ministry. Henry Clay Morrison warned the readers of *The Pentecostal Herald* of

[347] Beers, 309.
[348] Beers, especially 313 ff.
[349] Numbers, 118.

"the coming conflict between the conservatives and liberals with reference to the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible." He wrote,

> … the first shots have been fired, the hosts are gathering and the battle is on. We welcome the conflict most heartily. We shall watch its progress with intense interest and The Herald will, without hesitation, train its guns on those men and teachings who, if permitted to go unrebuked, will destroy the faith of the people in the inspiration of the Bible. … Let every faithful soldier of the cross draw his sword and hasten to the firing line in the coming conflict between saving faith and destructive unbelief.[350]

There was ample fear that the belief that humans evolved from monkeys would also lead to moral corruption, as some would point out that we are merely beasts anyways.[351] Numbers quotes Miller and Harding in a critique of Methodist schools: "Run the list, Vanderbilt, Northwestern, Syracuse, University of Southern California, Ohio Wesleyan, Boston University, and it is found that liberalism in its rankest form is often taught … only a few of the weaker colleges of the North, some of the smaller ones of the South, and those institutions fostered by the Church of the Nazarene, the Free Methodist Church, the Wesleyan Methodist Church and other holiness groups and the numerous Bible schools are true to the fundamentals."[352] On theistic evolution, a questionnaire was sent out to presidents of some Christian colleges concerning whether their scientific and sociological chairs endorsed it. The terse response from the president of FM's Greenville College was: "They are opposed to it."[353]

Some Methodists at the time were responding to the issue of evolution by noting that it is religious experience, rather than what one thinks about an issue (propositional

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[350] Numbers, 120-121, quoting Morrison from *The Pentecostal Herald*.
[351] Numbers, 121-122.
[352] Numbers, 122.
[353] Numbers, 122-123.

truth), that is most important. This is a much more Wesleyan method for thinking about these issues.[354] However, H.C. Morrison was even willing to push for a tax strike if they continued to teach evolution in public schools. He claimed, "We can easily conceive of two or three hundred thousand Kentuckians refusing to pay taxes to furnish salaries to conceited professors who think it quite smart to ridicule Revelation and teach their pupils that their ancestors were apes."[355] It is also good to remember that leading up to and even into the 20th century, many Christian academics strongly believed that science would obviously support Christianity, and evolutionary theory seemed in their modernist minds to be clearly putting the two at odds; but Christian academics also did not want to even appear to be rejecting science. Thus, Morrison wrote "An Open Letter to a Young Preacher" in which he encouraged young pastors not to let:

> the modernists or skeptics of any brand provoke you to any sort of unwise or sweeping statement against any branch of science or scientists in general. I have heard some very loud and boisterous declarations made by indignant ministers with much pointing of the fist that would raise questions in the minds of the thoughtful. … All intelligent ministers of the Gospel and devout Christians are ready to receive gladly any scientific fact that has been proven; in other words, *truly established.* … It is your privilege and duty to discern between truth established and the mere theories of men.[356]

The American Scientific Affiliation (ASA) was formed in 1941 and had three Free Methodists amongst its members. It even met one year at Seattle Pacific College, a Free Methodist institution. The ASA was concerned about the witness of science and religion, and was anti-evolutionary.[357] In 1961, *The Genesis Flood* was published. James F. Gregory,

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[354] Numbers, 123.
[355] Numbers, 124.
[356] Numbers, 124-125. Numbers is quoting from H.C. Morrison, "An Open Letter to a Young Preacher (no. 9)," *Pentecostal Herald* 38 (October 27, 1926): 1, 8.
[357] Numbers, 129-130.

editor of *The Free Methodist* reviewed it, predicting it would "become an authority for those who believe that creation was a unique act of God, and that the flood of Noah's time was universal."[358] Notably, Stephen Paine of Houghton College loved it.[359] One could argue that Stephen Paine was the primary individual who blocked the merger between the FMC and WMC in the nineteen-seventies.

Numbers is fairly scathing in his remarks on George Herbert Livingston's commentary on Genesis in the Beacon Bible Commentary series. Livingston was a Free Methodist Biblical scholar who opposed evolutionary theory and more than anything, Numbers appears to think that it was just very poorly written, noting that Livingston shows "no awareness at all of the current debate over earth history."[360] Numbers also details that John Wesley seemed inclined to take the biblical cosmogony literally, but reports that Wesley "warned against reading too much science into the creation story."[361] He quotes Wesley as saying that the Scriptures "were written not to gratify our curiosity, but to lead us to God."[362] This led some to see Wesley as a proto-evolutionary, which, Numbers notes, triggered a serious defense of Wesley's orthodoxy.[363] Numbers cites a 1964 issue of *Light and Life*[364] which contained two articles taking different sides in the evolutionary debate. The first was by a retired FM minister who wrote in favor of flood geology. The second was written by a lay scientist who was critical of the 'devious' arguments of the Creation

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[358] Numbers, 130. Quoting from James F. Gregory, Review of *The Genesis Flood*, by John C. Whitcomb, Jr. and Henry M. Morris, *Free Methodist.* 94 (October 27, 1961), 14.
[359] Numbers, 130-131.
[360] Numbers, 132.
[361] Numbers, 133.
[362] Numbers, 133.
[363] Numbers, 133.
[364] Numbers, 133-134. Numbers is mistaken in his citation. *The Free Methodist* did not change its name to *Light and* Life until 1972.

Research Society and not particularly troubled with the issue of evolution. Numbers questioned how many in the FMC would have had the ability (I think especially at that period) to share the author's lack of concern.[365]

At this same time, Professor Wilson King of Greenville College was open to considering different ways that God created. He wrote,

> "The Bible account was brief, plain, orderly, and dignified, with no complicated or grotesque features. Divine creative acts are commonly thought to be instantaneous, but Genesis suggests otherwise. God did many truly creative things in working with His first creation. God said, "Let there be a firmament [sky], … let the dry land appear … let the earth bring forth … let the waters bring forth … let birds fly." Did the great continents appear instantly? Did the multiplied vegetation on land, fish in the sea, and birds in the air appear in a split second where nothing had been a moment before? Unless one limits the meaning of "creation" to the single initial event when matter was brought into being, it seems that it properly includes the appearance of new life forms, unfolding life-power, implicit in the will and wisdom of that first divine creative act. Man himself was also a part, and had a part under God, in the ongoing fulfillment."[366]

Wilson King held a tenured position and was able to write with some security. However, the fact is that he also wrote a monthly article on interpreting Scripture for *The Free Methodist*. That he continued to write for *The Free Methodist* following this article demonstrates that there seem to have been more Free Methodists unconcerned about evolution than Numbers seemed to think.

In this section, I argued that while John Wesley clearly had a high view of Scripture, it would be anachronistic to call him an inerrantist. Free Methodists inherited an Article of Religion on Scripture from Wesley and the Methodist Episcopal Church. The FMC became a church at a time when Biblical criticism and evolution were challenging American

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[365] Numbers 134.
[366] Wilson R. King, "God Created," *The Free Methodist* 102:12 (June 24, 1969), 10.

Christians. We also looked specifically at examples of the ways in which Free Methodists responded to evolution as a means of seeking to understand the way that they interpreted Scripture. The next section will focus more exclusively on the way in which Free Methodists have received and responded to the fundamentalist doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture.

Inerrancy and the Free Methodist Church

The focus of the last section was specifically on the way in which Free Methodists received their position of Scripture from John Wesley. In this section, the focus will be on the ways in which Free Methodists 'received' the fundamentalist theology of inerrancy and responded to it at different times in their history.

Inerrancy was clearly a stimulating topic on which Free Methodists were reflecting, as attested to by a number of articles written in the *Earnest Christian* and *The Free Methodist*. This was not at all surprising, as the attacks on Scripture had most conservative Christians concerned for the authority of the Bible. For example, in an 1870 article, an author named J.T. wrote, "Let God's people be careful about yielding one item of the Bible to the objections and sophistries of infidelity. Let us maintain the truth of the Bible, and even when we cannot explain it, let us be firm as to its full inspiration, and man's responsibility for its reception as the Word of God."[367]

A week later, an article appeared defending miracles, one of the subjects attacked by Biblical critics. The article is not given an author, which indicates that it may have been written by the editor of *The Free Methodist* (Mackey). The argument is that God can and

[367] J.T., "Expositions No. 2," *The Free Methodist* V.1 No.6 Dec 15, 1870, p.3.

does continue to do miracles. The author claims,

> "Miracle called attention to the apostles; miracle attested their credentials as God's messengers; miracle was the seal that certified their word to be the word of God. And those same miracles are as conclusive at this day as ever. And what the Spirit of Truth, with miracle or without it, were then, they are still; so that if once they turned the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just by the thousands in a day, in a single city, why may they not be expected to do the same now, in many cities and in all lands, where the gospel is preached?"[368]

One did not have to be what would later be called a fundamentalist Christian to support the idea that God performed miracles. At that point in time (1870) there were no 'fundamentalists' per se. There were, rather, evangelicals who shared many interests, but who were beginning to polarize into either progressive or conservative camps. These two examples are merely demonstrating that Free Methodists, like many other conservative evangelicals, were aware of, and concerned with, attacks on the authority and veracity of the Bible.

The Niagara Bible Conferences began meeting in 1876. These were very popular interdenominational gatherings of leaders, many of whom were to become the first generation of protestant fundamentalists. Focused specifically on Biblical prophecy, these conferences were very influential among conservative evangelical churches. In 1878, they published a 14-point creed. Their first statement was on Scripture. It claimed:

> We believe 'that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,' by which we understand the whole of the book called the Bible; nor do we take the statement in the sense in which it is sometimes foolishly said that works of human genius are inspired, but in the sense that the Holy Ghost gave the very words of the sacred writings to holy men of old; and that His Divine inspiration is not in different degrees, but extends equally and fully to all parts of these writings, historical, poetical, doctrinal and prophetical, and to the smallest word, and inflection of a word, provided such word is found in

[368] Mackey, "Revivals of Religion" *The Free Methodist* V.1 No.7, Dec. 22, 1870, p.2.

> the original manuscripts: 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:21; 1 Cor. 2:13; Mark 12:26, 36; 13:11; Acts 1:16; 2:4.[369]

This statement declares that all Scripture is inspired in exactly the same way, down to the very last word. Later theories on revelation allow for different levels of inspiration. For example, one theory contends that while the Decalogue is inspired through verbal dictation, the Proverbs are an inspired collection of wisdom sayings from the history of the Jewish people.

For some time, *The Free Methodist* published questions that were sent in by readers, and B.T. Roberts sought to answer those as best he could. In the late nineteenth century, in the midst of this crisis concerning the veracity of the Bible, a writer posed a question about the inspiration of Scripture. It is helpful to look at both the question and answer in order to get an even broader feel for the position of Roberts on Scripture in the midst of the modernist controversy.

> In 2 Tim. iii. 16: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," do the words "all Scripture" include the entire Bible, Old and New Testaments? Or in other words, what does St. Paul mean by all Scripture"? It has been asserted that the Free Methodists reject some of the books of the Bible as not being written by inspiration of God. INQUIRER
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> (Roberts) Dr. Clarke says of this passage, 2 Tim. iii. 16: "This sentence is not well translated. The original *** should be rendered, "every writing divinely inspired is profitable for doctrine." The particle, "and" is omitted by almost all versions, and many of the fathers, and certainly does not agree well with the text. The apostle is here, beyond all controversy, speaking of the writings of the *Old Testament*, which, because they came by Divine inspiration, he terms the *Holy Scriptures,* v. 15, and it is of them alone that this passage is to be understood: and although all the New Testament came by as direct an inspiration as the Old, yet as it was not collected at that time, nor indeed complete, the apostle could have no reference to it," We give the above,

[369]Ernest R Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British & American Millenarianism, 1800-1930.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008 (1970)), 273 – This was reprinted from a pamphlet entitled, "The Fundamentals of the Faith as Expressed in the Articles of Belief of the Niagara Bible Conference." Chicago: Great Commission Prayer League, n.d.

> because we fully concur with it. The Free Methodists do not reject any of the books of the Bible as generally received.[370]

Roberts concisely answers all of the issues posed, invoking the authority of Adam Clarke, a younger contemporary of John Wesley, and one of the foremost theologians of the early Methodist movement.

Though the idea of inerrancy was becoming popular as a backlash against modernism, the FMC did not officially change their statement on Scripture until over one hundred years later. However, it cannot be doubted that members and leaders in the church were concerned about attacks on the Bible. In the 1914 *Minutes* from the Washington Conference of the FMC, it was reported:

> In the religious world of literature the last two decades especially have witnessed a marvelous revolution, which is now sweeping forward with increasing power. Under the withering effect of this destructive criticism thousands of heretofore orthodox Christians, in the ranks of both the ministry and laity, are being swept from their moorings, out into the fog banks and maze of an uncertain faith touching the fundamental and cardinal truths of the Bible, and our holy religion. Many of the loudly advertised publications from the religious publishing concerns of the day are from the pens of renowned scholars who are radical in their teachings of higher and destructive criticism, which shares liberally in evolution and New Thought doctrines. Some of these publications are so bold in their declarations against commonly accepted orthodoxy as to use language identical with much that Tom Paine, Voltaire and other pronounced infidels have used in their scathing denunciations of the Bible as being divinely inspired. … The *Free Methodist, Missionary Tidings,* and all the Sunday-School publications stand for and advocate an uncompromising faith in the Bible as being divinely inspired. Not only so, but they are pronounced in a determined opposition to all that is opposed to the same. We desire to register our pronounced and invulnerable opposition to the publications in support of "Christian Science," "Mormonism," "Modern Spiritualism," "New Thoughtism," "Higher Criticism," and "Millennial Dawnism." Perhaps the last system of error and spurious doctrines is the most audacious, circulating as it does its poisonous literature at the very threshold of our homes and churches ….[371]

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[370] B.T. Roberts, "Questions and Answers" *The Free Methodist*, XXI:5, Feb. 1, 1888, 8.
[371] 1914 Washington Conference of the Free Methodist Church, *Minutes*, p. 11-12.

This again clearly demonstrates a profound apprehension of many Free Methodists about the impact higher criticism may have on a Christian's value of the Scriptures, even though they did not embrace the position of inerrancy.

Conservative Christians responded to the attacks on Scripture by taking ever more defensive positions. As previously noted, in 1910,*The Fundamentals* were produced and published. These included attacks on Biblical criticism[372] as well as numerous articles defending the inspiration of the Scriptures.[373] An editorial in *The Free Methodist* during that same time period reflects the views of *The Fundamentals*, noting with derision the attacks on the Bible by "infidels, skeptics, higher critics, and the devil." The editor included an article by then Brown president, William W.P. Faunce in support of the Bible, even though the Faunce article did not actually speak at all to the issues of higher criticism. What Faunce did do is seek to defend the veracity of the Scriptures, writing,

> We do not want a Bible modernized and mitigated, diluted and sterilized. We want it in full, rugged virility, with all its unshorn strength, and its brutal rebukes of brutality, and its stout blows at stout-hearted and defiant sin. An eviscerated Bible is a lifeless cadaver.[374]

The problem with *The Fundamentals*, as with much of the thinking of evangelicals at the time, was that they seemed more focused on bolstering the faithful then truly engaging with the ideas that were raised by the modernists. Throughout this period, the academic

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[372] There are numerous examples that could be given. A short sampling includes, "The History of the Higher Criticism" by Canon Dyson Hague, "Fallacies of Higher Criticism" by Franklin Johnson, "My Personal Experience With the Higher Criticism" by J.J. Reeve, and "Three Peculiarities of the Pentateuch Which are Incompatible With the Graff-Wellhausen Theories of Its Composition" by Andrew Craig Robinson.
[373] A short sampling includes, "The Inspiration of the Bible – Definition, Extent and Proof" by James M. Gray, "Inspiration" by L.W. Munhall, "The Testimony of the Scriptures to Themselves" by George S. Bishop, and "Fulfilled Prophecy A Potent Argument for the Bible" by Arno C. Gaebelein.
[374] Editor, "The Good Old Book" *The Free Methodist*, 43:1 January 4, 1910, 8.

projects of fundamentalists and evangelicals were often defensive and rarely constructive in their theology.[375]

From the first article in the first volume of *The Fundamentals,* we get some insight into the thoughts of the early fundamentalists on the highly controversial linguistic tool of higher criticism. Canon Dyson Hague begins by informing the reader that higher criticism is differentiated from lower (or textual) criticism. The latter focuses on the investigation and comparison of manuscripts. Variant versions of the texts are compared with the desire to come as close as possible to the original words of the inspired authors (or as close to the autographs as possible). Higher criticism, on the other hand, focuses on the history of the origins of the Biblical books, including the authorship, dates, and even literary structures.[376] Then Hague argues that while higher criticism is a helpful tool for Biblical scholars, it "requires so devout a spirit and so exalted a faith in the supernatural …. It demands at once the ability of the scholar, and the simplicity of the believing child of God. For without faith no one can explain the Holy Scriptures, and without scholarship no one can investigate historic origins.[377] While blaming the originators of the discipline of "bas(ing) their theories on their own subjective conclusions," Hague brings his own subjectivity to the task claiming:

> anybody can understand that the Bible is the last book in the world to be studied as a mere classic by mere human scholarship without any regard to the spirit of sympathy and reverence on the part of the student. The Bible, as has been said, has no revelation to make to unBiblical minds. … Any thoughtful man must honestly admit that the Bible is to be treated as unique

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[375] Mark Noll is particularly critical of dearth of rigorous academic endeavors within evangelical and fundamentalist circles. See more on this in Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1994.
[376] Dyson Hague, "The History of the Higher Criticism," pp. 9-42 in *The Fundamentals*. V. I edited by R.A. Torrey. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003 (1917)), 9-10.
[377] Hague, 10.

> in literature, and, therefore, that the ordinary rules of critical interpretation must fail to interpret it aright.[378]

This demonstrates a real double standard. He adds that the only way one may perceive Biblical truth in the Bible is through spiritual insight.[379] Hague also traces higher criticism primarily to Spinoza's attack on the dating and authorship (Ezra, or some other compiler in post-exilic times, as opposed to Moses) of the Pentateuch in the late seventeenth century, and claimed that the later German higher critics were fanciful in their speculations and did not believe in the supernatural, and thus did not believe in God's personal revelation. In fact, he claims that their unbelief was an antecedent to their critical methods and their conclusions.[380] Though not original to German scholars, the documentary hypothesis developed within this context, culminating in the theories of Julius Wellhausen and the first volume of his history of Israel in 1878.[381]

Mark Noll and Nathan Hatch and others have correctly pointed out that while evangelicals have often had popular success in church growth, they have "failed notably in sustaining serious intellectual life. They have nourished millions of believers in the simple verities of the gospel, but have abandoned the universities, the arts, and other realms of 'high' culture. Even in its more progressive wing, evangelicalism has little intellectual muscle."[382] Hatch also points out that evangelical leaders without adequate academic

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[378] Hague, 11, 12.
[379] Hague, 12.
[380] Hague, 12-15, 21.
[381] Hague, 16-17.
[382] Nathan O. Hatch, "Evangelicalism as a Democratic Movement" in *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism.* Vol. 10 of Modern American Protestantism and Its World, Martin E. Marty, ed. (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1993), 17, 14. See also, Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994) as well as Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875-1925.* (Oxford: OUP, 1979) on the inadequacy of evangelical theological scholarship.

credentials have started their own universities, and small liberal arts colleges often work their faculty too hard to allow them adequate time for research.[383]

In his unpublished dissertation which focused on Free Methodist preaching, Dan Pugerude also asserts that this has been a significant failure within the FMC. Pugerude argues, "Free Methodism, as is characteristic of conservative denominations, has fostered an aversion to critical scholarship. … This aversion possibly finds its roots in the fact that in spite of a dedication to higher education which began early in the history of the Denomination, instruction was infrequently directed specifically toward the training of ministers."[384] Pugerude does note, however, that in 1964 the FMC began holding an annual seminar for graduate students to encourage scholarship within the FMC, and that by the 1970's, seminary training was being strongly recommended for FMC ministers.[385]

In 1942, Free Methodist leaders were founding members of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). According to their website, the organization was founded "with the hopes of reshaping the direction of evangelical Christianity in America."[386] The NAE notes that after the defeats of the 1920's (particularly the infamous Scopes Trial), conservative Christians channeled their energies in a variety of initiatives, often independent of denominations.[387]

Leslie Marston, a bishop of the Free Methodist Church, was the first secretary and second president of the NAE. President emeritus of Greenville University, W. Richard

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[383] Hatch, Evangelicalism … 17-18.
[384] Daniel Guy Pugerude, *Preaching From the Old Testament: A Study in Exegesis and Hermeneutics of the Free Methodist Church of North America.* (unpublished dissertation, Drew University, 1987), 5-6.
[385] Pugerude, 6.
[386] Editor, "History" retrieved July 21, 2015 from http://www.nae.net.
[387] Ibid, NAE, These creative means included Bible institutes, publishing houses, conferences, missions agencies, etc.

Stephens, claims that Marston "made clear before assuming office that his serving did not mean that he agreed theologically with all the positions of the NAE, especially their position on Biblical inerrancy." Stephens continued, "The Free Methodist Church rather affirmed the authority of the Scriptures for all matters of the life of faith in God in Christ."[388]

That some Free Methodists embraced an inerrant position, though, is clearly demonstrated through a couple examples. The first is the story of Dewey Beegle, who strongly opposed inerrancy, and wrote two books aimed at Free Methodists who he believed supported inerrancy. Beegle was raised in the FMC and was ordained as an elder in the Free Methodist Church in 1952. He attended Asbury Theological Seminary before earning his PhD and returning to Asbury to teach.

Beegle was critical of many conservative evangelical scholars who ended up teaching at institutions like Wheaton, Fuller, Gordon and Asbury after attending Harvard, where they could write 'safe' dissertations. His critique: "This group of right-wingers picked safe topics for their dissertations, dodged all the critical courses they could and learned little in those that they had to take because they reacted negatively. This core of professors controlled the thought of the National Association of Evangelicals and helped found the Evangelical Theological Society, based on belief in the inerrancy of the original documents of Scripture."[389]

Inerrancy was a chief concern of Beegle during his time at Asbury, especially as it affected students preparing for ministry in the FMC. He intoned, "I pleaded for a broad-

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[388] W. Richard Stephens, "Some Key Historical Roots of Free Methodism/ Colleges" unpublished paper, Aug 22, 2003, 9 –According to Stephens, this came from an undated conversation between Stephens and Marston.
[389] Edward T. Babinski, "Dewey Beegle: Journey to Freedom" in *Leaving the Fold: Testimonies of Former Fundamentalists.* (Amherst, NY, Promethius Books, 2003), 67.

gauge view that would affirm the Gospel of Jesus while being open to a view of inspiration that could be honest with all the data of Scripture. The usual rebuttal was a plea for a positive Gospel, implying that attention to critical matters was negative. I noted the far too high mortality rate of Asburyians who had gone out thinking that they had the necessary answers only to drop out of the ministry in disgust because of the warped education they had received."[390]

In 1963, Beegle published *The Inerrancy of Scripture* in which he reviewed what he considered the primary arguments he believed demonstrated the idea that while the Bible was inspired, it was not inerrant. His thesis is possibly best stated at the midpoint of the book when he claims, "Inasmuch as erroneous nonessentials do not invalidate the essential truth, it is unnecessary to contend for the unique inspiration and accuracy of every word of the autographs. By shifting the line of defense from 'absolute truth' to 'essential truth,' it is impossible to reckon with all the phenomena and teaching of Scripture and to have a sound view of authority as well."[391]

Beegle's work brought an interesting response both from within and outside the FMC. Bishop J. Paul Taylor published a two-part response in *The Free Methodist* that strongly castigated Beegle, and in a letter to the editor, Taylor was thanked for that response and for the "witness of biblical inerrancy by one of the bishops of our church."[392] There were two other letters to the editor from that same volume, which were written by a pair of key young leaders in the FMC. Don M. Joy reprimanded Beegle for his 'bitter

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[390] Babinski, 68.
[391] Dewey M. Beegle, *The Inspiration of Scripture*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), 82-83. Ten years later, Beegle followed this up with a volume entitled *Scripture, Tradition and Infallibility*.
[392] Benjamin Sharp, "Thanks to Bishop Taylor," *The Free Methodist* 96:18, Sept. 3, 1963, 17.

approach,' but maintained that Beegle was "certainly not addressing Free Methodists in his book." Joy was clearly irritated with both the tone and the focus of Beegle's diatribe. He remarked, "I would hazard a guess that he rushed into print as a self-styled apostle of enlightenment to some Fundamentalists he's met somewhere." Joy also contended that Wesley and the earliest Methodists were not inerrantists, claiming, "In the light of the present controversy, it is refreshing to recall that John Wesley charted a clear and sensible path through the confusion. 'What was their [the early Methodists'] fundamental doctrine? That the Bible is the whole and sole rule, both of Christian faith and practice.' I am optimistic to believe that Mr. Wesley, were he here, could say the same as us."[393] Joy was clearly maintaining that while Wesley had a robust view of Scripture, it was not an inerrant view.

W. Richard Stephens, a young professor and later president at Greenville College, also entered into the dialogue. He praised Bishop Taylor, but his praise was not for Taylor's position which supported inerrancy. Rather, it was praise for Taylor's willingness to respond to Beegle, and even more-so for *The Free Methodist's* willingness to enter what he considers an important dialogue. Stephens writes, "I wish to express my thanks to you for featuring Bishop Taylor's letter, which I interpret to be tacit admission to the necessity for wholesale dialogue and controversy for personal Christian growth. I am pleased to see that *The Free Methodist* has become a forum for inquiry, dialogue, and now controversy, while continuing its tradition of proclamation; I trust that it will continue in this path."[394]

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[393] Donald M. Joy, "The Bible Our Sole Rule of Faith" *The Free Methodist* 96:18, Sept. 3, 1963, 17.
[394] W. Richard Stephens, "A Call for More Dialogue" *The Free Methodist* 96:18, Sept. 3, 1963, 17.

Another example of the ongoing debate and potential for embracing the inerrancy position can be witnessed in the variety of responses from some significant leaders within the church. These clearly demonstrate that the issue of inerrancy was for some a valid option at this period of the FMC's history. As noted earlier, the *Wesleyan Theological Journal's* Spring 1968 edition contained three articles focused on the issue. W. Ralph Thompson of Spring Arbor College (a Free Methodist school) attacked the neo-orthodox position, considering its idea that humans can 'encounter' God through an errant text as mere subjectivity that denies the objective authority of Scripture and that allows "paganism, impurity and pandemonium to inundate society."[395] Thompson admitted that there are numerous passages in Scripture that seem both contradictory or difficult in terms of the inerrancy debate. He also raised the issue of the differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew texts. But these issues and questions, Thompson believed, would eventually be solved by archeology and 'other disciplines,' and thus we should have faith that these other perceived errors of Scripture will also be eventually worked out. Concludes Thompson:

> In the meantime, it is imperative that the Bible be considered as an objective statement of truth and as a medium through which the Holy Spirit can bring the reader into a direct encounter with God. To approach the Scriptures as objective truth prepares the mind and heart for the subjective experience. Not to approach them thus raises a barrier which the Spirit must overcome before He can be heard, if indeed He succeeds to be heard at all. Failure to approach Scriptures as the objective standard of divine truth conditions the reader to hear the voice of fallible reason or of carnal desire, voiced which the individual may even mistake for the voice of Deity. How can one 'try the spirits whether they be of God' unless there be an objective standard by which to try them? The holy Scriptures are that standard, that body of writings which our Lord and His apostles pronounced inerrant.[396]

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[395] W. Ralph Thompson, "Facing Objections Raised Against Biblical Inerrancy," *WTJ* 3:1 (Spring, 1968), 24.
[396] Thompson, "Facing …", 28-29. Wilber Dayton's article, "Theology and Biblical Inerrancy" immediately follows Thompson's in the Spring, 1968 edition of the *WTJ*. He also strongly argues in favor of an inerrant

This is just one example of the support that was within the FMC for a change to an inerrant statement during the merger talks that were proceeding at this time.

Concerning the merger with the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the article "Protestant Unity" was reprinted in *The Free Methodist* in July of 1954. What is very interesting here is that this comes one week after a report of the (Free Methodist/ Wesleyan) unity committee.[397] The crux of the article is that "(e)fforts to promote Protestant unity will be defeated so long as there is doubt in the minds of ministers as to the plenary view of the Scriptures. … Surely the time has come to shelve the 'critical approach' to the Scriptures in which peripheral questions which are sheer skepticism are entertained." The author then quotes the Rev. J. Sidlow Baxter at length from *Prophetic News*, including, "'(t)here has never been complete uniformity of *interpretation* – hence our diversity of denomination; but there *must* be unity of *attitude toward* the Bible, or there is simply no final authority, and all our Protestant bodies are thrown into confusion.'"[398] This seems a clear call for Free Methodists to embrace the inerrant view of the Wesleyans.

In "The Church and the World" section of *Light & Life*[399] in 1973 was a short article documenting teens at West Morris Street FMC – Indianapolis holding a Bible read-a-thon. A part of their rationale was their frustration with "the empty rhetoric of politicians at election time and from scriptural injunctions such as 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away' and 'the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word

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position offering 10 propositions of why an inerrant position is integral to Christian theology. *WTJ* 3:1 (Spring 1968), 32-37.

[397] This concerns unity with the Wesleyan Methodist Church, which will be considered in detail below.

[398] John W. Bradbury, "Protestant Unity," *The Free Methodist* Vol.87 No. 30, July 27, 1954, p.5. This is a reprint from the magazine, *Watchman-Examiner.*

[399] The official magazine of the FMC had its name changed from *The Free Methodist* to *Light and Life* in 1972.

of our God shall stand forever.'" They also note Harold Lindsell's two-part essay in *Christianity Today* entitled "The Infallible Word" as influential. Lindsell was a prominent proponent of inerrancy at the time, and became the center of the controversy when his *Battle for the Bible* was published in 1976.[400] At around this same time, the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was formed. The group included the influential evangelical theologian, J. I. Packer. At their Chicago meeting in 1978, they issued an official statement on Biblical Inerrancy which was persuasive for many evangelicals, though it should be noted that the wording of the statement left a lot of room for varying views on revelation.[401]

Although there may have been a desire of some Free Methodists at times throughout the twentieth century to see the church officially adopt inerrancy, FMC leaders had demonstrated an unwillingness to be pulled into an inerrant (fundamentalist) position on Scripture. In fact, in 1969, *The Free Methodist* published an article from one of the most renowned FMC theologians at the time, George Turner of Asbury Theological Seminary, on the relevance of the Bible for today. He argued that the "chief claim of the Bible to authority and relevance is the transformation it often makes in the lives of earnest readers."[402] We should see this in opposition to the idea that the Bible is authoritative in and of itself. In that same issue, another of Turner's articles was printed which focused more specifically

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[400] Editor, "Teens Hold Bible Readathon over Election Weekend," *Light and Life* Vol. 106:1 Jan 16, 1973, p. 10.
[401] The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy as posted on their official cite states, "The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority." Alliancenet.org – retrieved Sept. 12, 2016.
[402] George Allen Turner, "Biblical Relevance," *The Free Methodist*, 102:7, April 8, 1969, 4. Reprinted from *The Asbury Seminarian* (April, 1967).

on inerrancy. In the article, Turner invited his readers to recognize some important issues about the Scriptures. First of all, he pointed out that there are "varying degrees" of inspiration that we find in the Old Testament which range from the Decalogue, given through dictation, to the Proverbs, which "profess to the be distilled wisdom of the ages."[403]

Turner then turned to the New Testament and specifically the apostle Paul. He reminded his readers that Paul's claims of apostolic authority come specifically in the context of his preaching of the good news. Turner then writes, "Paul based his claim on a direct revelation from Jesus Christ. If this claim is valid, there can be no better claim to immediacy, and hence accuracy so far as divine revelation is concerned."[404] Turner also prompted his readers to remember that there are times when Paul denied that he was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in his writing. One such example is recorded in I Corinthians 7. When speaking to married couples, he believed that what he was saying was from the Lord, but when speaking of other relationships, he notes that these are his own opinions on the matter. Paul writes that concerning these, "(he) has no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy."[405] Of this, Turner opines, "(e)xtreme fundamentalists would object to this interpretation because they fear it would jeopardize the full authority of the New Testament. Paul and the New Testament writers generally seemed to entertain no such anxieties." [406]

In this article, Turner also asserted that the anonymous letter to the Hebrews is in the canon because of the intrinsic usefulness of the book, and not because it was in some

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[403] George Allen Turner, "Biblical Authority," pp. 8-11, 21 *The Free Methodist.* 102:7, April 8, 1969, 8.
[404] Turner, 9.
[405] I Corinthians 7:25b. (NIV)
[406] Turner, 9.

way connected to Jesus or one of the apostles. Additionally, he wrestled with the issue of the way in which New Testament authors 'misuse' the Old Testament, noting that this (mis)usage was standard for the time, and that these authors were not interested in modern concerns about accuracy.[407]

With the merger conversations reaching their culmination, and an audience of Free Methodists (and no doubt Wesleyans) reading his work, Turner is carefully conservative when he speaks to the topic of inerrancy. Because of the importance of the issue and the ensuing compromise that Free Methodists made with the Wesleyans on inerrancy, it is helpful to consider Turner's words.

> The conservatives, fundamentalists, evangelicals, generally believe that God revealed Himself historically through the prophets, and especially in Christ, and that this series of revelations is authentically and officially preserved in the Scriptures. They believe that the Bible writers were inspired in a sense in which no other writers were inspired; that the inspiration of the Bible is distinct and unique. Most of them believe also, as a corollary, that divine inspiration makes possible a trustworthy revelation. They believe, too, that since God is true, the things that He reveals are truth without an admixture of error. While they believe that human personality did transmit the revelation, yet the factor of divine inspiration was adequate to assure that the resulting product would be free from statements contrary to fact. No one, of course, would entertain the notion that extant versions of the Scriptures are thus free from error, but they bear witness to original documents which were in themselves free from erroneous statements. Since the original autographs are no longer available, this must remain in the area of an inference based upon extant copies of the original.[408]

The key issue here is Turner's comment that the original documents were 'free from erroneous statements.' This is an important difference from the Wesleyan Article of Religion at the time that said, "These Scriptures we do hold to be the inspired and infallibly written Word of God, fully inerrant in their original manuscript and superior to all human

[407] Turner, 9-10.
[408] Turner, 11.

authority."[409] In closing his essay, Turner remained conservative, and here follows the lead of many who do argue for inerrancy. He posits, "That there are apparent errors no one can deny. That they affect ideas has not been successfully proven. That study, patience and prayer, and often suspended judgment, is appropriate in seeking solutions should be generally accepted."[410]

As I end this chapter, I am returning to the merger negotiations with the Wesleyans. FMC leaders, after holding consistently to a non-inerrant position on Scripture for over one-hundred years, faced their most serious challenge during the proposed merger with the Wesleyans. The popularity of inerrancy clearly went beyond just the casual layman in the FMC. The General Conference of 1974 adopted what would have been the joint statement with the Wesleyans on Scripture that included inerrancy, even though the FM Study Commission on Doctrine had recommended a statement that was non-inerrant.[411] Bynum is correct in noting that "the Wesleyan tradition has consistently affirmed the

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[409] *Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of North America.* (Syracuse, NY: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing Association, 1955), 12-13.

[410] Turner, 11.

[411] 1974 Report of the Free Methodist Study Commission of Doctrine, p.3. The SCOD statement reads:
The Scriptures
V. Sufficiency

We believe the Bible is God's uniquely inspired word to man. This is the witness of the early church confirmed by the subsequent Councils. It is the trustworthy record of the powerful words and acts of God culminating in Jesus Christ. It is the full and complete revelation of everything necessary to our salvation. It is a divine-human book having inherent and self-authenticating authority over the whole range of human life and appropriate to every generation and culture. The spirit and the message of the Bible accords with all truth whenever found.

All articles of faith and conditions of salvation taught by the church must accord with what the Bible teaches. It is to be understood and interpreted in the light of the revelation of God in the person of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is needed to make God's word alive and life-changing.

The Bible has been preserved and transmitted under the superintendency of God from generation to generation and from language to language.

Note that the SCOD has been meeting at least annually since 1920 See *Light and Life,* 116:2 (Feb. 1983), 26. This article also includes a helpful description of the purpose of the Study Commission on Doctrine in the work if the Free Methodist Church.
The adopted position of the

Bible's absolute reliability in matters related to salvation or to faith and practice."[412] However, in this case he missed that the Wesleyan Church had adopted an inerrant position on the Scriptures. The original 1843 Article of religion for the Wesleyan Church was not an inerrant statement. It read,

> The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scriptures, we do understand these canonical books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority there is no doubt in the church.[413]

This was the official statement of the Wesleyan Church through 1954. The 1954 *Discipline* was to be the official *Discipline* of a merger between the Wesleyans and the Free Methodists who would have called themselves the United Wesleyan Methodist Church. The merger was not successful at this time, and in the 1955 *Wesleyan Church Discipline*, the statement of Scripture was changed. The New Statement read:

> The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scriptures, we do understand the books of the Old and New Testaments. These Scriptures we do hold to be the inspired and infallibly written Word of God, fully inerrant in their original manuscript and superior to all human authority.[414]

Notice the change in the new statement from a more general blanket statement that 'the original manuscripts were without error and transmitted without any

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[412] Bynum, 21.

[413] *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America.* (Boston: Published by O. Scott. John B. Hall, Printer, 1843), 12-13. The article then lists the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. Though the wording is slightly modified in the last sentence of the Article going from "whose authority was never any doubt in the Church" to "of whose authority there is no doubt in the church," this is both identical to the Article on Scripture for the Church of England and the Free Methodist Church.

[414] *Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of North America.* (Syracuse, NY: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing Association, 1955), 12-13. As with the 1843 Article, the 66 canonical books are then listed.

corruption of any essential doctrine' to a much more robust statement including that 'they are inspired and infallibly written, and superior to all human authority.'[415]

Over the next two decades, there continued to be merger conversations between the two churches. They were led by the Committee On Merger Exploration (COME) who eventually proposed a new compromise statement on Scripture which was approved by the 1974 FMC General Conference which reads:

> We believe the Holy Scriptures are God's record, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit. They have been given *without error* faithfully recorded by holy men of God as moved by the Holy Spirit, and subsequently transmitted without corruption of any essential doctrine. They are the authoritative record of the revelation of God's acts in creation, in history, in our salvation, and especially in his Son, Jesus Christ.
>
> We believe this written Word fully reveals the will of God concerning man in all things necessary to salvation and Christian living; so that whatever is not found therein, nor can be proved thereby, is not to be required of one as an article of faith or as necessary to salvation.[416]

Note the change from the 1969 Free Methodist *Book of Disciple* where the Article on Scripture reads:

> The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required by any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. By the Holy Scriptures we understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testaments of whose authority there was never any doubt in the church.[417]

The change in wording in the 1974 statement demonstrates the movement towards a more fundamentalist inerrant wording. "They have been given without error … transmitted without corruption." This is where we need to recognize a difference between the Word

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[415] Black and Drury, 227.

[416] The Free Methodist Church of North America: The Book of Discipline 1974. (Winona Lake, IN: The Free Methodist Publishing House, 1974), 13-14. Following this, is a list of the 66 books and a note that the Old Testament is not contrary to the new and that both Testaments bear witness to God's salvation in Christ. The emphasis is mine.

[417] The Free Methodist Church of North America: The Book of Discipline 1969. (Winona Lake, IN: The Free Methodist Church Publishing House, 1969), 10-11. Again, there follows the list of the 66 canonical books.

made flesh and the written 'Word of God.' Bynum helpfully notes that the "Bible is a collection of texts that engages us. It is by nature interrelational. It is not first a textbook, an intellectual construct, or a set of propositions that one can simply analyze from an objective viewpoint. It does not glow with unequivocal divine authority simply because it exists. These texts, as we interact with them, begin to draw us into a relationship with God and with the community of faith."[418] So, the Bible is a means to an end, as opposed to an end in itself. Bynum maintains that "the Wesleyan tradition has consistently affirmed the Bible's absolute reliability in matters related to salvation or to faith and practice. … If we are always drawn towards the center, we can relax about the 'outer edges'"[419] This theory, I believe, saves the church from having to fight for an irrelevant doctrine and allows the church to focus on what is central to Christianity, the *missio dei* in the world.

There is a significant difference between focusing on the functional authority of Scripture as opposed to the conceptual authority of Scripture, the latter of which limits the authority of Scripture to the composition of the original texts. The conceptual authority is an incomplete view, for it negates the way in which God's inspiration continues to occur in the ways in which the church continues to read, interpret and engage with the biblical texts today.[420] It has, for example, been common in Protestant circles to talk of the unction of the Spirit in preaching.

Over the next decade that followed the failed merger, there continued to be division in the church over whether Free Methodists were inerrantists or not. This division was

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[418] Bynum, 20.
[419] Bynum, 21.
[420] Richard P. Thompson, "Authority is what Authority Does: Rethinking the Role of the Bible as Scripture," pp. 35-47 in *Rethinking the Bible*. Richard B. Thompson and Thomas Jay Oord, eds. (Nampa, ID: SacraSage Press, 2018), 37.

exacerbated by the fact that the official Article of religion on Scripture for the FMC was the compromise statement that they had agreed to adopt in anticipation of the merger. In preparation for the 1985 General Conference, Bishop Donald Bastian wrote an article in *Light and Life* in which he posed three questions to consider for the upcoming event. The first of these concerned whether the FMC would reaffirm its Methodist heritage. Bastian writes, "(t)his question will not be addressed so explicitly. The tone of the General Conference may well seem pragmatic, isolating immediate problems and seeking immediate solutions. But the underlying question will be implicit, underlying all we decide. When the event closes, we will be a little more Methodist or a little more Anabaptist or a little more rootless, depending on how seriously we consider our historical lineage in all our deliberations."[421] In the same issue, Lyn Cryderman notes that one of the items that would be raised at the 1985 General Conference was a stronger position on the authority of Scripture.[422] During this time, as discussed previously, Free Methodists already held the compromise position with the Wesleyans, one that many of their leaders felt to be too close to an inerrant position.[423]

The thirtieth General Conference of the FMC met in July of 1985. The August 1985 *Light and Life* published an article by Charles White, a professor of philosophy and religion

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[421] Donald N. Bastian, "Three Questions for General Conference," *Light and Life,* 118:3, (March, 1985), 28-29.
[422] Lyn Cryderman, "Tough Issues Face General Conference," *Light and Life,* 118:3, (March, 1985), 22-23.
[423] It is interesting to note that Cryderman was not pleased that the issue of inerrancy was ultimately sent to SCOD. Cryderman writes, "Yet some issues which have troubled the denomination for the past six years were referred for further study. Can we really afford ten years of confusion over issues like inerrancy …" Lyn Crydeman, "We Need Each Other," *Light and Life*, 118:10, (August, 1985), 34. One letter-writer in the January edition of Light and Life expressed his disappointment that the word inerrant was not added to the article on Scripture. Don Wollochleger writes, "I firmly believe that the use of this word sets us apart from the liberal organizations. There is abundant evidence that those Christian organizations who do not adhere to or who have surrendered the doctrine of the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture inevitably abandon orthodox Christianity as well." "Letters," *Light and Life*, 119:1, (January, 1986), 5.

at Spring Arbor College. In it, White dramatized a fictional conversation between a husband and wife in which he argues that the Bible is inspired, authoritative, and inerrant. On the issue of inerrancy, he argues that the Bible is without error in the original autographs which we do not have. As for why we should sweat the details, White posits his answers through the wife who tells her husband,

> Why sweat the details? Because who decides what's a detail and what's important? Some think Jonah's a detail, but others consider the virgin birth or the Resurrection a detail! Another reason to sweat the details of science and history is that they are the only things in the Bible we can check. There's no way for us to prove that there really *is* such a thing as eternal life nor to know that believing in Jesus really gets you into heaven. But we can test the Bible's history and science – we can know if it's right or not. If I thought the Bible couldn't be trusted in things I could check, I'd be silly to trust it in matters I couldn't check.[424]

The timing of this article is the thing that is most interesting. It is not that White is espousing new doctrine here. This is the basic position of fundamentalists on inerrancy. Yet, only two months earlier, Bishop Elmer Parsons wrote in his bishop's column,

> "I want our church to be evangelical through and through. I believe we are. While we believe, preach, and uphold the fundamentals of the faith, the term, fundamentalist, does not fit us well. The combative attitude toward other Christians often associated with that term does not properly apply to us. Evangelical fits us much better. Without reservation, we uphold the historic evangelical Christian doctrines."[425]

Less than a year later, *Light and Life* focused an entire issue on evangelicalism and fundamentalism. Pastor Wilfred Gunderson echoed Parson's sentiments in an article entitled "Portrait of an Evangelical." There, he listed primary fundamentalist beliefs, including the virgin birth, Christ's deity, atoning death and bodily resurrection and second coming before adding, "Evangelicals, while sharing most fundamentalist beliefs, prefer

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[424] Charles Edward White, "But I Always Accept It," *Light and Life*, 118:8, (August, 1985), 24.
[425] Elmer E. Parsons, "My Dream for the Church," *Light and Life*, 118:6 (June, 1985), 27.

Wesley's 'Think and let think' attitude on many matters."[426] Parsons followed up Gunderson's 1985 premises with an article in which he also compared evangelical and fundamentalist beliefs. Parson first covered the common ground, including belief in the inspiration of the Bible as well as the items listed by Gunderson as primary beliefs. He also correctly notes that both stand opposed to theological liberalism. Where they differ, is in their history and in their attitude. He correctly notes that fundamentalism arose within evangelicalism as a response to the modernist crisis. However, he adds that because of the way they were 'injured' in the theological conflicts in the early twentieth century, fundamentalists have long taken a strong stance in favor of separation. He concludes,

> They not only refuse to associate with modernists, they refuse to have dealings with anyone who does not associate with them. … Billy Graham has been a special target of many fundamentalists because he participates in citywide campaigns without insisting on a theological test of those who cooperate. Having separated from their denominational bodies at great cost, fundamentalists have little patience with any Bible-believing church member who is committed to staying within a mixed body. As a result of this position on separation, the fundamentalists have often won the title of Fighting Fundamentalists.[427]

While it is clear that there were Free Methodists who fought hard for certain theological positions such as inerrancy, these internecine battles were not at the heart of the FMC. In an addendum to Parsons' article, Les Blank, then dean of the Graduate School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University, wrote, "Evangelicals insist on the acceptance of the essential doctrine of Christianity. But they are equally concerned that their faith express itself in love (Galatians 5:6). Fundamentalists, on the other hand, often stress right belief with such vigor

[426] Wilfred E. Gunderson, "Portrait of an Evangelical," *Light and Life,* 119:4, (April, 1986), 8.
[427] Elmer E. Parsons, "Evangelical or Fundamentalist," *Light and Life,* 119:4 (April, 1986), 11.

that they identify faith with orthodoxy. As a result, they often neglect to practice their faith as a personal relationship with God."[428]

In his overview of the Thirtieth General Conference, Jay Dudley, a pastor from California, lamented the number of items that were referred to an overloaded Study Commission on Doctrine (SCOD). On theological issues in the FMC, he concluded, "this conference loaded (SCOD) up with issues like the doctrine of entire sanctification, speaking in tongues, biblical inerrancy, etc. It appears to me that we're in theological disarray, not knowing exactly what we believe."[429] This seems a pretty fair statement as the FMC was still reeling following the failed merger with the Wesleyans. Dudley notes, "Yet we seem earnest about recovering a lost sense of identity. Occasional references were made to 1974 and the changes made then in hopes of merging with another denomination. Those changes are now seen as losses that we want to regain."[430]

In a note from former *Light and Life* editor Lloyd Knox to Marston Memorial History Center director, Evelyn Mottweiler, dated September, 1986, Knox asks, "Evelyn, Are U (sic) aware that this is what study com (SCOD) presented to G.C. – but was ignored in favor of merger statements?" He continues a little later,

> The article of religion carried now in the Discipline is quite new. It did not follow the recommendation of the standing committee (Doctrinal Study Commission) to the General Conference. Rather it adopted a statement agreed to reluctantly in an attempt at merger with the Wesleyan church. No member of the Free Methodist panel on merger was happy with the statement, but it was adopt it or deliberately scuttle merger. The merger did not succeed, but our denomination finds itself with a statement which is not acceptable to its leadership. Furthermore, the matter is before the current Study Commission. It appears that the next General Conference will receive a recommendation for rewording.

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[428] Les Blank, "Acceptance vs. Rejection," *Light and Life*, 119:4 (April, 1986), 11.
[429] Jay F. Dudley, "It was Something Grand," *Light and Life,* 118:10 (August, 1985), 8.
[430] Ibid, 8.

> As to our constituency's attitude we would have to say that for those capable of considering the subject inerrancy theory would not be approved. For the uninformed it is indeed a tricky subject since the very word "inerrancy" sounds so pious, so holy.[431]

Jay Dudley was assigned to report for *Light and Life* on the work done by the 1985 General Conference. His report contains similar concerns as the note by Knox and is worth repeating in full here.

> Our church has a high and healthy view of the nature of Scripture. But we have never used the word *inerrant* concerning the Holy Scriptures in our "Articles of Religion." The articles *do* affirm that the Scriptures were "given without error."
>
> Some feel that this phrase does not say enough. Consequently, a resolution to insert the word *inerrant* into the article on Scripture was brought to General Conference.
>
> When this resolution was brought before the revision committee, the atmosphere became tense. It was as if someone had brought a hand grenade into the room. And those who knew what was at stake wondered if someone would pull the pin.
>
> No one ever did. But there was sufficient discussion to help everyone know that the word is not incidental. The proponents take this word and the willingness to use it as an indication of evangelical orthodoxy. But for others, the word is a trademark of an entire philosophical system that Wesleyan thought rejects because it elevates human reason over Scripture.
>
> With issues of this magnitude before it, the committee recommended the resolution be referred to (SCOD). The General Conference later approved this referral. (SCOD) now has four years to work at clarifying the denomination's teaching on Scripture, for the final action requires a report from (SCOD) at the next General Conference.[432]

The 1989 General Conference did indeed accept a new statement on Scripture. However, two important points should be noted. First, in spite of Knox's views on how unacceptable the 1974 statement was to the C.O.M.E. committee and FM church leadership, the joint statement was the official position of the FMC on Scripture from 1974-1989. Second, two

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[431] Lloyd Knox, "Personal note to Evelyn Mottweiller", September,1986.
[432] Jay F. Dudley, "Inerrancy," *Light and Life*, 118:10 (August, 1985), 11.

separate entities sought to strengthen the inerrant wording of the 1974 statement at the 1985 General Conference. These papers are titled 369 and 370. Paper 369 originated within the South Michigan conference from a group not insignificantly named, Committee of the Concerned.[433] The point person was Dr. Charles White, who implored the General Conference to keep the inerrant statement. Paper 370, which originated from Wabash Conference, shared the desire for a more robust (read inerrant) view of Scripture, desiring the pertinent section of the statement to read, "We believe that the Holy Scriptures are God's record, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit. They have been given without error …"[434] The 1989 SCOD report followed up the discussion pertinent to these two papers and the decisions of the 1985 General Conference. It says,

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[433] 1985 General Conference Delegates Handbook of the Free Methodist Church, p. 59 under the Resolutions tab. The proposal in full reads:
WHEREAS our Lord clearly taught that "the Scriptures cannot be broken" (John 10:35), and
WHEREAS He included even the "jots and tittles" as part of the Scripture (Matthew 5:18), and
WHEREAS John Wesley declared, "if there be any mistake in the Bible, there well may be a thousand," (Journal, 24 August 1776, and
WHEREAS Free Methodists have always believed in the full authority of the Bible, and
WHEREAS the article on the Scripture in our Articles of Religion, Par. 108, states that the Scripture has "been given without error (and) faithfully recorded by holy men of God as moved by the Holy Spirit," and
WHEREAS in 1963 Bishop J. Paul Taylor publicly rebuked a Free Methodist elder for teaching that the inspiration of Scripture guaranteed its inerrancy only in matters of faith and practice, and
WHEREAS recently some in the denomination have apparently asserted that the words, "given without error," in Par. 108 of the DISCIPLINE apply only to the essentials of the gospel, to the requirements of faith and conduct,
WE THEREFORE PETITION THE GENERAL CONFERENCE TO
Clarify the denominations teaching on the Scripture. We request the General Conference to make it plain that we believe that when the Scriptures speak, God speaks, and that since God cannot lie, the Scripture can never teach that which is untrue. We wish the General Conference to state that when the Scripture makes affirmations, those affirmations are true, reliable, and inerrant in all matters.
WE THEN ASK THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF NORTH AMERICA, and all other General Conferences to amend Par. 108 of the DISCIPLINE in the following ways: … (notes changes leading to this final proposed wording:)
We believe the Holy Scriptures are God's inerrant <u>record</u>, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit. <u>God gave them</u> without error, and <u>caused them to be</u> faithfully recorded by holy men of God as moved by the Holy Spirit. <u>Thus they are without error in all that they affirm in any matter. They were</u> subsequently transmitted without corruption of any essential doctrine. They are the authoritative …" (The proposed changes have been underlined.

[434] 1985 General Conference Delegate Handbook of the Free Methodist Church, p. 59 under the Resolutions tab.

> Paper #369 of the 1985 General Conference requested that the church's position on the Scriptures be clarified. This task was referred to the Study Commission on Doctrine. Our response is in two parts. First, we offer an Article of Religion on the Authority of the Scriptures which, if adopted by this body, would be put to further referendum vote as a replacement for our present article. Second, we submit the statement, The Role of the Bible Scholar in the College Classroom. We offer this paper, originating out of the Study Commission, with the recommendation that it be given official status by this body but not be placed in the Book of Discipline. It could then be used to clarify the position of the denomination on this critical matter.[435]

The 1989 SCOD statement on Scripture was adopted, in spite of impassioned pleas at the meeting of the 1989 FM General Conference to reconsider, and it remains the official FMC Article on Scripture today. It does not include a statement supporting the inerrancy of Scripture.

What has been demonstrated in this chapter is that Free Methodists, like most theologically conservative denominations, were deeply concerned about the challenges to the authority of the Scriptures. The FMC did change its statement on Scripture to a more inerrant position as a compromise in order to facilitate a proposed merger with the Wesleyan Methodist Church. However, in spite of substantial support within the church to hold firm to that position on the inerrancy of Scriptures, ultimately the church rejected inerrancy.

[435] 1989 Report of the Study Commission on Doctrine to General Conference, D. Scripture, p.ii.

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Chapter 4 - Premillennial Dispensational Theology and the Free Methodist Church

In the previous chapter, the subject of the Free Methodist Church and its developing understanding of the ideas of God's revelation and the inerrancy of the Scriptures was evaluated. There, I argued that while there was some support for it in the FMC, the doctrine of inerrancy was ultimately rejected in favor of a statement that maintained a high view of Scripture, but which focused on the functional rather than a conceptual or qualitative authority of the Scriptures. In other words, Free Methodists found the Scriptures authoritative more through the ways in which they guided the lives of believers as opposed to merely valuing them for being God's Word. Closely connected with the subject of inerrancy in the American fundamentalist movement is dispensational theology, which is the subject of this chapter. I will demonstrate that much like inerrancy, premillennial dispensational theology found some support within the FMC, but was ultimately rejected, particularly at the General Conferences of the church.[436]

Those who were born in the 1950's and 1960's came of age at a time in American history when eschatological expectations were once again heightened. Hal Lindsey, who graduated from the bastion of dispensational theology, Dallas Theological Seminary, published *The Late Great Planet Earth* in 1970. The book became a best-seller, winning many over to his modified version of premillennial dispensational theology, and helping

[436] It is important to remember that fundamentalism exists as a subset within evangelicalism, and that there necessarily will be overlap, but that perhaps the most important/ telling trait of fundamentalism is a mentality … fighting for the "truth" of one's position. While we all do this to some extent, it is an integral element of the fundamentalist mindset. As early as 1920, when Curtis Lee Laws coined the term, he denoted that it was describing those "who were fighting for the faith." Curtis Lee Laws, "Convention Side Lights," *The Watchman-Examiner*, 8:27 (1 July 1920), 834.

fuel end time speculation.[437] In 1972, the movie "A Thief in the Night" was released. The story centered around a young woman who thought she was a Christian, but who was not 'raptured' to heaven when Christ returned. Three more movies were produced as a part of the series, and the soundtrack for the first movie included Larry Norman's song, "I Wish We'd All Been Ready," which included such lyrics as "A man and wife asleep in bed, she hears a noise and turns her head he's gone, I wish we'd all been ready," and the haunting lyric, "There's no time to change your mind. The Son has come and you've been left behind."[438] Perhaps this general societal interest in eschatology is one of the reasons why there were so many attempts within the FMC to change the official statement(s) on the end times.

While some may not consider premillennial dispensational theology a primary tenet of fundamentalist theology, as it is not included in the classic list of the five fundamentals affirmed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1910,[439] it is important to remember, as has been argued by George Marsden that fundamentalism was a "patchwork coalition of representatives of other movements. Although it developed a distinct life, identity, and eventually a subculture of its own, (fundamentalism) never existed wholly independently of the older movements from which it grew."[440] It is true that the Princeton theologians who provided a defense of the doctrine of inerrancy were opposed to John

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[437] Mark S. Sweetnam, "Hal Lindsay and the Great Dispensational Mutation," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*. 23:2 (July, 2011), 217. While this thesis is more focused on theories of premillennial dispensationalism that predated Lindsey, it is important to note both that Lindsey was innovative in his interpretation of dispensationalism, and also that it was within two years of Lindsey's first book that Free Methodists did change their Article of Religion concerning eschatology. This will be explored later in this chapter.

[438] Larry Norman, "I Wish We'd All Been Ready." Track 10 on *Upon This Rock*, Capitol Records, Vinyl.

[439] George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1991, 117.

[440] Marsden, 4.

Nelson Darby's premillennial dispensationalism, but Marsden argues that even so, "the millenarians stood at the center of the fundamentalist coalition of the 1920s, and the development of their thought is crucial to understanding the broader fundamentalist movement."[441] In arguing my thesis, I maintain with Marsden and Ernest Sandeen that premillennial dispensational theology became a primary tenet of fundamentalism, particularly after the publication of Scofield's reference Bible in 1909. It is true that one could be a fundamentalist without holding to dispensational theology, but most who held the doctrine were fundamentalists.

Before looking at the official stances Free Methodists have taken on eschatology over the years, it is important to understand exactly what we are talking about by setting the historical context and defining some key terminology.

Eschatology

Eschatology is simply the study of end things. In the *Dictionary of Christianity in America,* T. P. Weber notes that the study of end times "may refer either to the fate of individuals (death, resurrection, judgment and afterlife) or to events surrounding the end of the world. In America, when tied to expectations of a coming millennia, such concerns have produced powerful movements with significant religious and social effects."[442] In much Christian thought, eschatology is the ultimate conclusion of the entire meta-narrative of the cosmos that began with creation, and which will be concluded according to

[441] Marsden, 5.
[442] Timothy P. Weber, "Eschatology" in *Dictionary of Christianity in America.* Edited by Daniel G. Reid, Robert D. Linder, Bruce L. Shelley and Harry S. Stout, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 399.

Revelation 21:1-3 with the passing away of the first creation and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.[443]

Interest in the eschaton can be traced to the very beginning of Christianity, and it is clearly a prominent theme in the New Testament.[444] At the time of the ascension of Jesus, two men in white robes spoke to Jesus' disciples, saying, "Men of Galilee … why do you stand here looking in the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."[445] Since that time, there has always been some speculation about what Jesus meant, and how and when Jesus would return. In the Gospels, Jesus spoke of his return on many occasions. One example is recorded in John 14, where Jesus told his followers,

> "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.**2** My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? **3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."[446]

Other New Testament authors, including Peter and Paul, also wrote extensively about the eschaton. A couple of examples are helpful as a backdrop for this study. Paul encouraged the Christians at Thessalonica to wait for Jesus, who "rescues us from the

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[443] Richard Bauckham, "Eschatology" in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought: Intellectual, Spiritual, and Moral Horizons of Christianity.* Edited by Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason and Hugh Pyper, (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 206.

[444] Ben Witherinton, "Dispensationalism." In *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, edited by Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Iain R. Torrance, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2011. http://ezproxy.greenville.edu/login?qurl=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/cupdct/dispensationalism/0?institutionId=3000.

[445] Acts 1:11 (NRSV)

[446] John 14:1-3. (NRSV) In Matthew 24, Jesus focused on a future day that may be referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, and may also be speaking to an eschatological return of the Son of Man and in Matthew 25, Jesus tells three parables, all of which speak to being aware that there are eternal consequences to the lives that we live.

wrath that is coming."[447] In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes extensively on the resurrection of Christ and the implication of the resurrection for Christ's followers. He writes,

> for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. **23** But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. **24** Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. **25** For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. **26** The last enemy to be destroyed is death. … **50** What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. **51** Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, **52** in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. **53** For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. **54** When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:
> "Death has been swallowed up in victory."
> **55** "Where, O death, is your victory?
> Where, O death, is your sting?"[448]

Clearly, Paul has an expectation that Christ will return and put things to right for those who have been faithful in following him. Peter, too, wrote about the eschaton, using it as a word of encouragement for Christians to live lives wholly devoted to God. In II Peter, he wrote,

> **3** First of all you must understand this, that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts **4** and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!" **5** They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, **6** through which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished. **7** But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless.
> **8** But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. **9** The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not

[447] I Thessalonians 1:9-10. (NRSV)
[448] I Corinthians 15: 22-26, 50-55. (NRSV)

> wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. **10** But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.
> **11** Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, **12** waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? **13** But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.[449]

Peter certainly paints an apocalyptic day of the Lord that will come like a thief and that will see cataclysmic destruction of the heavens and the earth. There are other New Testament passages that reflect on the eschaton, not the least of which is the book of Revelation. Revelation focuses on the idea that even though it looks like Rome will triumph, if one could pull back the curtains, reality would be *revealed* and Christians would see that God is in control of all things, including the end of time which will be marked with a new heaven and a new earth.[450]

To better comprehend why a study of the eschaton is important for understanding the relationship between American fundamentalism and the Free Methodist Church, it is necessary to examine several other terms that will facilitate this study.

Apocalypticism

The book of Revelation (or the apocalypse of John) is the one notable example of apocalyptic literature in the New Testament.[451] Αποκαλιπτειν literally means to uncover or

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[449] II Peter 3: 3-13. (NRSV)
[450] Revelation 21. Note, however, that there have been diverse interpretations of the book of Revelation including some who see it as a puzzle that can be pieced together to provide a picture of how, and possibly even when, Christ will return.
[451] Some of Jesus' teaching, specifically Matthew 24 and Mark 11, as well as II Thessalonians 2 are also examples of apocalyptic literature in the New Testament.

unveil. The apocalypse of John is a message for Christians who were struggling in a difficult time when the Roman Empire was near the apex of its power, and Christians were living with persecution that at times became quite intense. The message of Revelation is that the curtain of all reality is metaphorically being pulled back and the reality of God's authority over all things is being revealed. Drawing deeply from the prophetic and sometimes apocalyptic works of Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah, a symbolic and metaphorical message is given that in spite of how things look, behind the scenes God is at work, in control, and will bring God's kingdom into fruition in God's own time. The book is rife with battles between good and evil, with the faithful persecuted and the martyred being vindicated in the end.

In spite of its focus on drawing back the curtain of reality in order for readers to be strengthened in their faith that God is in control, the history of interpretation of the Apocalypse of John has been widely used as a primer for predicting the end times. In fact, Jesus does say in Rev. 3:11 "I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown."[452] The letters to the churches in the first three chapters of Revelation are a call to purity and endurance in the midst of persecution. Though the end of the world is certainly a theme in the book, much more important is the idea that though the wicked are prospering and the righteous are suffering, God will right this injustice and the righteous will prevail.[453]

Historically, apocalyptic literature has especially found a hearing during times of persecution. Groups on the margins of Christianity, particularly, have turned to the book of

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[452] Revelation 3:11 (NRSV)
[453] Kenneth G. C. Newport, "Apocalypse of John," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Theologians.* V.1. Edited by Ian S. Markham. (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 4-5.

Revelation for hope or guidance as they have waited for the end. The Apocalypse of John has most often been interpreted as a revelation of the events that will lead to the end times; a timetable that may be decoded and followed. Kenneth Newport notes that Sir Isaac Newton was fascinated with the book, that interpretations of the book deeply informed David Koresh and the Branch Davidian community in 1993, and that eschatological interpretations of Revelation strongly influenced the theology of the *Left Behind* series.[454]

Christian apocalypticism often focused on the imminent return of Christ, which would inaugurate a peaceful kingdom that would last for one thousand years: the millennium.[455] Not all Christians have historically held this interpretation of John's apocalypse. Some, such as Augustine and other post-Nicene fathers, argued that the message should be understood as allegorical, and that one should not look for literal fulfillment of these prophecies in history. Instead, one should place their eschatological hopes in God's continuing work of grace in the church.[456] The adherents of these two views have clashed repeatedly. Ernest Sandeen contends that it has been the established authorities who have normally defended the Augustinian[457] position. Those who held to the imminent return theory (premillennial theology) have been the more marginalized sectarian parties who believed that they were fighting for true and historic Christianity. One of these groups was the Puritans (many were premillennialists) of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as they fought against the Catholic Church and then the Church of England for theological control in the country.

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[454] Newport, 3.
[455] This is the basic premillennial position.
[456] Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Fundamentalism, 1800-1930.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 4.
[457] This position is also referred to as amillennialism.

As we have discussed previously, Henry VIII (1491-1547), in a desire to escape the heavy-handedness of the papal authority over England and over his own personal affairs, led England in a break from Roman Catholicism. This was the beginning of the Church of England. Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), who served as Archbishop of Canterbury during the reign of Henry VIII, brought some of the reforming ideas from the continent to England. Changes included abolishing mandatory clerical celibacy, changing the Eucharistic teaching from transubstantiation to a belief that Christ is mystically present when the sacraments are taken by faith, and the abolishment of iconography. The Church of England, especially during the reign of Elizabeth I (1533-1603), emphasized compromise between disparate views during extremely turbulent times, but as we saw in an earlier chapter, embraced many of the primary doctrines of the Reformation.

However, the Puritans did not believe that the reforms taken by the Church of England had brought all of the change that was needed. They believed that the Catholic Church was completely corrupted and some even viewed the pope as antichrist. The Puritans managed to gain control of Parliament in the mid-seventeenth century. However, the excesses of the Puritan revolution and their ultimate downfall caused disparagement of their religious movement as well as their premillennial eschatology in England.[458] Under a new spirit of optimism in England, a revived postmillennial eschatology arose. Proponents such as Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) taught that society would continue to improve and would ultimately flower with a literal millennium, which would culminate with the second coming of Christ.[459]

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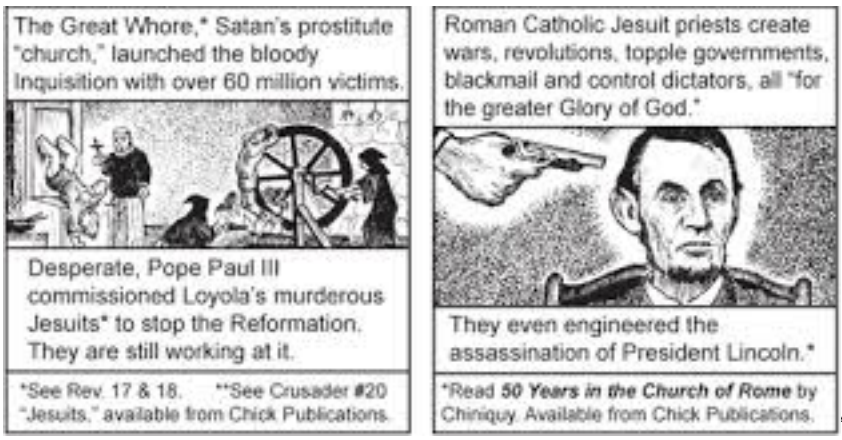
[458] The Fifth Monarchists, for example, were an extremist Puritan sect who taught that Jesus would return by 1666 to inaugurate his millennial kingdom. See Sandeen, 4.
[459] Sandeen, 5. This is the basic postmillennial position.

As some of the first settlers in America, the Puritans have had a substantial impact on the development of theology in America.[460] This included their millennial views as well as their deep distrust of Catholics that continues to manifest itself in outlets such as Chick tracts like the one below.



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In his dissertation addressing the practical theology of B.T. Roberts, Rick McPeak describes Roberts' theology as apocalyptic. This brought a sharp critique from Howard Snyder in his monograph on the lives of B.T. and Ellen Roberts. McPeak uses the term apocalyptic as a description of an us-against-them attitude, where everything is seen as black or white. This is a fair assertion. It is integral to keep in mind that Roberts' personal experience must have seemed apocalyptic. The well-documented trials of the Nazarites, under perceived persecution by the Regency in the Genesee Conference, contributed to this us-versus-them mentality, although Roberts was able to maintain a sense that all of the ministers involved were still on the same side in the ministry of the Gospel. In the broader

[460] Patterson, J.A. "Apocalypticism" in *Dictionary of Christianity in America.* Edited by Daniel G. Reid, Robert D. Linder, Bruce L. Shelley and Harry S. Stout, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 70-71. See also Christopher Rowland, "Apocalypticism" in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought: Intellectual, Spiritual, and Moral Horizons of Christianity.* Edited by Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason and Hugh Pyper, (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 29-30.
[461] Accessed March 6, 2020.

context of the United States this same apocalyptic atmosphere was growing. Civil War finally broke out in 1861, the climax of decades of growing distrust between the North and South over issues of slavery and states' rights.

McPeak argues that Roberts' metaphor for God envisioned God as a governor, sovereign over Christians who are constantly at war. Roberts claims, "For instance, if God is Governor and we are in a state of war with a dangerous and imminent enemy then what metaphor drives the view of self. God as governor implies creatures as citizens, but the state of war makes the most serious, thorough, and sincere [earnest] citizens into soldiers."[462] McPeak continues to document his understanding of Roberts, claiming that 'Roberts unequivocally stated (his) worldview in the following quote from an article entitled, "The Conflict." Roberts writes,

> The Christian's life is a perpetual warfare. It is never ended until death, that last enemy is vanquished. There is no cessation of hostilities so long as one remains an accepted child of God. We may each one truly sing, 'Sure, I must fight if I would reign.' … The hardest battles of the Christian life are fought by those who are entirely sanctified. It is a great mistake to suppose that repose from spiritual combat will result, when sin is subdued in the heart. In reality the great conflict is now but just commenced."[463]

McPeak makes a compelling argument that this demonstrates Roberts' apocalyptic understanding of his time and place in history. He writes, "In Roberts we have seen an apocalyptic vision with a heavy stress on eternal rewards and punishments, a belief that humanity was in its last days, the conviction of God's revelation to man in the scriptures, and the recognition of the need for an earnest response in the light of a most dire situation.

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[462] Rick Hughes McPeak, "Earnest Christianity: The Practical Theology of Benjamin Titus Roberts" (PhD diss., Saint Louis University, 2001), 260.
[463] B. T. Roberts, "The Conflict," *Earnest Christian* 4:3, (Sept. 1862), 88. I have kept McPeak's splicing of the quote. See McPeak, 262.

The best metaphor for life in a situation such as this is warfare."

For McPeak, this idea of warfare is what drove Roberts' practical theology. This fits well with the dissertation of James Reinhard, in which he portrayed the Nazarites as agitators within the Genesee conference who seemed unwilling to find compromise with members of the Regency.[464] Indeed, Roberts' tone in letters to various newspapers in Buffalo aroused the ire of his opponents. McPeak seeks to explain Roberts' understanding of apocalypticism and God's governance when he writes,

> As we have seen, Roberts's entire theological enterprise assumed a biblical hermeneutic that rested upon confidence in the unity of truth. That view was made possible through the future orientation of Roberts's worldview. The expectation of a future where all truth would be evident and justice would reign enabled Roberts to answer a powerful question. That question: How can a group respond when its efforts to manage, control, manipulate, or even understand its immediate environment are thwarted by powers it assumed were friendly and in alliance with it? arose from the tensions of his life experience and led to a deeper commitment to the idea of the unity of truth.[465]

Snyder asserts that McPeak is mistaken in his analysis. He writes, "Rick McPeak misleadingly describes Roberts's theology as "apocalyptic" and maintains that this is a key to understanding his views."[466] Snyder suggests that Roberts' view of God as governor was not really a 'dominating metaphor' in Roberts' theology, nor was it apocalyptic in and of itself. Snyder argues that "Roberts's own writings show that in the context of the times, and as the term is generally used, his theology was not apocalyptic. He largely avoided apocalypticism and apocalyptic language."[467]

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[464] James Allen Reinhard, "Personal and Sociological Factors in the Formation of the Free Methodist Church, 1852-1860" (PhD diss. University of Iowa), 1971.
[465] McPeak, 286.
[466] Howard A. Snyder, *Populist Saints: B.T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists.* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 2006, 810, footnote, 64.
[467] Snyder, 810, footnote 64.

What we have here are two nuanced portrayals of Roberts that are focused on different aspects of the understanding of apocalypticism. Snyder is correct in recognizing that Roberts did not really hold to apocalypticism as it would have been understood in his day. Snyder is also correct in challenging McPeak's portrayal of Roberts as a dispensationalist, a topic to which we shall return shortly. McPeak wrote that Roberts held "a dispensational view of history as opposed to the progressive view held by the liberal tradition in American Christianity." But, as Snyder has properly noted, "Roberts' theology was dispensational only in the broadest Biblical sense. He avoided dispensational theories and his view of history may in fact be properly viewed as progressive – not of course in a secular evolutionary sense, but in the sense of God progressively working out his purposes in history."[468] However, McPeak does correctly interpret that Roberts' often defaulted to an apocalyptic (read us vs. them) mentality. His letters to the different newspapers in the midst of the Genesee controversy could be almost caustic. They were sharply worded enough to warrant a mention by (Ellen Roberts' aunt) Mrs. Lane, that he should probably tone it down. Mrs. Lane understood that Roberts was not being wise. In a letter to Ellen Roberts, she wrote, "I see that Mr. Roberts is assailed on the right, and left, for his plain truth. I think it is wise in him to be silent."[469]

Millenarianism

Drawn from Revelation 20, where John describes the imprisonment of Satan and the thousand-year reign of Christ, millenarianism itself refers to the reign of Christ on earth.

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[468] Snyder, 810-811, footnote 64.
[469] Letter from Mrs. George Lane, Mt. Holly, New Jersey, to Mrs. Roberts, Buffalo, June 2, 1853. Zahniser notes that he found the letter in the personal letters of the Roberts family, Zahniser, 61.

America has been particularly susceptible to millenarian movements and hopes. Weber describes millenarianism as, "the belief that there will be a long period of unprecedented peace and righteousness closely associated with the second coming of Christ."[470] He also points out that most Christians generally take one of three viewpoints concerning the millennium.

1. Amillennial – Biblical references to the millennial reign of Christ are symbolic and refer to the reign of Christ in the hearts of Christians.
2. Postmillennial – After the church has worked to build the kingdom of God and establish the millennium through evangelism and missions, Christ will return to rule over it.
3. Premillennial – The world is continuing to grow increasingly evil, but one day, Christ will return and will establish His kingdom by his power and authority.[471] There are two subcategories to the premillennial position. The first is historic premillennialism which can be traced back to the ante-nicene Church, and the second is dispensational premillennialism which flourished in America under the teaching of John Nelson Darby and later fundamentalists.[472]

There are, of course, variations and derivations of these positions, but if churches do take a position on the millennium, these are the three basic viewpoints on millenarianism to which they ascribe.

Dispensationalism

Theological dispensationalism that can be traced to John Nelson Darby is not a static doctrine. It has developed over time through the Bible Conferences of the late nineteenth century and Scofield's Reference Bible (1909). Further revisions occurred in the 1950's and

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[470] Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875-1925.* (New York: OUP), 1979, 9.
[471] Weber, 9.
[472] Note that premillennial dispensational theology was not a unique invention of Darby. However, Darby did develop his own unique brand of dispensationalism which was later embraced by many later fundamentalists.

1960's under leaders such as Lewis Sperry Chafer, J. Dwight Pentecost and Charles Ryrie.[473] That being said, Mark Sweetnam argues that while one may not be able to write one definitive description of dispensationalism, it is possible to offer an emphasis-based definition that should be an asset to those working on projects concerning dispensationalism. Sweetnam contends that one can identify dispensationalism by the following characteristics.

1. A commitment to Evangelical doctrine.
2. A commitment to a literal Biblical hermeneutic.
3. A recognition of distinction in manifestations of Divine dealing with mankind, which insists on the uniqueness and importance of both Israel and the Church in the Divine plan.
4. An expectation of the premillennial, imminent return of Christ in the Rapture
5. An emphasis on the apocalyptic and millennial expectation.[474]

The idea of a dispensation of time has existed within the cosmogony of both Israel and of other civilizations since ancient times. In order to gain a broader understanding of dispensational theology in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century America, it will be helpful to do a brief historical survey of how this idea of time periods and God's governance of time periods have developed.

One can argue that there are three particular dispensations that have been implicitly accepted through the history of the church; the periods of law (Hebrew Bible), grace (beginning with the coming of Christ), and finally eschatological glory (the coming return and reign of Christ).[475] The dispensational theology that informs fundamentalist Christians in America comes from a distinct hermeneutic of Biblical interpretation which sees biblical

[473] Sweetnam, 218.
[474] Sweetnam, 218.
[475] Ben Witherington. (2011). "Dispensationalism."

history as a series of (ordinarily) seven time periods within God's plan of history.[476]

In his survey of the development of dispensational theology, Arnold Ehlert points readers to the work of D.T. Taylor. Taylor invites his audience to consider the interesting coincidence that in a number of ancient cultures there is an expectation that the world will last for a total of either six or seven thousand years. For Jews, these six thousand years correlated with the six days of creation. They note that for God a thousand years are but a day. The seventh day, a day of rest, points to a coming "millenary sabbath of rest."[477] Of the other nations, Taylor specifically cited the Chaldeans, who, according to Plutarch, believed that there would be a six thousand year struggle between good and evil, after which 'Hades is to cease, and men are to be happy, neither wanting food nor making shade.' Concerning those that subscribed to a six to seven thousand year existence of the earth, Taylor also lists the Egyptians, Zoroastrians, The Sibylline Oracles, the Greek Historian Theopompus, and especially the Etruscans, whose cosmogony and creation story quite closely resembles that of Genesis.[478]

Many early Christian writers echoed this idea of the history of the earth lasting six to seven millennia. These included the Epistle of Barnabas, Justyn Martyr, Irenaeus, Cyprian, Lactantius, Jerome, Hilary of Poitiers and Augustine, though as Ehlert rightly notes, Augustine later wrestled with this in *The City of God.*[479] James Ussher's (1581-1656)

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[476] While most modern dispensationalists agree that there are seven dispensations, there are many schemes in which the numbers differ.
[477] Arnold D. Ehlert, *A Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1965), 8, 10-11.
[478] Ehlert, 9-10. Note that Ehlert acknowledges that he is drawing heavily on D.T. Taylor's *The Voice of the Church on the Coming and Kingdom of the Redeemer: or, a History of the Doctrine of the Reign of Christ on Earth*. The Bible's Student Library. Revised and Edited with a preface by H.L. Hastings. Eighth ed. The second edition of this work is available online, published by (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers), 1891.
[479] Ehlert, 12-17.

literalistic chronology of the Bible placed creation at 4004 B.C. For those who accepted the idea of a sex-millenary tradition, this time-table worked well, placing the return of Christ somewhere around the year 2000 AD. Ehlert published his work in 1965, but noted that "…if the year 2000 A.D. should come and go without the great event's taking place, the whole sex- and septa-millenary tradition would be proved erroneous, for hardly anybody would want to place the commencement of the first millennium any later than 4004 B.C."[480]

Because Augustine has so impacted western theological discourse, I have included a couple examples of his thoughts concerning sex- and septa- millenarianism. In his book, *On the Catechizing of the Uninstructed,* Augustine speaks of the eternal rest which is promised to Christians. Concerning this rest, he reflects on the fact of the sixth day of creation and then wrote, "He spake, and they were made; He commanded, and they were created; but that he might signify how, after six ages of this world, in a seventh age, as on the seventh day, He will rest in his saints; inasmuch as these same saints shall rest also in Him after all the good works in which they have served Him …"[481] As we see here, Augustine certainly seemed to share the idea of a six age period followed by an age of rest, similar to the sex- or septa-millenary schema described above. Though he seemed to have disagreed with the order or proposal of dispensations aligned by Pelagius, he set out his own in a sermon, which fits well with his statements concerning an age of rest. Augustine writes,

> But in that sabbath, in which it is said that God rested from all His works, in the rest of God our rest is signified; because the sabbath of this world shall be, when the six ages shall have passed away. The six days as it were of the world are passing away. One day hath passed away, from Adam unto Noë;

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[480] Ehlert, 20.

[481] Augustine, "On the Catechising of the Uninstructed," Ch. 17 Sec. 28, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* Vol. 3 edited by Philip Schaff. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1956, 310. See also, Ehlert, 14-15.

> another from the deluge unto Abraham; the third from Abraham unto David; the fourth from David unto the carrying away into Babylon; the fifth from the carrying away into Babylon unto the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the sixth day is in passing. We are in the sixth age, in the sixth day. Let us then be reformed after the image of God, because that on the sixth day man was made after the image of God. What formation did then, let reformation do in us, and what creation did then, let creating-anew do in us. After this day in which we now are, after this age, the rest which is promised to the saints and prefigured in those days, shall come.[482]

Note that while Augustine has set out six ages, this proposal does not include a specific redemptive program for each age. All of the above cited works concerning Augustine support him holding a sex- or septa- millennial position, but do not demonstrate his promotion of dispensational theology in which God metes out his redemptive grace in different ways at different times.

The current theory of dispensationalism can be traced back at least to Joachim of Fiore, a twelfth century one-time abbot, who argued that world history can be divided into three periods. His theological vision is best described as a Trinitarian view of history. The first age was the age of the Father. In this dispensation, humanity lived under the (Mosaic) law. The second age, that of the Son, was a dispensation of grace, which Joachim estimated would last 42 generations of thirty years. The final age was the age of the Spirit, which he believed would be fulfilled in 1260, and which would see the founding of new religious orders, and the rise of a truly spiritual church in which Christians would be inwardly guided by the Holy Spirit. This age would culminate with the antichrist being defeated and

[482] Augustine, "Sermon LXXV" (CXXV. BEN.), *op. cit.,* Vol. VI, 477.

the renewal of the world.[483] Though many of Fiore's works were condemned by the fourth Lateran Council of 1215, his eschatological speculation continued to be influential.[484]

The first theologian in the post-Reformation period to put forth a dispensational schema was William Gouge (1575/78-1653). In his commentary on Hebrews, Gouge outlines six dispensations (though he does not specifically call them dispensations), and ties these to the sex-millennia tradition that we looked at earlier.[485] These are Gouge's six dispensations:

A. God made a covenant of grace to Adam – the first covenant made to humans, and it lasted until Noah
B. God renewed the covenant with Noah, until the time of Abraham.
C. God made a new covenant with Abraham with a promise to his seed. This lasted until the time of David.
D. The fourth covenant was with David. It established a royal line and lasted until the captivity of Israel.
E. The fifth covenant was with the returning exiles and lasted until the coming of Christ, and included the rebuilding of the temple.
F. The final covenant lasts from the coming of Christ in the flesh until he will return in a second coming to judge the world.[486]

Gouge's project was particularly helpful in that he went beyond a mere division of history into six time periods, which we saw in sex- and septa- millinery positions, and related each of his six dispensations to the way in which he believed God worked redemptively within each period.[487]

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[483] Stephen E Lahey, "Dispensationalism" in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity,* edited by Daniel Platte. Cambridge, (NY: CUP), 2010, 328. See also "Joachim of Fiore," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Third Edition, edited by E. A. Livingstone, (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 878; Eugene TeSelle, "Joachim of Fiore" in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity,* edited by Daniel Platte. (Cambridge, NY: CUP, 2010), 648-649; "Joachim" in *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature,* Vol. 4, edited by John McClintock and James Strong. (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1891), 922.
[484] Livingstone, 878.
[485] William Gouge, *A Commentary on the Whole Epistle to the Hebrews.* Vol. 1. (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1866 (1665)), 11-12. See also, Ehlert, 33-34.
[486] Gouge, 12.
[487] Ehlert, 33.

There were other important works concerning dispensationalism before the time of the Wesley brothers. Ehlert names William Cave (1637-1713), Pierre Poiret (1646-1719), John Edwards (1639-1716), John Barrington (1678-1734), the hymn writer, Isaac Watts, (1674-1748), John Taylor (1694-1761, and finally the American theologian, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), who had a profound effect on John Wesley.[488]

British pastor John Nelson Darby was the primary early proponent of dispensational theology in America, and this is the eschatology that has been embraced by many American fundamentalists, and the system that Free Methodists have sometimes considered over their history. Before Darby came to America, there had been a surge of millennial interest that escalated with the teaching of William Miller, but that interest waned when Miller's predictions of Christ's return proved incorrect. Interest in eschatology, apocalypticism and certain interpretations of Biblical prophecy once again began to flourish in America immediately following the horrors of the Civil War (1861-1865). This was particularly true of Darby's dispensational premillennialism. Darby came on frequent trips to America, beginning in 1859, to popularize his theology. He also taught that Christ would return twice to the earth. On the first return, he would 'rapture' Christians to heaven with him. He would then return seven years later after a period of tribulation and begin his millennial reign on earth. Dwight Moody, through his preaching, and C.I. Scofield, through his reference Bible, helped to popularize Darby's dispensational theology in America.[489]

Proponents of Darby's theory taught that rather than society continuing to progress until Christ returned (postmillennialism), society and the church were instead declining

[488] Ehlert, 34-41.
[489] Witherington, "Dispensationalism."

and growing ever more corrupt, leading to the return of Christ, and his millennial reign. (premillennialism)[490] To many Christians, this theory offered reassurances of God's control in the midst of the apocalyptic atmosphere following the Civil War, the growing popularity of Darwin's godless evolution, the mounting attacks on the authority of Scripture, the massive waves of predominantly Catholic immigrants that filled American cities in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the growing industrialism that drew many Americans away from small towns and into cities with their many vices.[491]

C.I. Scofield, whose reference Bible was first published in 1909, defined a dispensation as "a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some *specific* revelation of the will of God."[492] In each dispensation, humans have failed the test, and each dispensation ended with its own divine judgement. Note that dispensationalists claim that we live in the sixth dispensation, which is the age of the church (or the age of grace in Scofield's terminology).[493] Dispensational proponents have argued about the total number of dispensations with the most common number being seven.[494]

Scofield lists the seven as:

1. Innocency. Man is created in innocency, placed in a perfect environment, subjected to an absolutely simple test, and warned of the consequence of disobedience. … the dispensation of innocency ended in the judgment of the Expulsion.
2. Conscience. By disobedience man came to a personal and experimental knowledge of good and evil – of good as obedience, of evil as disobedience to the *known will of God*. Through that knowledge conscience awoke. Expelled from Eden and placed under the second, or Adamic Covenant, man was responsible to do all known good, to abstain from all known evil, and to approach God through sacrifice.

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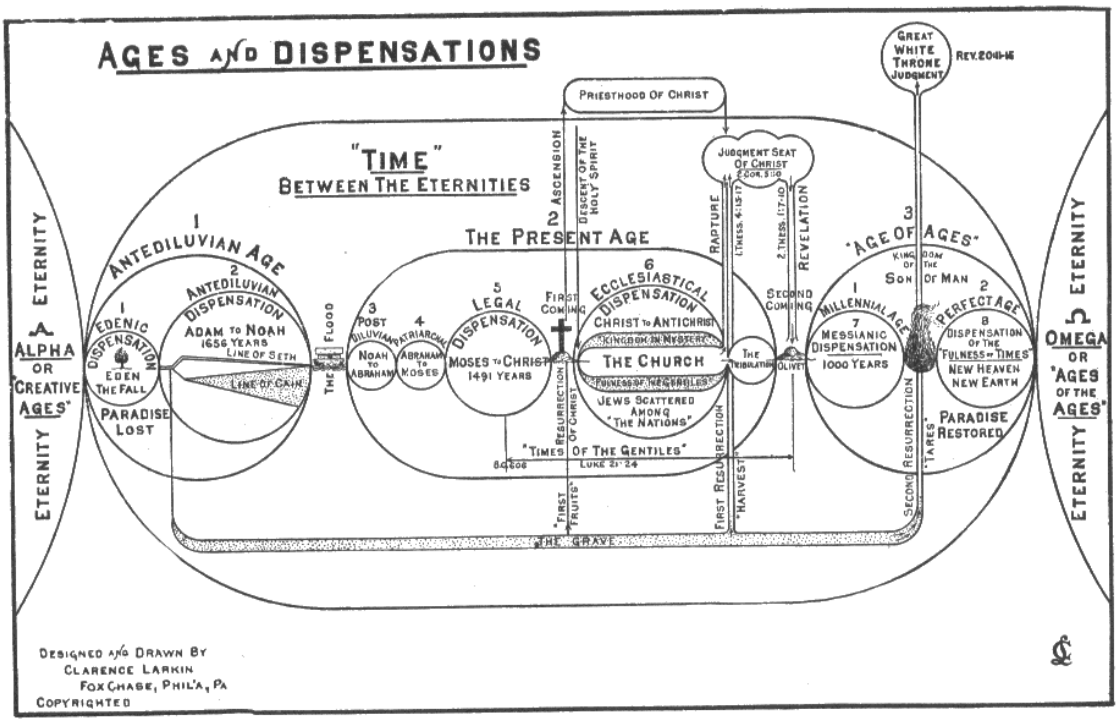
[490] Marsden, 39.
[491] Mark. A Noll, *Protestants in America.* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 89. Noll notes that between 1870 and 1930, the number of Americans living in cities of over 2500 people had risen from 10 million to 70 million. This was a combination of immigration and those leaving farms to pursue employment in the cities..
[492] C.I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible.* (Oxford: OUP, 1945 (1909)), 5.
[493] Marsden, 40.
[494] Many early dispensationalists taught that there were three dispensations, although there was not always agreement on the three, and some, such as Adolph Knoch argued for as many as twelve. See Ehlert, 85-86.

3. Human Government. Under Conscience, as in Innocency, man utterly failed, and the judgment of the Flood marks the end of the second dispensation and the beginning of the third. The declaration of the Noahic Covenant subjects humanity to a new test. Its distinctive feature is the institution, for the first time, of human government – the government of man by man. The highest function of government is the judicial taking of life. All other governmental powers are implied in that. … Man is responsible to govern the world for God.
4. Promise. For Abraham and his descendants, it is evident that the Abrahamic Covenant made a great change. They became distinctively the heirs of *promise*. That covenant is wholly gracious and unconditional. The descendants of Abraham had but to abide in their own land to inherit every blessing. In Egypt, they lost their *blessings*, but not their *covenant*. The Dispensation of Promise ended when Israel rashly accepted law. Grace had prepared a deliverer (Moses), provided a sacrifice for the guilty, and by divine power brought them out of bondage; but at Sinai they exchanged grace for law. … The *dispensation* must be distinguished from the *covenant*. The former is a mode of testing; the latter is everlasting but unconditional.
5. Law. This dispensation extends from Sinai to Calvary – from the Exodus to the Cross. The history of Israel in the wilderness and in the land is one long record of the violation of the law. The testing of the *nation* by law ended in the judgment of the Captivities, but the dispensation itself ended at the Cross.
6. Grace. (G)race begins with the death and resurrection of Christ. The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as the fruit of salvation. The *immediate result* of this testing was the rejection of Christ by the Jews, and His crucifixion by Jew and Gentile. The *predicted end* of the testing of man under grace is the apostasy of the professing church … , and the resultant apocalyptic judgments.
7. Kingdom. The Dispensation of the Fulness of Times. – This, the seventh and last of the ordered ages which condition human life on the earth, is identical with the kingdom covenanted to David. …, and gathers into itself under Christ all past 'times' …. [495]

[495] Scofield, 5, 10, 16, 20, 94, 1115, 1250.



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This accompanying diagram was from Clarence Larkin, a Baptist minister who promoted premillennial dispensationalism through books and charts. Charts such as these have been common teaching tools in fundamentalist colleges and churches.

These dispensations are more than just temporal; they denote a specific way in which God chose to relate to people over the course of history. Witherington describes individual dispensations as being:

> defined by the transmission of a divine revelation to a particular group of people (e.g., all humanity in the case of the dispensation of conscience, Israel only in the case of the dispensation of the law). Each revelation discloses an aspect of God's will for human beings that demands the obedience of those to whom it is revealed. In every period the ground of salvation remains Christ's atonement on the cross, so that under all the dispensations one is saved by faith rather than works; but only under the dispensation of grace is Christ the explicit object of that faith. Prior to that time, the object of saving faith for an

[496] preservedwords.com. Accessed July 11, 2018.According to this site, Clarence Larkin was a Baptist minister and author who promoted premillennial dispensational theology through his books and the many charts he designed.

> individual is the revelation corresponding to the dispensation then in force.[497]

Witherington argues that there have been some positive consequences that have come from the rise of dispensational theology. First, it has challenged Christian thinkers to re-examine the Bible's teaching on prophecy, eschatology and apocalyptic literature. Second, he notes that dispensationalism stands strongly opposed to supersessionism, the belief that God's promises to Abraham were voided by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Third, Witherington points out that dispensationalism encourages starting one's hermeneutical work with the plain meaning of the text. Fourth, he rightly points out that dispensational theology is correct in maintaining that God has indeed related to people in different ways at different times. Finally, he praises proponents of dispensationalism for recognizing that early Christians did indeed expect the reign of Christ on earth in space and time, as opposed to the belief in only a heaven and hell in the eschaton.[498]

It is also important to recognize some of the difficulties of dispensational theology. By focusing on prophetic literature as a foretelling of a future event in history, dispensationalists miss the primary point of much of that literature, which was a strong word of correction for the community of Israel. God made numerous covenants with God's people, including the giving of the law to Moses. These covenants helped to define what it looked like to live in community as God's people. Israel (and Judah) regularly broke the covenant, and the messages given to the prophets were first and foremost a rebuke and a reminder of what the people needed to change in order to once again live correctly in community as God's covenant people. The prophetic messages and books were clearly not

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[497] Witherington, "Dispensationalism."
[498] Witherington, "Dispensationalism."

written with a message for an intended audience in some unknown future (such as 20th century America). Witherington notes as well that dispensationalists have largely ignored the metaphorical language of apocalyptic works such as Daniel and the Revelation, seeking instead a meaning that would unlock a puzzle concerning the eschaton.[499]

This literal reading of Scripture is emphasized by proponents of dispensationalism. One example is the future return of the Jews to Israel, which we find in Isaiah 11 and 66 as well as Ezekiel 37.[500] Dispensationalists believe that the Jews' rejection of Jesus inaugurated a bracketed period in history called the age of the church. After the rapture, the Jews will return to Israel, rebuild the temple, and accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Another illustration of this literalism is the interpretation of Isaiah 24. Here, we find a great example of a prophecy that is interpreted by dispensationalists as referring to a final battle that is a part of a premillennial judgment of the nations. The early twentieth century premillennialist, William Blackstone, used Isaiah 24 as a commentary on the apocalyptic saying of Jesus in Matthew 24:21, which reads, "For at that time there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be."[501] Blackstone believed that Jesus is referring to the premillennial tribulation.[502] Isaiah 24 is indeed a word of judgment from Isaiah concerning a great destruction of the earth at the end of time, but does not fit into their schema concerning the end of the world. The people have broken the laws and the statutes of God (v.7), and thus "The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the Lord has spoken this

[499] Witherington, "Dispensationalism."
[500] Marsden, Understanding, 40.
[501] Mt. 24:21 (NRSV)
[502] William E. Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming.* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908 (1898)), 43-44.

word." (v. 3). The chapter culminates in vv. 17-22;

> Terror, and the pit, and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth!
> **18** Whoever flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit; and whoever climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble. **19** The earth is utterly broken, the earth is torn asunder, the earth is violently shaken. **20** The earth staggers like a drunkard, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again. **21** On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven in heaven, and on earth the kings of the earth. **22** They will be gathered together like prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. **23** Then the moon will be abashed, and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before his elders he will manifest his glory.[503]

Premillennialists such as Blackstone interpret this as a description of the final judgment of God, with verse 23 specifically referring to the beginning of the millennial 'reign of peace.'[504] It is important to remember what has just been mentioned here concerning fundamentalism and the sovereignty of God. As there is no indication that this prophecy has been fulfilled in Scripture, and as all of the words of God must be literally true, then this prophecy of Isaiah must be referring to a time that is yet to come in a future age. In this case, obviously, the end of the world has not come yet. The problem here is that dispensationalists are interpreting the passages to fit their own schema. Often, though, the prophetic messages were intended for the time and place in which they were written. We should understand prophecy as warning the people to change their ways as opposed to generally understanding prophecy to be foretelling a distant future.

It is useful to reflect here upon a response to this interpretation from long-time Free Methodist minister, Harmon Baldwin. Baldwin published seven monographs over his forty-

[503] Isaiah 24:17-22 (NRSV)
[504] Blackstone, 44.

six years of ministry in the FMC.[505] His last book, *The Coming Judgment: General and at the End of Time,* specifically critiqued premillennial theology.[506] Concerning the passage previously discussed, Baldwin notes,

> Should it be conceded that verse 23 describes the millennium and that verses 18-22 describe the events which will immediately precede that season, still, there is not one word in all this which would place this "judgment" in any other light than a glorious display of God's anger against sin, lesser manifestations of which are seen in the destruction of Sodom and the overthrow of the Egyptians. To make this transaction parallel, or to place it in the same light as the final gathering before the bar of God to receive sentence for the things done in the body, is to wrest the Scriptures.[507]

Baldwin also gives several more examples of Old Testament prophecies that have been interpreted as premillennial, only to argue that a premillennial interpretation denies "the orthodox view of the event(s) and when we thus surrender, we open the door for all degrees of criticism and infidelity, for the orthodox view is the Biblical view, and when we leave the Bible for fables of our own creation it is impossible to tell where we will end."[508] Baldwin acknowledges that these passages do refer to some type of judgment of God for sin, but they cannot be referring to the final individual judgment, for among other problems with this interpretation, the final judgment is to be individual, while these passages point to the divine wrath upon unfaithful nations. Likewise, whereas individuals are killed by the sword in these forecasts of judgment, never is a word given concerning any type of divine and future judgments for individuals being held accountable for their own indiscretions.[509] Again, Baldwin is not denying that the prophets are referring to some future battle, only

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[505] https://prabook.com/web/harmon_allen.baldwin/1082984. Accessed January 29, 2019.
[506] Harmon A. Baldwin, *The Coming Judgment: General and at the End of Time.* (Chicago: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1927), 87-88.
[507] Baldwin, 88.
[508] Baldwin, 93. Baldwin looks specifically at Jeremiah 25, Joel 3, Zepheniah 3:8, and Isaiah 34 as further examples of how he believes premillennialists have misinterpreted prophetic texts. See, 89-96.
[509] Baldwin, 99.

that we must not confuse whatever this battle is with the final judgment of God.[510] We will return to Free Methodists and eschatology later, but what this does demonstrate is the way in which fundamentalists were literally interpreting Scripture, and the way in which one prominent Free Methodist minister responded to that literalism.

This literalism is necessarily tied to the theology of inerrancy, for if the Bible can be wrong on any one point, then it could be wrong on many points. Inerrancy developed out of Reformed theology with its emphasis on the depravity of humans and the sovereignty of God. If God is truly sovereign, then nothing has happened, or will ever happen, without God willing it to occur. In the writing of Scripture, God could not truly entrust the work to fallen humans, where errors would surely be introduced. Views such as the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture (every word of Scripture is God-given) arose to support inerrancy. Dennis Bratcher helpfully describes the problem of this view.

> Another logical syllogism came into play. *Because* God wrote Scripture, and because God is perfect and without error, and *because* God knows exactly what happened, *then* the Bible must be absolutely accurate and inerrant in everything it says. The Bible is even accurate in the things that it does not say that we now know to be fact (the earth is round, the solar system is heliocentric, matter consists of atoms, etc.).[511]

Concerning eschatology, then, if prophecies of the Old Testament had not been literally fulfilled in the Bible, then they must yet be fulfilled at some future point. Daniel Steele, a contemporary of B.T. Roberts at Wesleyan University,[512] wrote an entire book, *Antinomianism Revived,* where he provides a number of excellent examples of problems

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[510] Baldwin, 101.
[511] Dennis R. Bratcher, "Thinking About the Bible Theologically: Inerrancy, Inspiration and Revelation" in *Rethinking the Bible*, edited by Richard P. Thompson and Thomas Jay Oord, (Nampa, ID: SacraSage Press, 2018), 51-52.
[512] Clarence Zahniser, *Earnest Christian.* (Circleville, OH: Advocate Publishing House, 1957), 20.

created by premillennialists as they seek to interpret the Scripture literally.[513]

Finally, in dispensational theology, the role and work of Christ is no longer the central theme of all Scripture and prophetic fulfillment. Instead, his work is seen as only one method of God's dealing with humanity. Witherington helpfully explains that this has not been the common teaching of the church through history. He writes, "In opposition to the dispensationalist understanding of the time of the Church as a sort of parenthesis between the time of OT prophecy and the time when those prophecies are fulfilled for Israel literally on the earth, the majority of Christian tradition sees the Church as encompassing all the faithful from Abel till the end of time."[514] Darby's dispensational eschatology must be seen as a modern invention that introduces some important hermeneutical concerns, even while seeking to make sense of the sovereignty of God in a world full of chaos.

Millenarianism in America

Prior to the Civil War, the most prominent theory of the eschaton in the America was the postmillennial position. Those who adhered to this view believed that Christ would return at the culmination of a long period (millennium could be conceived of as a metaphorical thousand years) of steady growth in morality and spirituality.[515] There was a sense of triumphalism stemming from the Second Great Awakening (roughly 1790-1850). Historian Randy Balmer describes the mood of the period:

> Amid the Second Great Awakening, with all of America intoxicated with Arminian self-determination, an air of optimism about the perfectibility both of humanity and society prevailed; postmillennialism, the doctrine of Christ's

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[513] Daniel Steele, Daniel, *Antinomianism Revived; or, The Theology of the So-Called Plymouth Brethren Examined and Refuted.* (Boston, MA: McDonald, Gill & Co., 1887), 208 ff.
[514] Witherington, "Dispensationalism."
[515] Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 44-45.

> triumphal reign on earth, suited the mood, and it complimented nicely the Enlightenment's sanguine appraisal of human potential. This spirit of optimism unleashed all manner of reform efforts – temperance, abolitionism, prison and educational reform, missions – consonant with the assurance that Christ was even then vanquishing the powers of evil and establishing his kingdom.[516]

This postmillennialism continued to be the most dominant eschatological position among those who were concerned with eschatology in America, in spite of the cataclysmic Civil War and the failures of William Miller's speculations in the 1840's.

Though the postmillennial position was the most popular of those who were interested in eschatological speculation, Sandeen suggests that millenarianism generally had trouble gaining traction in America. He helpfully points out that the majority of American Protestants were uninterested in millennial speculations. This included many who would consider themselves conservative evangelicals. Part of the reason millenarianism was unpopular can be traced back to William Miller's Adventism, a movement that was considered fanaticism by many, especially when Jesus did not return by May of 1844.[517] Miller believed that Christ would return before the millennium, and believed that he had broken a prophetic code, and thus was able to interpret the exact timing of the second advent of Christ.[518] Miller interpreted Daniel 8:14[519] as a literal prophecy beginning with the decree of Artaxerxes to repair the temple. However, Miller

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[516] Randall Balmer, *Evangelicalism in America.* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 69.
[517] Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Fundamentalism, 1800-1930.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970 (2008)), xvi. Miller adjusted his dates to October 22, 1844 for a "tarrying time," but his followers were once again disappointed. See Balmer, 67.
[518] Douglas W. Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century.* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 68.
[519] "And he said to him, 'For two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state," RSV.

believed that the days spoken of in the text should be interpreted as years.[520] Miller's teachings had spread throughout the Northeast United States, and an estimated fifty thousand individuals were convinced of Miller's date, while another million were skeptically optimistic.[521] His embarrassing errors brought millenarian speculation into disrepute.

The post-Civil War period was the beginning of what has been called 'The Gilded Age' in American history. The latter half of the nineteenth century was a time when everything seemed to be going right in America. It was a time of progress through innovation and invention. Some examples include the horseless buggy, electric lights, the telegraph, and in the early days of the 20th century, flight.[522] As in England much earlier, many people believed that this progress could continue and that the world's many problems could be addressed through the application of science and innovation. Many evangelicals believed that this progress would continue until the return of Christ, which would usher in his millennial kingdom.

The Civil War was the first of many fissures in the hegemony of the postmillennial position, though some would argue that it was a necessary final step of cleansing America of the sin of slavery before the millennial kingdom could commence. Sandeen notes that late in the nineteenth century, as challenges to Protestant hegemony grew, criticism of millenarianism considerably moderated, and the movement began to gain a measure of

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[520] Balmer, 65-67. Note that Miller's followers became the Seventh Day Adventists, numbering over 18 million adherents today.
[521] Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion, 1800*-1850. (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950), 287. See also, Balmer, 55-57, and an excellent chapter "From Millerism to Flying Saucers," pp. 305-343 in St. Clair, Michael J. *Millenarian Movements in Historical Context.* (New York: Garland Publishing, INC), 1992.
[522] David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850.* (Greenville, SC: Unusual Publications, 1986), 47.

respectability.[523] (This may explain why early Free Methodist leaders B.T. Roberts (1823-1893) and W.T. Hogue (1852-1920) differed on the issue.) Sandeen and Frank demonstrate that the premillennial view flowered as a response to the attacks on the authority of the Bible. Gradually, the feeling began to grow, especially amongst conservative Christians, that the world was not progressing. Protestant control of the intellectual and moral climate in America was quickly waning. There was a massive influx of Catholic immigrants in the latter half of the nineteenth century. At the same time, cities were becoming centers of vice, and European ideas such as Darwinistic evolution and German textual and higher criticism were becoming pervasive.[524]

Premillennial leaders interpreted the perceived apostasy of Americans as fitting with the teachings of the Scriptures.[525] Sandeen claims that premillennials believed that "this whole panorama of coming glory and judgment was explicitly foretold in the prophecies where one could, if taught by the spirit, discover the truth and be ready for the coming of the bridegroom."[526] Frank notes that the premillennial movement "prided itself on a literal interpretation of the fulfillment of prophecy when liberal theology was moving toward increasingly symbolic or spiritual understandings of Scripture."[527] Proponents of this theology taught that the world would continue to grow increasingly evil until Christ came to rapture the Christians, and the advent of the Great War in 1914 provided a tremendous boost for dispensational premillennial theology, as it seemed to demonstrate to all that things were in fact getting worse.

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[523] Sandeen, xvi.
[524] Balmer, 71.
[525] Frank, 68.
[526] Sandeen, 39.
[527] Frank, 68.

There were two key principles that were driving the rise of premillennial dispensationalism in the late nineteenth century. These were: "the whole Christian world, including the United States and Canada, was falling into apostasy and heresy so deeply and so decisively that it could only mean the approach of the Last Days; and that, therefore, nothing was more direly important than preaching of the hard facts drawn from God's Word."[528]

Though the difference between the pre and postmillennial positions appears to be relatively minor, mainly the timing of the second advent of Christ, this variance is actually very important. Church historian Bill Faupel claims, "Despite the apparent similarities, however, much more was at stake than a simple change in timetable. The new chronology disclosed a transformation in world-view."[529] Douglas Frank spends substantial time reflecting on how the premillennial position indicates the extent to which evangelicals who held this position believed that America had become an apostate nation.[530]

As noted earlier, one of the reasons that this view became popular was because of its effectiveness for evangelism. In many ways, it could be described as fear theology. If it could be demonstrated that Jesus could return at any moment to rapture the church to heaven, and that those who were not raptured would face the tribulation and an eternity in hell, there is then a very significant reason for immediate evangelism and missions work. This helped fuel the incredible burst of missions activity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This kind of strategy was popular among conservative evangelicals for

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[528] Sidney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972, 2004), 808.
[529] D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought,* Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 10 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 91.
[530] Frank, 64-65.

decades, and is nicely demonstrated, for example, with the 1972 movie "A Thief in the Night," which spawned the Larry Norman hit song, "I Wish We'd All Been Ready."

While there were various formulations used to define the tenets of fundamentalism, one of the most influential was the 14 points of the Niagara Conferences. First published in 1895,[531] the final statement of the 14 points focuses on eschatology and reads:

> We believe that the world will not be converted during the present dispensation, but is fast ripening for judgment, while there will be a fearful apostasy in the professing Christian body; and hence that the Lord Jesus will come in person to introduce the millennial age, when Israel will be restored to their own land, and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord; and that this personal and premillennial advent is the blessed hope set before us in the Gospel for which we should be constantly looking: Luke 12:35-40; 17:26-30; 18:8; Acts 15:14-17; 2 Thes. 2:3-8; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Tit. 2:11-15.[532]

Historian Grant Wacker notes that most of those who began to embrace premillennialism were also dispensationalists. He writes,

> Influenced by fundamentalist Bible teachers in Ireland and England in the late nineteenth century, dispensationalists held that God had divided history into distinct eras, or dispensations. The church dispensation – running from Christ's birth through the end of the period covered by Acts – included miracles. Those events attested to the Holy Spirit's power in the founding of the church. When that dispensation ended, God suspended miracles until the end of history. The present dispensation would end when Jesus would 'rapture' his saints from earth. That meant, among other things, that they would escape the Great Tribulation, or the time of terrible suffering that the Bible foretold would take place just before the Battle of Armageddon. At the height of the battle, dispensationalists argued, the Lord would return to earth with his saints, bind the forces of evil, and then rule throughout a millennial age. It would be an age of healing, peace, and justice. The lion would lie down

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[531] Sandeen, xiv.

[532] Reprinted in Sandeen, 276-277. Sandeen also notes that within the historiography of American fundamentalism, there was great emphasis placed on 5 points. This comes from an early account of fundamentalism written by Stewart G. Cole. According to Sandeen, Cole mistakenly stated that the five creeds of fundamentalism had come from the Niagara Bible Conferences of 1895. These five do not mention premillennial dispensationalism. But, as noted above, premillennial dispensationalism was clearly being strongly supported in the Niagara conferences. The five creeds Cole is citing actually were from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. See Sandeen, xiv-xv.

> with the lamb. At the close of the millennium the Lord would judge all people, sending some to their final reward and others to their final punishment.[533]

The premillennial dispensationalism that became popular with American fundamentalists is the teaching of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), which was popularized in the Niagara Bible Conferences and the Scofield Reference Bible, and which teaches that before a time of tribulation, Christ would come and rapture the church. Christians would not have to suffer through this time of trial and persecution.

Darby, as previously mentioned, was an Irish clergyman who helped found a movement called the Brethren.[534] Darby expressed deep concerns about political meddling within the Church of England. In part because he was so critical of the established church, Darby had trouble popularizing his theories in Europe. However, the Plymouth Brethren Church spread to American in the mid-nineteenth century, and Darby made seven trips to America, where his ideas were well received by many conservative Christians. [535] Some of the primary Christian leaders who embraced his theory included C.I. Scofield, the editor of the Scofield Reference Bible (1909); R.A. Torrey, editor of *The Fundamentals*; William J. Eerdman, the publisher; and famed Chicago evangelist, Dwight L. Moody. It is important to understand that "Darbyite dispensationalism dominated the late nineteenth century American millenarianism, formed the substance and structure for the Scofield Reference Bible, and constituted one of the most important elements in the history of Fundamentalism."[536]

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[533] Wacker, 45.
[534] W. McDonald, "Introduction" pp. 5-21 in Steele Daniel, *Antinomianism Revived; or, The Theology of the So-Called Plymouth Brethren Examined and Refuted.* (Boston, MA: McDonald, Gill & CO., 1887), 7.
[535] Ahlstrom, 809.
[536] Sandeen, 60-61.

If premillennial dispensational theology is indeed a key pillar of fundamentalism, then it is necessary for this study to understand its tenets and consider if and where Free Methodists have embraced it. Note with Nineteenth century Methodist clergyman and holiness proponent, Daniel Steele, that for Darby, holiness was imputed (stamped). It was the same as justification. "The old man, instead of being absolutely crucified and put to death, *was* only crucified *in* Christ eighteen hundred years ago, while, in fact, he actually lives and grows, worse and worse, to the end of life."[537] The Plymouth Brethren interpretation of Scripture was very literal. Steele notes, for example, their concept of being 'born again,' and a 'child of God.' Citing John Fletcher, Steele explains the 'oriental style' of describing wisdom. A follower of wisdom is called a 'son of wisdom.' One who turns from wisdom is described as a 'son of folly.' Thus, when one turns from sin by faith, he or she becomes a 'child of God.' The Brethren take this language of 'sonship' or 'new birth' and "(press) these phrases into a proof of an unchangeable acceptance with God, however grossly sinful the once regenerate person may afterwards become."[538]

This is, of course, very problematic for Wesleyans of all varieties who maintain that one can turn from God and lose their salvation and who also expect the sanctifying work of God in the life of a Christian.

Steele goes on to note that personal holiness was the same for the Brethren as justification. This also clearly would have been a difficult teaching for Methodists to accept. For Darby, "(i)n regeneration, the new man is created in the believer, and the old man remains with all his powers unchanged. Mr. Darby asserted to this writer (Steele) that after

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[537] McDonald, 16.
[538] Steele, 134. Steele next turns to the metaphor of sheep and goats, and how antinomians abuse the idea of the invariability of species to argue that once one is a sheep, one must always be a sheep.

more than fifty years of Christian experience he found the old man in himself worse than he was at his regeneration."[539] Steele points out that the Brethren ultimately teach that a Christian has two distinct natures. He quotes one of their theologians, J. Denham Smith who says, "'The two natures remain in him unchanged. His old nature is not modified or ameliorated by the impartation of the new; nor, on the other hand, does the new nature become soiled or corrupted by reason of its co-existence in the same being with the old. They remain the same. There is no blending or amalgamation. They are essentially and eternally distinct. The old nature is unalterably and incurably corrupt, while the new nature is divinely pure in its essence.'"[540]

It also would have irked the Methodists that the Brethren believed that they were the one and only true church. Darby desired Christians to leave their denominations and join with the Brethren. Even though followers of Darby in America did not end up separating from their churches as he hoped and expected, this anticipation of separation would have been unpopular with Methodists.[541] Note the importance of separation for the Brethren: "They talk much about separation unto God, by which they mean abandonment of ecclesiastical organizations, and politics even, refraining from voting, insisting on deadness to the world and entire devotion to God, by going forth and preaching Christ whenever they can get a hearer."[542] One interesting side note here is the idea of the separation from established churches which later became a prominent tenet of fundamentalism.

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[539] Steele, 60.
[540] Steele, 62-63. While Steele does quote Smith verbatim, he does not give the name or page numbers of the sourced book.
[541] McDonald, 11-13.
[542] Steele, 54-55.

One of the problems with the Brethren's definition of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit is that in their view, the work of the kingdom in this dispensation is an abject failure. From the time of the cross until the second coming of Christ, there is little but failure. The theory also disparages the work being done by churches and all sorts of Christian agencies in sharing the gospel and building God's kingdom. This certainly was the opposite of the idea of progress which was such an important component of the post-millennial Christians.[543] In attacking the hopeless spirit of this view, Steele wrote,

> It is, moreover, an imputation of a lack of goodness on the part of God to let the world wax worse and worse, and generation after generation go down to hell, who might have been saved or their existence prevented by the earlier coming of Christ to set up his earthly kingdom, converting the Jews in a day, and, through them, converting the Gentiles in a wholesale way by sheer omnipotence. But if the world is growing better under a purer and more widely preached Gospel, there is merciful reason for the delay of the second coming of Christ to wind up the period of human history by judging the quick and the dead and assigning them to eternal destinies.[544]

Steele is absolutely correct that this premillennialism completely opposes our understanding of God as patient and full of compassion. If this theory were true, God certainly would have intervened in history long ago to "prevent the race drifting hopelessly down to inevitable ruin;" whereas, if the theory of a final judgment at the end of history is true, then it makes sense that God has tarried in order to give as many as possible the opportunity to respond to his grace.[545]

Steele later follows this up in a report on "The Prophetic Conference" held in New York in 1878. He details that there were only seven Methodists out of the one hundred and five attendees, and asserted that Methodists still have faith that God is at work in the world

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[543] Steele, 168-169.
[544] Steele, 169-170, 203.
[545] Steele, 203.

and the Gospel is progressing. Methodists, he says, are "in too close a grapple with this present wicked world to sit down and waste time in speculating upon the future."[546] This sounds much like Roberts in his frustration with the arguments about the future in *The Free Methodist,* and also perhaps hints at the level in which premillennial speculation had made inroads in the FMC by the closing years of the nineteenth century. Note also that B.T. Roberts wrote a review of Steele's book, *Antinomianism Revised,* in *The Free Methodist*, where he praised it as a 'timely work,' and agreed with Steele that the teaching of the Brethren is "unscriptural in its character and dangerous and damning in its tendency." Roberts encourages Steele's book to be generally read and widely circulated.[547]

Steele also points to the way in which the Brethren have misinterpreted the parables of the leaven and the mustard seed. They understood these as signs that the church is being corrupted, a message "eagerly swallowed by those who desire to prove that the world is on the down grade, nearing the brink of destruction, and the church is crowded with a plethora of sins, and is so far gone in wickedness as to be past praying for, and deserves nothing but vilification and denunciation by all true lovers of Christ's appearance."[548] While this negative view of humanity would have fit well with Calvinists, it does not resonate with the optimistic views of God's work in the world as maintained by Wesleyan Arminian Christians including Free Methodists.

Steele continues his attack on Darby's dispensationalism by condemning the theory of a temporal earthly millennial kingdom. He sees it as being completely incongruent with

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[546] Steele, 195. Steele also notes that eighty-one of the delegates were from Calvinist denominations, while only twenty-two were Arminian. Also, of the papers delivered, twelve were from Calvinists and only three were Arminians.
[547] B.T. Roberts "Antinominianism Revised," *The Free Methodist* XXI:7 (February 15, 1888), 14.
[548] Steele, 174.

both the clear teaching of the spiritual kingdom of Christ as taught in the Scriptures, as well as totally at odds with the historic teachings of all major branches of Christianity. These all teach that Christ will indeed return to judge the quick and the dead, but is not returning to set up a world kingdom centered in Jerusalem.[549] Indeed, this dispensational view of a millennial kingdom and rein of Jesus in Jerusalem teaches that the result of this kingdom is that all the world will be saved. This is in part because they will see Jesus with his holy angels in all of his power and might; sinners will basically be overpowered by awe and terror in seeing Jesus in all of his glory. But, as Steele suggests, this flies deeply in the face of the entire message and heart of the Gospel, in which humans will be drawn to Christ through his love, grace and truth, rather than through a reign of force.[550] Steele notes,

> We can see how an old-fashioned Calvinist, who believes in irresistible grace, can accept this doctrine; but how an Arminian, trained to magnify human freedom and the suasive power of Gospel motives for the renovation of the will, through the Holy Spirit applying truth assented to by the intellect, and taught to reject salvation by mere sovereignty, can accept the Millenarian idea of the universal triumph of Christ, surpasses our poor understanding.[551]

Clearly, for Steele, Methodism and dispensational premillennialism cannot co-exist.

This section has focused on the development of premillennial thought in America and the critique of this theology by Daniel Steele, a classmate of B. T. Roberts at Wesleyan University. The focus of the next section will be on the development of millennial thought from the Wesleys to the Methodist Episcopal Church in America.

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[549] Steele, 187-191.
[550] Steele, 201.
[551] Steele, 202.

Premillennial Dispensationalism – John Wesley and the Methodists

Previously, I presented an overview of the development of eschatological theology in Christian and pre-Christian thought. The study began with ancient theories concerning the full duration of history. Next, I discussed Christian theories of eschatology, including the development of the idea of apocalypticism, millennial theories, and changing concepts concerning the way that God might work in dispensations of time and governance. This section will present an interpretation of John Wesley's eschatology and then explore how eschatological thinking within Methodism developed through the teachings of John Fletcher as Methodism was established in the American context.

Methodists, including Free Methodists, trace their roots to the revivals in England under John Wesley. Those who founded the Free Methodist Church believed that the Methodist Episcopal Church had slowly strayed from historical Methodism. They accused the MEC of dead formalism caused by growing wealth and a love of popularity. They noted that the MEC had increasingly departed from 'the original spirit of Methodism,' and believed from the beginning that they were seeking to faithfully follow Wesley's teachings.[552] More importantly, they believed that the teachings of real Methodism were timeless. In his two-volume history of the FMC, Wilson T. Hogue claimed, "(a)s a principle, or system of truth and righteousness, Methodism is as old as Christianity itself; as an ecclesiastical polity it dates from the early part of the eighteenth century, when, under John

[552] "Origin of the Free Methodist Church in *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Free Methodist Church.* (Buffalo, NY: B.T. Roberts, 1862), iii-xii. Note that there being always two sides to a story, the Genesee Conference was quick to claim the high ground. The address given to the Genesee Conference, attributed to Israel Chamberlayne, was a response to the perceived insubordination of B.T. Roberts as well as other pastors and laity. See Israel Chamberlayne, "Pastoral Address of the Genesee Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Adopted at its Session in Perry, New York, October 20, 1858," (Wilmore, KY: First Fruits Press, 2017).

Wesley, the United Societies of Methodism were founded."[553] In light of this, it is important to examine Wesley's eschatology before considering Free Methodist views.

In the late nineteenth century, John Wesley was often included as one of the forerunners of the modern premillennialists in lists circulated at Bible prophecy conferences and among other premillennialist leaders of the time. This should not be surprising, for as Don Dayton has pointed out, the historical interpretation of Wesley's theology has been incredibly diverse. This rises out of Wesley's practical (rather than systematic) theology. One result of Wesley's theology is an ever-increasing fragmentation within the Wesleyan tradition in which different groups have focused on, or preserved, only certain themes that they have found most important.[554] Likewise, as Dayton contends, Wesley is extremely difficult to interpret concerning his eschatology, and in fact, both post and premillennialists have claimed him.[555]

For example, in the late nineteenth century, H.C. Morrison, argued that Wesley taught premillennial theology. In an introduction to the pamphlet, *John Wesley and Premillennialism*, Morrison states, "The pre-millennial view of Christ's second coming is evidently in harmony with the plain teachings of the word of God. It was so understood and proclaimed by the apostles, the early Christians, and the founders and fathers of Methodism." He then suggests that it is natural for a revival in holiness to also bring about a revival in interest in the return of Christ, ending his introduction by quoting 'for in such an

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[553] Wilson T. Hogue, History of the Free Methodist Church Vol. 1, (Winona Lake, IN: The Free Methodist Church Publishing House, 1938 (1915)), 7.
[554] Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism.* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987 (2007)), 38-39. Also see especially footnote 13 on p. 55.
[555] Dayton, 149.

hour as ye think not, *the Son of Man cometh.'*[556]

While Morrison believed Wesley and the early Methodists were premillennialists, in his ground-breaking work on the development of fundamentalism, Ernest Sandeen notes that the Methodists were not very involved in the British millenarianism movement, with some even being antagonistic towards it.[557] This should not be too surprising, as John Wesley and the Methodists were much more interested in evangelism and the experiential life of a Christian. This hopeful outlook is the opposite of premillennialism, which has a negative view of the future and of humanity (think total depravity here), assuming that society will continue to deteriorate until the return of Christ.[558] As has been demonstrated by Kenneth Newport and others, Wesleyans are much more hopeful about the future. The Wesleyan revival occurred in the midst of terrible corruption and deprivation in eighteenth century England, and Methodists followed the example of the Wesleys in working for positive social change concerning numerous social issues. Newport notes that "…according to this view, Wesleyans and premillennialists are (and always have been) in disagreement on the answer to the very practical question: How shall the kingdom of God be brought upon earth?"[559]

Sandeen and Dayton are correct in claiming that Wesley focused on soteriological issues rather than eschatological speculations. This is demonstrated in a letter he penned

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[556] H.J. Morrison, "A Word of Explanation" in Nathan West, *John Wesley and Premillennialism*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: John de Witt, 1894 (2018), 4. Emphasis in the quoted passage from Luke 12:40/ Matthew 24:44 is Morrison's.
[557] Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Fundamentalism, 1800-1930.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1970 (2008)), 20. George Marsden also notes that the number of Methodists involved in the Niagara Bible conferences in the late nineteenth century was 'extremely small,' George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture.* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 46.
[558] Kenneth G.C. Newport, "Premillennialism in the Early Writings of Charles Wesley," *The Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32:1 (Spring, 1997), 85-106.
[559] Newport, 86. Newport does make the disclaimer that not all premillennialists have a negative view of humanity, nor are all socially inactive.

to Christopher Hopper in 1888 where he writes,

> My Dear Brother,
> I said nothing, less or more, in Bradford church, concerning the end of the world, neither concerning my own opinion, but what follows: -- That Bengelius had given it as his opinion, not that the world would then end, but that the millennial reign of Christ would begin in the year 1836. I have no opinion at all upon the head: I can determine nothing at all about it. These calculations are far above, out of my sight. I have only one thing to do, -- to save my soul, and those that hear me.
> I am
> Yours affectionately.[560]

Steven O'Malley has helpfully explored the influence of Johann Albrecht Bengel (1684-1752) on Wesley. Bengel was a Pietist who taught at Tübingen, and Wesley relied on his work for his *Notes* on Revelation.[561] O'Malley also points out that for a time Wesley followed Bengel in interpreting the seventh trumpet as the period of time between Charles the Great (800) and 1836, when Bengel had predicted that Christ would return. However, as O'Malley notes, Wesley later moved away from this opinion,[562] and Dayton points out that Wesley reprimanded one of his followers, George Bell, who predicted that Christ would return on February 23, 1763.[563] In fact, it appears that Wesley was more interested in the soteriological implications of Bengel's eschatology.[564]

If it were true that John Wesley was a premillennialist, then it would not be surprising to find Free Methodists embracing Darby's premillennial theology. However, it is clear that B.T. Roberts accepted postmillennialism; and as we shall see, premillennial

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[560] John Wesley, "Letter to Mr. Christopher Hopper," no date but the year, 1788. Reprinted in The Works of John Wesley V.11, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 319.
[561] J. Steven O'Malley, "Pietist Influences in the Eschatological Thought of John Wesley and Jürgen Moltman," *WTJ* 29:1-2 (Spring-Fall, 1994), 128-129.
[562] O'Malley, 130.
[563] Dayton, 150.
[564] O'Malley, 130.

theology, while certainly popular among some Free Methodists at different times in history, has never had enough support to become an official doctrine of the FMC.

Concerning dispensations, Don Dayton argues that Wesley believed in two dispensations divided by the advent of Christ. He points out that Wesley speaks of the covenant of work and the covenant of grace, as well as a Jewish dispensation and a Christian dispensation.[565] Newport demonstrates that in the mid seventeenth century, John's brother, Charles Wesley, was clearly a premillennialist who believed that the "end would come in 1794."[566] Newport argues, though, that as time passed, Charles Wesley's interest in apocalypticism diminished. Perhaps this is because he did not witness the conversion of the Jews, which he thought would occur by 1761-1762.[567] As has been pointed out by O'Malley, John Wesley did not appear to know, nor did he use the terms "rapture" or "tribulation," but he did speak of two distinct millennial periods; first, when Satan is bound, and second a thousand year reign of the saints.[568]

John Wesley's close friend and perhaps the foremost theologian of the nascent Methodist movement, John Fletcher, was a premillennialist when he was in his twenties, but Laurence Wood argues that "his views seem to be more flexible and open-ended in his later years."[569] It is essential to consider Fletcher as a forerunner to American Methodism. It is clear that John Wesley intended for Fletcher to take over the Methodist movement

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[565] Dayton, 51.
[566] Newport, 87.
[567] Newport, 87-89.
[568] O'Malley, 131. O'Malley draws on an unpublished paper by James B. Bross titled, "John Wesley and Eschhatology," where Bross claims that Wesley did not use these terms in his discussion of Mathew 25:40 and I Thes. 4:17.
[569] Laurence W. Wood, *The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism: Rediscovering John Fletcher as John Wesley's Vindicator and Designated Successor.* (Pietist and Wesleyan Studies Book 15). (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, INC, 2002), 162. Refer to footnote 3. Wood sites Luke Tyerman's book *Wesley's Designated Successor,* 20-21.

after his death, but the younger Fletcher died at the age of 55, more than five years before Wesley died. No matter what one's final conclusions are concerning Fletcher's influence, it is clear, as Dayton and Wood have noted, that Fletcher is a 'key hinge' when it comes to understanding the development of American Methodism.[570]

In his chapter, 'The Doctrines of Grace of Justice', Fletcher notes that there has been controversy that has lasted for fourteen hundred years in the church, and that he feels the need to address this by "lay(ing) before the reader a plain account of the *primitive catholic Gospel*, and its varying dispensations."[571] Next, Fletcher makes clear that he believes that God works out salvation in different ways in different ages. He writes,

> The Gospel, in general, is a Divine system of truth, which, with various degrees of evidence, points out to sinners the way of eternal salvation, agreeable to the mercy and justice of a holy God; and therefore the Gospel, in general, is an assemblage of *holy doctrines of* GRACE, *and gracious doctrines of* Justice. This is the idea which our Lord himself gives us of it, Mark xvi, 16. For though he speaks there of the peculiar Gospel dispensation, which he opened, his words may, in some sense, be applied to every Gospel dispensation. "Preach the Gospel. He that believeth [in the light of his dispensation, supposing he does it '*with the heart unto righteousness'*] shall be saved," according to the privileges of his dispensation: here you have a holy doctrine of *grace*. "But he that believeth not shall be damned:" here you have a gracious doctrine of *justice*. For, supposing man has a gracious capacity to believe in the light of his dispensation, there is no Antinomian grace in the promise, and no free wrath in the threatening, which compose what our Lord calls the Gospel; but the conditional promise exhibits a righteous doctrine of grace, and the conditional threatening displays a gracious doctrine of justice.[572]

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[570] Dayton, "Rejoinder to Laurence Wood," pp. 367-375 in *Pneuma* 27:2 (Fall, 2005), 374. Note that in the middle years of the first decade of the twentieth century, Dayton and Wood carried on a spirited debate in *Pneuma* concerning the influence of Fletcher on American Methodism.
[571] John Fletcher, *The Works of the Reverend John Fletcher.* V.II. (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1835), 261.
[572] Fletcher, V. II, 260.

Fletcher divides the Gospel into four "capital" dispensations as well as two further dispensations of grace and justice, which are to take place at a future time. Fletcher's dispensations are:

1. Gentilism – Fletcher describes this as natural religion, or 'the Gospel of the Gentiles.' It is a dispensation of grace and justice.
2. Judaism – Fletcher calls this the 'Mosiac dispensation' or the law.
3. The Gospel of John the Baptist – This is the Gospel message found in the four Gospels, a type of 'infant Christianity' before the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.
4. The Perfect Gospel of Christ – Fletcher describes this as the other three dispensations reaching their full maturity and includes the baptism of the Spirit.

The final two dispensations that Fletcher adds are the day of death and the day of final judgement.[573] Fletcher then adds yet an additional dispensation. He states of this additional dispensation, that it will take place before the second coming of Christ. He feels the need to further explain this, writing,

> I have added the clause, *before the second coming of Christ* because in the Psalms, Prophets, Acts, Epistles, and especially in the Revelation, we have a variety of promises that "in the day of his *displayed* power, *Christ will* come in his glory, to judge among the heathen, to wound even kings in the day of his wrath, to root up the wicked, to fill the places with their dead bodies, *to* smite in sunder *antichrist, and* the heads over divers countries, *and* to lift up his *triumphant* head," on this very earth, where he once "bowed his *wounded* and gave up the ghost:" … In that great day, another gospel dispensation shall take place. We have it now in prophecy, as the Jews had the Gospel of Christ's first advent; but when Christ shall "come to destroy the wicked, to be *actually* glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe: in that day," ministers of the Gospel shall no longer prophesy, but, speaking a plain, historical truth, they shall lift up their voices, as "the voice of many waters and mighty thunderings, saying, Allelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth; the marriage of the Lamb is come; his wife [the Church of the first born] has made herself ready: blessed and holy is he that has part in the first

[573] Fletcher, V. II, 261-263. Note that Wood, Dayton, and J. Russell Frazier all appropriately conflate these into three primary dispensations. The first is of the Father, the Mosaic dispensation, the second is the Son, which is the dispensation of the Baptism of John, and the third, which Wood argues Fletcher believed could come immediately following the second, is the dispensation of the Spirit, which Fletcher linked with entire sanctification. See Laurence W. Wood, *review* of *True Christianity: The Doctrine of Dispensations in the Thought of John William Fletcher (1729-1785),* by J. Russell Frazier, Methodist History 53:2 (January, 2015), 126.

> resurrection: he REIGNS with Christ a thousand years. … May the Lord hasten this Gospel dispensation.[574]

It is important to understand that Fletcher's dispensationalism is soteriological, and not in any way in agreement with the eschatological dispensationalism that would be espoused by John Nelson Darby almost a century later. Dayton argues that while these differences, and the exegesis which informs them, would have had little practical consequence in early Methodism, especially under the influence of Wesley, they do open the door for a greater emphasis on a dispensation of the Spirit, especially in the American context.[575] However, as has been argued by Larry Wood, Arnold Ehlert and others, the dispensationalism that preceded Darby was substantively different than modern dispensationalism.[576]

Dayton says that Fletcher believed in the dispensation of the Father (Old Testament), and the dispensation of the Son (the New Testament beginning at the baptism of Jesus), and the dispensation of the Spirit (which begins at Pentecost with the gift of the Spirit.)[577] This is not entirely accurate, as has already been demonstrated, but Dayton does helpfully point out that "(t)hese dispensations are not only a description of the movement of the *Heilsgeschichte*, or the stages of God's working within human history, but also – and perhaps even more primarily – a description of the stages of spiritual growth and development through which each individual must pass."[578]

Wood is critical of Dayton's interpretation of Fletcher's premillennialism. Referring to a privately circulated article written by Dayton, Wood notes,

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[574] Fletcher, V. II, 264.
[575] Dayton, 53-54.
[576] Larry Wood, *The Meaning of Pentecost*, 162.
[577] Dayton, 51.
[578] Dayton, 51

> Donald Dayton has offered a highly speculative interpretation of Fletcher's alleged 'premillennialism.' He proposes that Fletcher's doctrine of dispensations 'helped open the door to' a kind of 'literalistic view of Scripture, to cultural disengagement, to the 'great reversal' that abandoned 'social reform.' … Dayton writes: 'I do not blame all of this on Fletcher, but as his formulation moved out from under Wesley and the context of original Methodism, I think it had the tendency to take on a life of its own and prepare the way for fundamentalism in the holiness movement.'[579]

Wood notes that part of Dayton's problem here was his misinterpretation of Ehlert's work. Wood points out that Dayton claims Ehlert begins with Fletcher in his history of dispensationalism, but this is clearly inaccurate. Ehlert begins with ancient types of dispensationalism, and as Wood correctly notes, "Ehlert makes a very careful distinction between 'the logical dividing-line between the old and new dispensationalism.' He shows that the new dispensationalism starts with John Nelson Darby, and he notes that the modern type of dispensationalism 'is quite different from ancient dispensationalism.'"[580]

Ehlert also writes that Fletcher likewise used dispensation to refer to the progress of a Christian in spiritual maturity as noted above.[581] Fletcher wrote,

> Converted sinners, or believers, are either under the dispensation of the Father, under that of the Son, or under that of the Holy Spirit, according to the different progress they have made in spiritual things ….
>
> Believers, under the dispensation of the Father, are ordinarily surrounded with a night of uncertainty and doubt, though visited, at times, with a few scattered rays of hope. Under the dispensation of the Son, the doubts of believers are dissipated, like those of the two disciples who journeyed to Emmaus, while they discover more clearly, and experience more powerfully, the truths of the Gospel. But under the dispensation of the Spirit, they "walk in the light," 1 John i.7, and are led into all truth by the "spirit of truth," John xvi, 12, "the anointing which they have received abideth in them, and teacheth them all things" necessary to salvation, 1 John ii.27.[582]

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[579] Wood, 162.
[580] Wood, 162.
[581] Ehlert, 42.
[582] John Fletcher, *The Works of the Reverend John Fletcher.* V.III. (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1835), 170.

Fletcher's theology is important to understand, as it was incredibly informative for Methodists in America. Dayton maintains that, because of Fletcher's view, many Methodists would have been further predisposed to accepting John Nelson Darby's dispensationalism, which began to permeate American eschatology after the mid-nineteenth century, and he also makes a close correlation between Fletcher's influence and the eschatology of Pentecostals with their 'latter rain' theology. Dayton's interpretation suggests that Fletcher opened Methodists in America to legalism and Darby's dispensationalism. Dayton was raised in the Wesleyan Methodist Church, which did embrace fundamentalism, and this seems to be coloring his interpretation of Fletcher.

Adam Clarke (1762-1832) and Richard Watson (1781-1833) are the two other prominent Methodist theologians preceding Darby who wrote about dispensations. Clarke held that there were three dispensations, each lasting two thousand years, after which will come 'a period without terminating limits.' Clarke also wrote regularly of the Jewish and Christian dispensations.[583] Watson does speak of dispensations in his *Institutes*, but Ehlert argues that there he largely follows the work of Anglican scholar, George Farber (1773-1843). However, Watson also includes an article on dispensations in his theological dictionary. There, he wrote,

> These are otherwise called 'the ways of God,' and denote those schemes or methods which are devised and pursued by the wisdom and goodness of God, in order to manifest his perfection and will to mankind, for the purpose of their instruction, discipline, reformation, and advancement in rectitude of temper and conduct, in order to promote their happiness. These are the grand ends of the divine dispensations; and in their aptitude to promote these ends consist their excellence and glory. The works or constitutions of nature are, in a general sense, divine dispensations, by which God condescends to display to us his being and attributes, and thus to lead us to the acknowledgment, adoration, and love, of our Creator, Father, and

[583] Ehlert, 43-44.

> Benefactor. The sacred Scriptures reveal and record other dispensations of divine providence, which have been directed to the promotion of the religious principles, moral conduct, and true happiness of mankind. These have varied in several ages of the world, and have been adapted by the wisdom and goodness of God to the circumstances of his intelligent and accountable creatures. In this sense the various revelations which God has communicated to mankind at different periods, and the means he has used, as occasion has required, for their discipline and improvement, have been justly denominated divine dispensations. Accordingly, we read in the works of theological writers of the various dispensations of religion; that of the patriarchs, that of Moses, and that of Christ, called the dispensation of grace, the perfection and ultimate object of every other. All these were adapted to the conditions of the human race at these several periods; all, in regular succession, were mutually connected and rendered preparatory to the other; and all were subservient to the design of saving the world, and promoting the perfection and happiness of its rational and moral inhabitants.[584]

We clearly see in the Methodism from Wesley to Watson an acknowledgement that God does indeed work in different dispensations. But, as stated before, this is a soteriological rather than an eschatological dispensationalism, the latter of which is the primary concern of John Nelson Darby, who began to write on dispensational theology in 1836.[585] Along with his seven dispensations, Darby denoted that each had a separate condition which God has placed upon humanity, "principles which in themselves are everlastingly sanctioned of God, some condition in which He has placed man, principles which in themselves are everlastingly sanctioned of God, but in the course of those dispensations placed responsibly in the hands of man for the display and discovery of what he was, and the bringing in their infallible establishment in Him to whom the glory of them all rightly belonged …". In Darby's scheme, humans must ultimately fail totally and immediately, but the patience of God would be displayed in the grace of a new dispensation.[586]

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[584] Richard Watson, "Dispensations, Divine" in *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary.* (New York: John Mason, 1844), 331-332.
[585] Ehlert, 47.
[586] Ehlert, 51-52.

I have focused on the development of eschatological thinking with John Wesley and the early Methodists. This included a recognition that there has been significant debate on the way in which John Fletcher influenced the development of dispensational theology within the Methodist movement in America. Next, I will concentrate on the way in which premillennialism and dispensational thought have been received within the Free Methodist Church.

Premillennial Dispensationalism and the Free Methodist Church

I have been arguing in this chapter that one of the issues that challenged Free Methodists was premillennial dispensational theology. Here, I intend to show how and why this became a problem for the FM Church, and how the Wesleyan Methodists and Free Methodists demonstrated different ways of understanding and receiving this fundamentalist doctrine.

B. T. Roberts was born in Western New York in 1823 and raised at a time and in a place that has since been labeled the "burned over district" because of the religious revivals and upheaval that occurred in the region in this period. These included the Millenarian movement and the beginnings of Mormonism. Roberts was raised in a time of extraordinary millennial expectations in the United States.[587] Among other things, he was exposed to the teaching of William Miller, who predicted the return of Christ and the end of the world in 1843, when Roberts was a college student. Snyder notes that Roberts must

[587] For a detailed description of Roberts' theological context, see Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850.* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press), 1950.

have attended at least one Millerite meeting, as he wrote about it in an 1862 article in the Earnest Christian.[588] Roberts wrote,

> At first, their meetings were among the most deeply spiritual that we ever attended. But when the time they had fixed upon for the second-coming of Christ passed by without his making his appearance, many could not admit that there had been any mistake in their calculations. To save themselves from the mortifying confession that they had not fully understood "all mysteries, and all knowledge" they resorted to various expedients. Some held that time was really passed—that we were now in eternity—some held to the annihilation of the wicked—some went to the Shakers—and many made shipwreck of faith and of good conscience.[589]

Clearly, Roberts was appalled with the way the Millerites responded to the failure of Jesus to return in 1843, and this may have been what steered him from getting caught up in later millennial speculations. In the very first edition of his journal, the *Earnest Christian*, Roberts included a reprint of an article by a Methodist bishop, Leonidas Hamline, titled "The Millenium." (sic)[590] Snyder notes that the article was written in January 1843, in the midst of the Millerite hysteria.[591] The point of the article was to downplay the millennial speculation within the church, and invite Christians to focus on more important aspects of Christianity, such as praying and laboring for the kingdom of God. This reflects the attitude that Roberts maintained through his life concerning eschatological speculations, and this is doubtless why he chose to print the article. Hamline writes,

> It seems to us unadvised to draw the attention of the Church to what may properly be called curious and unlearned questions. And have we not done it in regard to the millenium? (sic). Its exact period, its mode of commencing, its implications as it regards the personal coming of Christ, are of no great practical moment, or they would have been revealed so clearly as not to admit of *pros* and *cons.* These are unlearned questions – that is, they are

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[588] Howard A. Snyder, "B.T. Roberts: Holiness and the End of Days" presented to the SCOD/ MMHC Session on February 24, 2014, 1
[589] B. T. Roberts, "Mistaken," *Earnest Christian* IV:2 (Aug. 1862), 62.
[590] Leonidas Lent Hamline, "The Millenium," *Earnest Christian* I:1 (Jan, 1860), 21-25.
[591] Howard A. Snyder, *Populist Saints: B.T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists.* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 533.

> unlearnable, not being set forth with certainty in the Scriptures. The fact that they are not is a hint to man. He should let them alone, or at least touch them lightly and diffidently.[592]

Roberts wrote a brief note on why he had included the article, and it is helpful to replicate that here, as it gives further clarification concerning Roberts' thoughts on eschatology. He writes that he has reprinted the article because it is "so appropriate to the conflict at present going on in the Church between spirituality and formalism, that we conclude to give it entire to our readers. To most of them it will be new, and those who have read it will be glad to give it another perusal."[593] Roberts was clearly much more interested in seeing people come to a deeper spiritual experience with God as opposed to formal theological speculation, even though as we saw earlier, he admitted that at first he found the Millerite meetings 'deeply spiritual.'[594]

It is worth noting, in terms of the early focus of the FMC, that while there was one article on eschatology in the first year (1860) of the *Earnest Christian*, there were thirty-eight articles that focused on revivalism. Roberts exhibited a clear postmillennial view in an article entitled, "The Future of the Earth" that he wrote for the *Earnest Christian* in 1863. In it, he claimed, "The whole tenor of language common in these last days, is to the effect, that as all things continue as they were from the beginning, so they will continue for all coming time. The prevalent theory is, that the race is progressing rapidly in knowledge and virtue, and this progression is to continue, until the millennium is ushered in, so-gradually, and so naturally, that the transition will be scarcely noticed."[595] Howard Snyder has demonstrated

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[592] Hamline, 22
[593] Hamline, 21. Editor's note from B.T. Roberts.
[594] We will see later that Bishop Wilson T. Hogue defended his premillennial views because he felt that they encouraged him in a deeper and richer faith.
[595] B.T. Roberts, "The Future of Earth," *Earnest Christian* V:1 (Jan. 1863), 5

that Roberts was clearly aware of the 'apocalyptical crisis' of the Civil War, but unlike many evangelicals, especially as the nineteenth century progressed, he expected the United States to survive the Civil War and he expected the world to go on.[596]

As one who was aware of the popular religious trends of his time, Roberts returned to the eschatological concern in 1868. In considering the second coming of Christ, he wrote, "we dare not speculate where (the Bible) is silent." He was unwilling to "pry into mysteries which the word of God assures us are purposely concealed. We have no vanity to gratify by appearing to be wise above what is written. To the law and the testimony. … the second coming of our Savior …with other doctrines with which it has no necessary connection, and which we believe to be fundamentally wrong."[597] It was not long before the return of Christ became a popular topic amongst Free Methodists. In 1885, a Mrs. H.E. Hayden published an article on eschatology in the *Earnest Christian*, and just three years later, debate concerning the millennium began to rage on the pages of *The Free Methodist,* the official periodical of the FMC.

While Roberts was reserved concerning millennial speculations, Bishop Wilson T. Hogue embraced premillennial theology. Hogue was perhaps the most important of the second generation of leaders within the Free Methodist Church, and if there was one individual who edged the church closer to fundamentalism, it was Hogue. Among other things, Hogue was the primary opponent of B.T. Roberts at the 1890 General Conference concerning the ordination of women, an issue that could be argued as a significant indicator of fundamentalism. The vote against the ordination of women was 43-39, and it

[596]Howard A. Snyder, *Populist Saints,*808-809.
[597] B.T. Roberts, "Christ's Second Coming," *Earnest Christian* 16:3 (Sept. 1868), 69-70.

would be almost a full century before Free Methodists reversed this decision and allowed for the full ordination of women. Ironically, this was at a time when other holiness denominations such as the Wesleyan Methodist Church and not far in the future, the Church of the Nazarene were ordaining women.

FM historian Howard Snyder suggests Free Methodists are very fortunate in that both the denomination and Roberts were born before premillennial dispensationalism became so incredibly influential by the 1870's and 1880's. He argues strongly that this theology "reshaped American evangelical Protestantism from the 1880's on."[598] However, it is clear that W.T. Hogue (1852-1920)[599] did embrace premillennial theology, and since he did, then the question must be asked as to how much he did or did not lead the church to an embrace of that eschatological view.

Hogue was ordained in the Genesee Conference of the FMC in 1873, was a bishop of the church from 1903 until his death, and served as the first president of Greenville College beginning in 1892. Hogue embraced premillennial theology early in his career, arguing for it in a series of articles in *The Free Methodist* in 1888-1889.[600]

At the time, *The Free Methodist* was a weekly paper. Having researched many early editions of the Free Methodist, I observed that each edition was 16 pages, and most included full pages on holiness teachings, personal experiences of being sanctified, attacks on liquor, denominational news, and obituaries (which also often served to testify to the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the lives of the deceased, as well as the grace with which

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[598] Snyder, B.T. Roberts: Holiness and the End of Days, 1, 3.
[599] Note that W.T. Hogue changed his name from Hogg. For consistency, I will use Hogue when citing and referring to him.
[600] W.T. Hogue, "Premillennialism – No. 1," *The Free Methodist* XXI:28 (July11, 1888), 8-9. Others from this series will be footnoted below.

they succumbed to death). The front page was a mélange of brief articles by the editor (B.T. Roberts during this period) and others. Additionally, there was always a page or two of original articles, usually from Free Methodists, which had been sent to the paper for publication. The authors of those articles embraced numerous topics, and rarely focused on one topic for any length of time; however, that changed in 1888. In a ten-month period between April 25, 1888 and February 13, 1889, no less than twenty-five articles or responses concerning premillennialism were printed in *The Free Methodist*, including a twelve-article series written by Hogue that defended premillennialism. Apart from one lone article, Hogue stood alone in defending this position, although, as will be noted later, there certainly was some interest in continuing the conversation.

The article on premillennialism that seemed to trigger this debate was published in April of 1888, and in it, R. Gilbert argued for a rejection of premillennialism, pointing out that premillennialism robs from Christians any hope for the work of the Holy Spirit. He used Daniel Steele, a classmate of Roberts at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, as his primary source for arguing that the creeds did not espouse premillennialism. Perhaps what is most interesting for this thesis is his statement that there are some Free Methodists who walk out of church after a Sunday morning and "attempt to discourage evangelistic efforts to save the world, by teaching that the Holy Spirit is incompetent to save the world, by the spread of Christianity; and hence that Christ must, and positively will, come in person, long before the 'end of the world' – even at the beginning of the millennium."[601] This indicates

[601] R. Gilbert, "Premillennialism – What the Creeds Say," *The Free Methodist* XXI:17 (April 25, 1888), 3. The following week, *The Free Methodist* published what should have been the first of a series of articles by Gilbert, entitled "Premillennialism – Introductory Remarks." *The Free Methodist* XXI:18 (May 2, 1888), 2-3 Gilbert claims that he had been 'somewhat familiar with the millennial theme' for half a century.

clearly Gilbert's impression that there were Free Methodists who held premillennial views. Gilbert followed this first article with a series of others, noting the rise of the prophetic conferences beginning in 1878, and what he considered the 'absurd literalism' of premillennialists.[602] Gilbert also continued to incorporate Steele's work in his attack on the premillennial position.[603]

Hogue wrote his first article in support of premillennialism two months later (July,1888). He argued that the premillennial position has not ever received 'it's due proportion of attention' within the FMC periodicals. He points out that premillennialism is his personal view of eschatology, and that it provides him and many others hope, and that he expects that his series of articles "will be suited to minister instruction, encouragement, comfort, hope, and patient continuance in well-doing to all who read with a desire to be profited."[604] Hogue follows this up in the next issue with a type of secondary introduction to his thesis. He notes that there are indeed some differences of opinion as to some of the details of premillennialism; he points out that the premillennialist position is often caricatured wildly and unfairly, including in the articles by Gilbert, and he defines the terminology of the doctrine.[605] In his next article, he proposes the three primary tenets of premillennialism,[606] followed by an article focused on views opposed to premillennialism, particularly the "Whitbyan theory," which is postmillennialism.[607] Next, he attacks the

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[602] Gilbert, "Premillennialism – Absurd Literalism" *The Free Methodist* XXI:22 (May30, 1888), 2-3.
[603] Gilbert, "Premillennialism – 'The Prophetic Conference,'" *The Free Methodist* XXI:20 (May16, 1888), 2-3.
[604] W.T. Hogue, "Premillennialism – No. 1," *The Free Methodist* XXI:28 (July11, 1888), 8-9.
[605] Hogue, "Premillennialism – No. 2," *The Free Methodist* XXI:29 (July18, 1888), 8-9.
[606] Hogue, "Premillennialism – No. 3," *The Free Methodist* XXI:30 (July 25, 1888), 8-9.
[607] Hogue, "Premillennialism – No. 4," *The Free Methodist* XXI:31 (August 1, 1888), 8.

Whitbyan theory,[608] and argues in favor of the Lord's Personal Return,[609] Hogue continued along these lines for an exhaustive total of 12 articles.

The West Kansas Conference clearly was not amenable to Hogue's views. Their committee reporting on periodicals wrote, "(W)e deplore the fact that so much valuable space in our paper has been devoted to advocating the doctrine of Premillennialism, which is, in our opinion, contrary to the plain teachings of the Scriptures, and the doctrine of our church as set forth in the discipline on page 10."[610] C. M. Damon, a member of the West Kansas Conference and one who contributed to the report cited above, wrote an apology to Hogue in the Nov. 21 issue. Damon admitted that he had been unfairly critical of Hogue, and had actually encouraged him to write on the issue. Hogue was clearly upset, writing,

> I was writing my articles on that subject when you were here. You told me that in your own mind you had never been fully decided on that question, but from what attention you had given the matter, you leaned towards the opposite view from what I held. You then told me you should be glad to see my articles in the paper, and give them a very careful reading. Now when I have but barely begun, your conference, led on by yourself as one member of the committee, pass a resolution to the effect that my articles are unscriptural and heretical.[611]

Damon responded to this contritely, noting,

> I think brother Hogg (Hogue) is correct and I am at fault. Perhaps I did not give strong enough expression to my 'leaning' toward the Postmillennial view, yet I cannot say that my conviction of it has excluded the thought that perhaps the eminent and spiritual minds who accord with Brother Hogg's views may be right. However, I do not 'deplore' the discussion of doctrinal questions by able and candid writers. Really I am interested in such, and desire to see both sides have fair opportunity. I do not desire our official organ committed by authority to the view presented by Brother Hogg. I did

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[608] Hogue, "Premillennialism – No. 5," *The Free Methodist* XXI:33 (August 15, 1888), 8-9.
[609] Hogue, "Premillennialism – No. 6," *The Free Methodist* XXI:34 (August 22, 1888), 8, and Hogue, "Premillennialism – No. 7," *The Free Methodist* XXI:35 (August 29, 1888), 8-9.
[610] J.H. Taylor, C.M. Damon & J.B. Swaim, "West Kansas Conference – Report on Periodicals," *The Free Methodist* XXI:42 (October 17, 1888), 4.
[611] C.M. Damon, "A Confession," *The Free Methodist* XXI 47 (Nov. 21, 1888), 4. Damon is here quoting a letter he had received from Hogue.

> not draft the report but treated it perhaps improperly, in a vein of pleasantry, thinking more of its simply gaining the attention of the conference than commanding it, or of its bearing on my brother. My attention was chiefly drawn to another feature of the report. I should be sorry to have favored the exclusion of such a series of articles after beginning their publication, nor did I think of such an effect or bearing; but should be glad to see a review, or the opposing theory, by a competent writer.[612]

Hogue's primary opponent in the argument, Warren Parker, argued for postmillennialism. Parker's description of the postmillennial age included the idea that on this earth, there will be a partial restoration to a prelapsarian state, but sin and death will continue, and millions will still reject Christ, and these will become the visible portion of Satan's army when he is loosed.[613] A week later, Parker contributed a second article attacking premillennialism, in which he argued vigorously that Christ's promise to come again refers to His coming to an individual at their death to take them home to a place prepared for them. He states, "(r)eason should teach us that there is not a single passage in the Bible that tells us to watch for the personal coming of Christ; if there is it could only apply to that generation that will be living on earth at the time of his coming. Otherwise, he would only be practicing a deception upon us."[614] In a fourth response to Hogue and premillennial theology, Parker's attack became even more vigorous. There, he concluded, "The Premillennialists take all these passages that speak of the coming of Christ in its various aspects, mix them up together, draw from them promiscuously, and apply them haphazard to what they call the second coming of Christ. A few more rays of light will dispel this darkness also. Yes, premillennialism must be destroyed with the brightness of his coming."[615]

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[612] C.M. Damon, 4.
[613] William Parker, "Premillennialism," *The Free Methodist* XXII:1, (Jan. 2, 1889), 3.
[614] William Parker, "Premillennialism. – No. 2," *The Free Methodist* XXII:3, (Jan. 9, 1889), 19.
[615] William Parker, "Premillennialism. – No. 4," *The Free Methodist* XXII:5, (Jan.23, 1889), 50.

These constant speculations in *The Free Methodist* wore on the FMC population, as evidenced by the example of one letter to the editor (which doubtless carried the views of many) which appeared in *The Free Methodist* on January 30, 1889 with this message:

> Is there no possible way to constrain our millennial brethren, both pre and post, to let us rest a little from so much conjecturing on the subject of the millennium? I think I strike an amen chord in the hearts of most of the brethren in the ministry and the laity, when I say we are getting a little tired of what seems to be merely speculative theories regarding the millennium. … I mean no reflection on the editor; but if I could kindly persuade my brethren to come a little nearer the world's present needs and exhibit their talents on things a little more plain and practical … I sincerely believe their labors would be more highly esteemed and result in greater good to the church and the world.[616]

This letter, I believe, really captures the heart of many Wesleyan holiness Christians at that time. They were much more interested in practical ministry than in speculative theology.

Of course, eschatological speculation would not just go away, as the late nineteenth century was a period of great growth in the popularity of premillennial theology. The February 13, 1888 edition of *The Free Methodist* included two letters to the editor, both written by individuals who were quite interested in seeing the conversation continue, while the February 20th edition included yet another article on the second coming of Christ.[617] Around this time, B.T. Roberts, who had been elected by the 1886 General Council as editor of *The Free Methodist*, felt the necessity to write an editorial to address the 'belligerent articles' sent in for publication. He wrote, "Let our polemical writers profit by this example (of the gracious spirit of Peter towards Paul)."[618] He also asked that his

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[616] No Grumbler, "A Kind Complaint," *The Free Methodist* XXII:6, (Jan. 30, 1889), 69.
[617] William Parker, "Explanation," & J.T. Michael, "Premillennialism. – Just a Word," *The Free Methodist* XXII:8 (Feb. 13, 1889), 100-101, H. Frank Hill, "We Shall Not All Sleep," *The Free Methodist* XXII:9 (Feb. 20, 1889), 114-115.
[618] Clarence Zahniser, *Earnest Christian.* (Circleville, OH: Advocate Publishing House, 1957), 290-291. This quote is not found in the work cited by Zahniser, though it surely fits the Roberts' theme here.

writers focus their writing on issues "relating to experimental or practical godliness," and to "avoid metaphysical subtleties and profitless speculations, (not) meddle with matters too deep" for them and readers, and writers would be best advised to "let the beast with the seven heads and two horns alone …."[619] In another article addressed to prospective contributors to *The Free Methodist,* he advised writing about topics that were practical, and that would 'help souls get to heaven.' Roberts urged,

> Now but few read these long continued articles touching the millennium. They are nothing but opinions, and prove nothing; therefore, of what use can they be? I would not raise the question of piety in these brethren. Will the millennial theory as ventilated help us to comfort the sick and afflicted ones about us? Will the idea of a Christ coming one thousand years sooner, or later, assist us to lead souls to the Christ who came 1888 years ago?[620]

In spite of the growing popularity of premillennialism, the FMC did not embrace it or the dispensationalism with which it was often paired. However, Free Methodists did continue to write on the subject. Albert Sims, a Canadian Free Methodist, wrote two books on eschatology: *Deepening Shadows and Coming Glories* (1905) and *Behold the Bridegroom Cometh: or Some Remarkable and Incontrovertible Signs which Herald the Near Approach of the Son of Man* (1900). Jesse Forest Silver penned *The Lord's Return: Seen in History and in Scripture as Pre-Millennial and Immanent* (1914). It's interesting to note that Bishop Hogue wrote the introduction to Silver's monograph. About the book, Hogue remarks that throughout the New Testament, admonitions abound to be prepared for the Lord's return.

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[619] B.T. Roberts, *The Free Methodist.* March 5, 1890, 1. Quoted by Clarence Zahniser, Earnest Christian, 290-291.

[620] B.T. Roberts, "Suggestions to Contributors" (reprinted from the *Free Methodist*), in *Pungent Truths, Being Extracts from the Writings of the Rev. Benjamin Titus Roberts, A.M., While Editor of "The Free Methodist" from 1886 to 1890,* ed. W.B. Rose. Chicago: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1912, 106.

He continues,

> But how can anyone obey any of these directions who does not believe the Lord can personally return until the world has been converted and a thousand years of universal righteousness shall have intervened? Yet such is the doctrine held by many concerning the return of Jesus Christ to this world.[621]

The work is obviously strongly premillennial, and argues that this was the doctrine of the early church, but it was sidetracked beginning with Origen's allegorical interpretations of Scripture. Silver also vilifies the Roman Catholic Church because they "invent the post-millennial system and (bury) the faith of the primitive church."[622] He then notes that the Reformation introduced a return to the faith of the early church and argues adamantly that John Wesley and the earliest Methodists were premillennialists.[623]

Interest in the millennium continued with the publication of Harmon Allen Baldwin's *The Coming Judgment: General and at the End of Times* (1927). Baldwin counters Silver by arguing for a post-millennial final and general judgment of both the righteous and the unrighteous. Baldwin's primary opponent is the premillennialist William Blackstone in particular, and Blackstone's theory that there will be many judgments leading to the end of time.

Former Greenville College president, Richard Stephens, claims that Darby's dispensationalism was never seriously considered by Free Methodists. However, the veracity of this statement could be questioned. In 1960, Bishop Leslie Marston published his centennial history of the FMC, and perhaps we get a glimpse of his personal eschatology

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[621] Hogue, "Introduction" pp. 5-8 in Jesse Forest Silver, *The Lord's Return: Seen in History and in Scripture as Premillennial and Immanent.* (New York, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1915 (1914)), 7.
[622] Jesse Forest Silver, *The Lord's Return: Seen in History and in Scripture as Premillennial and Immanent.* (New York, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1915 (1914)), 18.
[623] Ibid, 148-161.

when he writes, "May we observe that it is not inconceivable that God, even in the present dispensation in rare instances, might accommodate his dealings to the weakness of a man's faith, even as he did with Gideon's age."[624] In his chapter on missions, Marston once again reveals his thoughts about the eschaton. He is talking about evangelizing nationals in strategic centers, then says, "This does not mean releasing the home church from responsibility for world missions, but rather increasing its responsibility ***if this eleventh hour crisis*** is to be met successfully."[625] However, whatever Marston's own beliefs may have been concerning eschatology, he made a number of clear statements about the FMC and millennial schemes. He wrote, "(t)he two groups (those who hold to either pre or post-millennial views) are nearer together now than a few years ago. Few in the church today hold the hope that by its inerrant power, apart from the fiat of a Sovereign God, righteousness shall reign and 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.' And premillennialists of the church generally have never been so dazzled by the prospect of 'Rapture' as to dull their concern for a general judgment; nor have they held that the Holy Spirit will be withdrawn from the earth before Christ comes; nor that there will be a post-tribulation opportunity for sinners to repent after his return."[626] This demonstrates an important Wesleyan conviction of not majoring on the minors, and for allowing some diversity of thought concerning inconsequential theological issues.

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[624] Leslie Ray Marston, *From Age to Age: A Living Witness.* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1960), 55. Note that later in the same monograph, Marston argues that Free Methodists did not get caught up un millennial speculations.
[625] Marston, 468. (Emphasis is mine)
[626] Marston, 298.

Marston continues, "(t)hose inclining to the premillennial position have generally been moderate in their millennial interpretations, and such today probably comprise the majority of the church on the millennial issue." (new paragraph) "In the hundred years of its history the Free Methodist Church has made no specific doctrinal pronouncements on the issue, nor has it been pressed to do so. The church holds firmly to the position that belief in the Lord's return is essential, and both in its Articles of Religion and in its burial ritual places that coming at the last day.[627] Note that within fifteen years of Marston's statement, the FMC would be pressed from within for a clear statement in support of premillennialism, and the Free Methodist Article of Religion concerning eschatology would change.

Marston may have been influenced by W.B. Godby, a popular preacher and evangelist in the Methodist Church in the early 20th century. The Marston Memorial Historical Center contains an interesting file (no.317) on the works of Godby, including a couple of his books. One of his works had been owned by FM Bishop Charles Fairbairn and another by Marston, who called him "a great scholar but also unusually odd." Marston notes that he met Godby when he was a speaker at Greenville College around the year 1913. (This is handwritten by Marston in the book, *Signs of His Coming*).[628]

Two years prior to Marston's history of the FMC, Don Demaray published a book of Free Methodist theology entitled, *Basic Beliefs.* In *Basic Beliefs,* Demaray points out some of his thoughts concerning the second coming of Jesus. This was a book published by Light & Life, the Free Methodist publishing house, and intended to be used as a basic theology

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[627] Marston, 299.
[628] W. B. Godbey, *Signs of His Coming*, (Nashville, TN: Pentecostal Mission Publishing Company), 3 (no date).

textbook or small group study guide. Demaray, who taught homiletics at Asbury Theological Seminary for years, clearly believed in a sudden second coming of Jesus, but also notes that Christians should not concern themselves with "date-setting." We should also be looking to the future with hope, not gloom, and we should have what he believed to be an early church attitude of, "This may be the day … What a thrill if Christ would come today."[629] Demaray, though very positive in his speculation, unmistakably reflects the premillennial position here.

Byron Lamson, editor of *The Free Methodist,* demonstrated the traditional old covenant/ new covenant dispensational view in an editorial in 1967. In the editorial, he opines, "Anyone who reads the Bible with insight must see the great drama of a developing culture and civilization. There are places in the Old Testament where life is rather primitive. At this childhood stage in the development of people, God's methods are different than in dealing with the high-level cultures of Greece and Rome in the New Testament period. The writer of the Hebrews recognizes and tells us that 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son' (Heb.1:1,2a)"[630]

In the late nineteen-forties, with the repatriation of the Jewish people to Israel, there was a lot of speculation concerning the return of Christ. Thus, it was not surprising that an article focusing on the second advent of Christ appeared in an early 1948 edition of *The Free Methodist.* The author focused on two key words: "When" and "ready." He remarked that "when" is a topic that can easily draw a crowd, but it has also often done much harm to

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[629] Donald E. Demaray, *Basic Beliefs.* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1958), 136-137.
[630] Byron S. Lamson, "Do God's Standards Change." *The Free Methodist.* 100:24 (Nov. 21, 1967), 4.

the church. On the other hand, he asserted that Christians should be "ready" for the return of Christ, be it soon, or be it a thousand years or more in the future. For, he claimed, being "ready" is the love life of Jesus in the soul. "'*Ready*,'" he says "glows with a hope which sings in the language of a patient 'soon.' … *Ready* settles everything imperative to know of His second coming.[631]

In reflecting on the question of the impact of fundamentalism on the FMC, there are a couple of important considerations that should be taken. One is to look at important articles or monographs written by Free Methodists including those noted previously. Another consideration is the official positions that the church has taken and the way in which the church has responded when those positions have been challenged.

Throughout Free Methodist history, there were clearly many who were interested in and thinking about theories of eschatology. The Marston Memorial Historical Center at the Free Methodist World Ministries Center houses a large collection of Methodist and Holiness books. Included in this collection is arguably the largest compilation of books written by Free Methodist authors. Since the opening of the Center, archivists (beginning with Bishop Emeritus, Leslie Marston) have placed a gold star on the bindings of all publications written by Free Methodist authors. Included in the starred collection is a series of pamphlets written by Wesley J. Edwards and published by The Prophetic Book and Film Service. One of these was a personal copy that had belonged to Bishop Marston. The titles of these pamphlets are: "The Day of Vengeance," "This is the Day," "The End Draweth Nigh," and "The Rapture of the Church: Pre or Post Tribulation."

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[631] Walker Mayfield, "The Soon of Ready," *The Free Methodist* 81:5 (Feb. 3, 1948), 3.

Although to what degree Marston was personally interested in eschatology is speculative, he did provide solid rationale for why Free Methodists continually rejected the proposed changes concerning eschatology. In his triumphant centennial history of the FMC, he wrote,

> It is not surprising that Methodism, which holds that the life of God can animate the soul of man here and now, cleansing it from sin and uncleanness in this world, should lay less emphasis on the time schedule of last things than do those who hold to man's inescapable sinfulness in the present dispensation. The latter view at least logically calls for a purgatorial deliverance from sin for believers who escape death by Christ's millennial return. The Methodist movement never has been strongly premillennial and throughout its history the Free Methodist Church has included those who could not accept the premillennial position, even when premillennialism was sweeping through the conservative Christian world in earlier decades of the present century.[632]

Note here that while Marston makes some excellent points about the focus of Methodists on holiness and transformation of a person in the present, rather than the discouraged theories of the dispensationalists, he also makes the interesting assertion that "the Free Methodist Church has included those who could not accept the premillennial position …" Of course, he is also implying here that there were some, perhaps even many, Free Methodists who were accepting the premillennial position.

E. Walter Helsel published "When is Jesus Coming Back" in the November 9, 1976 edition of *Light and Life*. Clearly Free Methodists felt the need to think about it in the midst of the eschatological fervor in America popularized by Lindsay's books and Graham's movies. That interest would continue in FM circles, as will be addressed further in the next section of this chapter, which explores further the merger with the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

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[632] Marston, 298.

What has become clear in this section is that the primary founder of the Free Methodist Church, B.T. Roberts, clearly held a postmillennial eschatological position, which was common for his time. During the late nineteenth century, the optimism of this period waned and the much more pessimistic premillennial eschatology grew. During this same period, John Nelson Darby's dispensationalism also increased in popularity, especially amongst conservative and fundamentalist Christians. As has been demonstrated, it is quite clear that Free Methodists were drawn to premillennialism. However, though monographs were written in favor of a premillennial position, and though there was a steady stream of resolutions to general conference encouraging the adoption of said position, the FMC never officially embraced a premillennial eschatology. This is in spite of the attempted merger with the Wesleyans, who did officially adopt premillennial theology. There is also no evidence that Free Methodists entertained the dispensational position with which premillennialism was so often paired in fundamentalist circles. While it is clear that fundamentalism impacted the way Free Methodists viewed Scripture, it is also clear that the fundamentalist position of dispensational premillennialism did not officially make significant inroads in the FMC, as we shall see in the following case study.

Merger and Eschatology: A Case Study

It is integral to this thesis to continue to reflect on the distinct theological developments as they are juxtaposed between the Wesleyan Methodist Connection (Church) and the Free Methodist Church. The Wesleyans predated the Free Methodists by a mere seventeen years. Both splintered from the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) with slavery and abuse of church governance being the primary (but not sole) issues for the two

churches. The Wesleyan Methodists (WMC) and the Free Methodists both largely retained the Articles of Religion from the MEC at the time of their founding.[633] Neither church became embroiled in the fundamentalist crisis of the early twentieth century, though both continued to hold conservative positions on theological issues. However, the fundamentalist movement did have an impact on both churches.[634] Don Dayton goes as far as to suggest that the WMC was 'deeply impacted' by fundamentalism.[635]

It is interesting that those expelled Methodists who founded the FMC did not choose to immediately join with the Wesleyans.[636] It was not until the 1903 Wesleyan General Conference that merger was first raised. Free Methodist bishop, Wilson B. Hogue, was a fraternal delegate to the conference and in his address to the convention suggested that the two denominations should consider merging. There was serious discussion by both churches, but no immediate action was taken, and though discussions continued, they were put aside for a time in 1919.[637] Merger talks picked up again in 1943 and became more serious, including the publication of a joint hymnal, *Hymns of the Living Faith* (1951), and an agreed upon *Book of Discipline*. However, once again these talks came to naught, and by 1955 the merger was put aside.[638] After an extended courtship, the Pilgrim Holiness Church

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[633] Both churches did make changes in the Articles both at the time they founded their churches as well as at different points in their historical and theological development.
[634] Black and Drury argue that Wesleyans were not fundamentalists because they did not follow the fundamentalist pattern of isolationism, and instead embraced the rising neo-evangelicalism that included the National Association of Evangelicals (1948) and the ecumenical ministry and attitude of Billy Graham. Robert Black and Keith Drury, *The Story of the Wesleyan Church.* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2012 (2018)), 170-171.
[635] Donald W. Dayton, "Yet Another Layer of the Onion: Or Opening the Ecumenical Door to Let the Riffraff in," *The Ecumenical Review* 40:1 (Jan. 1988), 88.
[636] It is possible that the reason the expelled future FM's did not join the WMC is because the Wesleyans had just endured a 'catastrophic' merger attempt with the Methodist Protestant Church in 1860 that ended with the loss of one of their colleges as well as many members. See Black and Drury, 136-137.
[637] Black and Drury, 116, 136.
[638] Black and Drury, 174. The authors note that the WMC decisively voted down the merger.

and the Wesleyan Methodist Church merged in 1968, forming The Wesleyan Church. Most people expected the newly formed Wesleyan Church to merge with the Free Methodists. This included the flagship evangelical publication, *Christianity Today*, which reported,

> Besides creating a new church with a membership of 122,000 … delegates moved far beyond committee recommendations. They resoundingly adopted a floor proposal for preparation of a basis of merger with the Free Methodist Church – if possible, before next summer's Free Methodist conference. Such a merged church would have a constituency approaching half a million.
>
> If there was doubt about how widespread merger sentiment was, Free Methodist bishop Myron Boyd dispelled it when he spoke to six thousand of the new Wesleyans on Sunday. 'I'm thrilled,' he said. 'Now I've got to get our people on the move so we'll be ready for you.'[639]

The two churches were unable to consummate a merger by the summer of 1968, but the expectation among both bodies was that merger was imminent. As we have seen, merger talks with the Wesleyans leading up to 1974 clearly affected the Article of Religion on Scripture for Free Methodists. This appears to have been the case concerning eschatology as well, as Free Methodists made major changes to their Article(s) on Last Things in 1974. There was clearly some interest within the FMC constituency for changing the Article, and the proposed merger seems to have been a catalyst for those who sought the change.

At the founding of the FMC in 1860, the original Article of Religion concerning eschatology was Article XIV, entitled "Future Reward and Punishment." It reads:

> God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ according to the Gospel. The righteous shall have in heaven an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched.[640]

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[639] James L. Huffman, "The Wesleyan Church" in *Christianity Today* 12:21 (July 19, 1968), 52.
[640] *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Free Methodist Church*. (Buffalo, NY: B.T. Roberts, 1860), 23.

This remained the official statement of the FMC in every Book of Discipline from 1860 until 1969.

In 1969, paper 271 was presented by Royal Nelson and the California Conference. The intent was to change the FMC's Article of religion concerning eschatology. Their resolution reads,

> There are at least two major considerations that argue for a statement by the General Conference of the Free Methodist Church on the doctrine of the premillennial coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
>
> First, the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments explicitly set forth the teaching that the appearance of Christ will be sudden, unexpected, and at a time of moral declension and spiritual apostasy. With one accord, the apostolic writers and Jesus Himself teach that the Lord's return will be literal, visible and immanent and that Christians should be aware of the signs of the times.
>
> Second, from my observation, an overwhelming number of ministers and laymen alike believe that the 'coming of the Lord draweth near,' accepting the inspired declaration: 'unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.'
>
> For these and other reasons we strongly believe that the conference should adopt a plank declaring 'It is the sense of this conference that the Free Methodist Church go on record as accepting the premillennial view of Christ's Second Advent.'
>
> Moreover, it is imperative, in the interest of this so vital truth, that the columns of The Free Methodist, the organ of the denomination, be opened to articles by responsible contributors on this wholly Scriptural theme.[641]

There are several important things to note from this proposed change to Article XIV. The first is that the authors/ supporters of the document specifically ask for a statement clearly supporting a premillennial position. Second, they ask that the one denominational magazine, *The Free Methodist*, be used to disseminate this "vital truth." Third, in paragraphs two and five, they assume and posit that this is the clear teaching of Scripture, calling it a "wholly Scriptural theme."

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[641] Conference GuideBook of the 1969 General Conference of the Free Methodist Church, p.216-217.

Finally, and possibly most interesting for this discussion, is paragraph three. Here, the author(s) argues that it is their observation that "an overwhelming number of ministers and laymen alike" share their positions. There are a couple of things that should be considered here. First, though they are arguing for a specific premillennial position for the church, they are not arguing for dispensationalism. It must be noted that while dispensationalists were very often premillennialists, one could hold to a premillennial position without being a dispensationalist. However, note that the pessimism of the premillennial theology does go hand in hand with fundamentalism's frustration and anxiety concerning the modernist crisis. Second, we should ask how the authors of this paper know that this overwhelming number of people hold these views. The best we might be able to say is that it is unlikely the authors would have included this in their argument (which was passed/ supported by the California Conference) if they didn't really think that this would have been an effective argument. In other words, they must have thought that other FM ministers would have seen this as a valid argument, or they must have felt like these other FM ministers perhaps held this position themselves.

The General Conference rejected the proposal by a greater than two-thirds vote,[642] but five years later, Nelson and the California Conference again made an attempt to bring change. This time, they chided the Free Methodist Church for neglecting to teach the doctrine of premillennialism through the denominational magazines, the *Free Methodist* and its successor *Light and Life,* saying,

> Whereas, the hallowed doctrine, in the Christian faith, of the Second Coming of Christ – more than 1800 Scriptural references in the Old Testament, and over 300 in the New Testament – is basic, being set forth and stressed by the

[642] Minutes of the 10th sitting of the General Conference of the Free Methodist Church – June 20th, 1969, p.311.

> apostles and by our Lord Jesus Christ and accepted as a cardinal article of faith by all evangelical churches,
>
> And whereas, the Free Methodist and now Light and Life Magazine, accepted as the voice of the denomination, has been remiss in setting forth this truth in its columns for many years now,
>
> Therefore, be it resolved, that the editor or editors of our church publication be enjoined by this General Conference to request that the theme of our Lord's return, so shamefully neglected, appear again and again in the columns of our very attractive denominational paper, 'so much the more as we see the day approaching' and taking to heart the inspired Word, 'unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.'[643]

This was also rejected by the General Conference, again by the two-thirds vote.[644] However, the Article of Religion on Eschatology was rewritten in 1974. This is no doubt in part because of the impending merge with the Wesleyan Church, and it is important to take some time to reflect here on the development of Wesleyan thought on eschatology to see how it may have impacted the change made by the FMC in 1974. In 1843, when the Wesleyan Methodists broke away from the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), the MEC had no article of religion concerning eschatology. The only mention of the end times comes in Article III "Of the Resurrection of Christ," which notes that after Jesus' work on earth was complete and he had risen from the dead, "he ascended into heaven and there sitteth until he shall return to judge all men at the last day."[645]

The Wesleyans retained Article III in their inaugural Book of Discipline. They also chose to add two Articles on eschatology. Article XVIII *Of The Resurrection of the Dead* reads, "There will be a general resurrection of the dead, both for the just and the unjust, at

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[643] Conference Guide Book of the 1974 General Conference of the Free Methodist Church, p.210. Also, note that The Free Methodist was renamed Light and Life in 1970.

[644] Official Minutes of the Fifth Seating of General Conference of the Free Methodist Church, June 28, 1974, p. 376.

[645] *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. (Cincinnati: Published by J.F. Wright and L. Swormstedt, 1941), 9. Note that Article XIV *Of Purgatory* was strictly a condemnation of the 'Romish doctrine concerning purgatory.", 14.

which time the souls and bodies of men will be reunited to receive together a just retribution for the deeds done in the body and in this life." Article XIX *Of the General Judgment* asserts, "There will be a general judgment at the end of the world, when God will judge all men by Jesus Christ, and receive the righteous into his heavenly kingdom, where they shall be forever secure and happy; and adjudge the wicked to everlasting punishment suited to the demerit of their sins."[646] The Wesleyan Methodist Connection (Church) was founded in Utica, NY in 1843. Though the issues that spurred their secession from the MEC were largely opposition to slavery and ecclesiastical polity,[647] the secession occurred at the height of the fervor caused by William Miller's prediction of the return of Christ sometime between March of 1843 and March of 1844. Miller lived in Low Hampton, NY, which was less than 150 miles from Utica.

In 1854, the Wesleyans added an Article concerning Sanctification, which changed the numbering of the Articles concerning Eschatology to XIX and XX.[648] In 1880, an Article was added on Regeneration, which changed the numbering on the Eschatology Articles to XX and XXI.[649] The 1904 Wesleyan Book of Discipline held no changes in Articles XX and XXI. However, it was mandated at the 1903 General Conference that Appendix A: The Second Coming of Christ be added to the discipline. Though it was in an appendix to the Articles, it was numbered XXII. This statement did not appear until 1915 and included a

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[646] *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America.* (Boston: Published by O. Scott, 1843), 19-20.
[647] Ira Ford McLeister, *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of America.* Revised edition by Roy Stephen Nicholson. (Marion, IN: The Wesley Press, 1959 (1934)), 28.
[648] *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America.* (Syracuse: Published by L.C. Matlack, 1854), 17.
[649] *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America.* (Syracuse: Published by D. S. Kinney, 1880), 21.

footnote that it had been omitted from the 1904, 1907 and 1911 editions of the *Discipline* 'by some oversite.' The statement reads:

> Appendix A.
> The Second Coming of Christ
> Whereas, the minds of a large number of devout and godly persons are being directed to the doctrine of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only rightful sovereign in the world; and,
> Whereas, this good hope in proving a powerful inspiration to holy living and godly effort for the evangelism of this world; therefor,
> Resolved, that we, the delegates of the annual conferences of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection (or Church) of America, in General Conference assembled in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the year of our Lord 1903, do hereby affirm and declare that we do not consider any of the articles of faith of the said Connection of churches, or any of the standards of doctrine to exclude or discourage a belief in the premillennial doctrine of the second coming of the Lord, but that every member of the church is free to interpret the Bible on this question as he may be inclined and to freely teach the same.
> Resolved, that the committee to edit the Discipline be instructed to place this resolution with the preambles in the Discipline as Appendix A.[650]

Note that this statement embraces premillennial theology, without adhering to dispensationalism. It also provides freedom of interpretation for those who do not embrace a premillennial position. What is interesting to consider is the question of why the Wesleyans felt the need to publicly make a statement at this time. As we have already observed, the premillennial position had been growing ever more popular in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In 1919, a second appendix, Appendix B, was added to the Wesleyan Discipline with a noted purpose of "reaffirm(ing) our faith and adherence to those doctrines that have been held as fundamental."[651] This set of ten statements aligns very closely with the 5 'essential

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[650] *Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection (or Church) of America.* (Syracuse, NY: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing Association, 1915), 238.
[651] *Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection (or Church) of America*. (Syracuse, NY: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing House, 1919), 22.

doctrines' propounded by the Presbyterian General Assembly only five years previous, which were: 1. The inerrancy of Scripture, 2. The Virgin Birth of Christ, 3. The Substitutionary Atonement of Christ, 4. The Bodily Resurrection of Christ, and 5. The authenticity of the miracles attested to in the Scriptures.[652]

The ten points of Appendix B were:

1. The inerrancy of Scripture
2. The virgin Birth and deity of Christ
3. The Substitutionary (vicarious) Atonement of Christ
4. The bodily resurrection of Christ
5. The Ascension of Christ
6. The Second Coming (in like manner as he went away)
7. Creation as an act of God
8. The Fall
9. Justification by faith
10. Entire Sanctification by presenting oneself on the alter as a living Sacrifice.

Note that the first four points of Appendix B completely mirror the first four of the five 'essential doctrines' of the Presbyterian General Assembly, which as Marsden reminds us, became the 'five points of fundamentalism,' with premillennialism replacing the authenticity of miracles.[653]

In 1939, the WMC made significant changes in their Articles of Religion concerning eschatology. They added a statement entitled The Second Coming of Christ and also bolstered their two previous statements concerning eschatology. The Second Coming of Christ article became number XX and the others were changed accordingly. The statement reads:

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[652] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture.* Oxford: OUP, 2006, 117.
[653] Ibid, 117. See also Sandeen, xiv. Sandeen reminds us that while the five points of the Presbyterian General Assembly did influence the Fundamentalist Movement, most fundamentalists were not stuck on five points. It was Stewart Cole's early history of fundamentalism that mistakenly credited the five points to leaders of the Niagara Bible Conferences in 1895.

> The Doctrine of the second coming of Christ is a very precious truth, and this good hope is a powerful inspiration to holy living and godly effort for the evangelization of the world. We believe the Scriptures teach the coming of Christ to be a bodily return to the earth and that he will cause the fulfillment of all prophecies made concerning His final and complete triumph over all evil. Faith in the imminence of Christ's return is a rational and inspiring hope to the people of God.[654]

Note also that as merger between the FMC and WMC was considered in the 1950's, the proposed joint 1954 *Book of Discipline* compromised on the issue, but retained much of the Wesleyan flavor. The proposed statements were:

> V. Of the Second Coming of Christ
>
> The Scriptures teach the second coming of Christ to be a bodily return to earth, and that He will cause the fulfillment of all prophecies concerning His final and complete triumph over all evil. Differences in millennial interpretation within this confession shall not violate the fellowship of the church.
> The doctrine of the second coming of Christ is a precious truth and a strong incentive to godly living and holy zeal for the evangelization of the world.
>
> W. Of the Resurrection of the Dead
>
> The Scriptures plainly teach the resurrection of the dead; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact of history, a miracle of supreme importance, and a pledge of our own resurrection which will be the reuniting of spirit and body for eternity.
>
> X. Of Judgment and Future Rewards and Punishment
>
> The Scriptures reveal God as the judge of all mankind, and the acts of His judgment to be based on His omniscience and eternal justice. His administration of judgment will culminate before His throne of great majesty and power, where records will be examined and final rewards and punishments will be administered.[655]

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[654] *Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection (or Church) of America*. (Syracuse, NY: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing House, 1939), 20.
[655] Proposed Discipline for the United Wesleyan Methodist Church, 11. This document was never published, but was circulated by mimeograph to members of conference for both churches.

Notice the important compromise statement that "differences in millennial interpretation shall not violate the fellowship of the church." However, when merger failed, the FMC chose not to adopt the Articles from the proposed joint *Discipline* of 1954. While there was no proposed *Discipline* during the apex of merger talks in the late 1960's and early 1970's, Free Methodists did propose and make changes to their own articles of religion.

As was the case with their statement of Scripture, in 1974 Free Methodists approved a change in their official statement on eschatology. Article XIV, which had previously been the short statement on eschatology quoted above, was replaced with a statement on the restoration of a Christian who has lapsed. Eschatology went from one to five statements (XVIII – XXII), covering a wide array of aspects concerning the end of time. To understand the significance of this change, it is necessary to look at each of the statements.

> **Last Things**
> **The Kingdom of God**
> ¶126 We believe that the kingdom of God is a prominent Bible theme providing Christians with both their tasks and hope. Jesus announced its presence. The kingdom is realized now as God's reign is established in the hearts and lives of believers.
> The church, by its prayers, example and proclamation of the gospel, is the appointed and appropriate instrument of God in building His kingdom.
> But the kingdom is also future and is related to the return of Christ when judgment will fall upon the present order. The enemies of Christ will be subdued; the reign of God will be established; a total cosmic renewal which is both material and moral shall occur; and the hope of the redeemed will be fully realized.
> **The Return of Christ**
> ¶127 The return of Christ is certain and may occur at any moment, although it is not given us to know the hour. At His return He will fulfill all prophecies concerning His final triumph over all evil. The believer's response is joyous expectation, watchfulness, readiness and diligence.
> **Resurrection**
> ¶128 There will be a bodily resurrection from the dead of both the just and the unjust, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. The resurrected body will be a spiritual body, but the person will be whole and identifiable. The

> Resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of resurrection unto life to those who are in Him.
> **Judgment**
> ¶129 God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness in accordance with the gospel and our deeds in this life.
> **Final Destiny**
> ¶130 Our eternal destiny is determined by God's grace and our response, not by arbitrary decrees of God. For those who trust Him and obediently follow Jesus as Savior and Lord, there is a heaven of eternal glory and the blessedness of Christ's presence. But for the finally impenitent there is a hell of eternal suffering and of separation from God. [656]

Though there is nothing here concerning dispensationalism, one should note the emphasis on Christ's imminent return and the need for readiness and anticipation in the statement on the return of Christ. Even with these changes and even though merger failed there were members of the FMC who continued to press for further change. Many Americans were intensely interested in eschatological concerns in the 1970's. Premillennial dispensationalism was further popularized by the 1972 movie, "A Thief in the Night," which was accompanied by Larry Norman's hit song, "I Wish We'd All Been Ready." Hal Lindsey wrote a popular series of eschatological thrillers, beginning with *The Late, Great Planet Earth* in 1970. Premillennial dispensational theology continued to gain popularity in the 1980's and 1990's with the best-selling *Left Behind* novels, which spawned a series of movies and children's books. With the advent of radio, television, and the internet, the ability to access disparate theological materials is amazing, even while the ability to discern the quality of these has seemingly diminished. Thus, it should not be surprising to find a 1976 article in the FMC's sole periodical speculating on the return of Christ.[657]

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[656] *Free Methodist Book of Discipline*, (Winona Lake, IN: The Free Methodist Publishing House, 1974), 19-20. Note that there has only been a slight change of wording that has taken place between 1974 and 2015.
[657] E. Walter Helsel, "When is Jesus Coming Back" Light and Life (Nov. 9, 1976), 6.

In 1985, the California Conference once again sought to change the statement on eschatology. This time, they were more focused on tailoring the changes made in 1974 to fit with their theological concerns. The following was their proposition:

> "Whereas we have always believed in the return of Christ and have reflected that belief in our Articles of Religion, and
>
> Whereas the 1974 and 1979 Articles of Religion contain a section on the return of Christ (Par 127, Article XIX) that had never previously appeared in a Free Methodist Discipline, and
>
> Whereas the current Articles of Religion never mention the rapture or the controversial issue of when the rapture will take place in relationship to the great tribulation, and
>
> Whereas the words (Par. 127, Article XIX) 'and may occur at any moment' in reference to the return of Christ, are not substantiated by any Scripture given in the apparatus following the Articles of Religion, and
>
> Whereas the word, 'soon' as found in Revelation 22 obviously cannot be equated with immediacy, and
>
> Whereas the current clause under question reflects a theological prejudice in favor of pre-tribulation rapture viewpoint that reflects some contemporary ideas and not historic Methodist understanding, and
>
> Whereas the Scripture teaches very clearly that although He is coming soon and the Christian should be waiting His return, the Anti-Christ must be revealed before His coming, which for many, places the rapture in the mid-post-tribulation position, and
>
> Whereas the Free Methodist pastors and laymen will hold differing views concerning this issue and should not be obligated to believe something that has never been a part of the historic Methodist movement prior to 1974,
>
> Therefore be it resolved that
>
> The words of Par. 127 in the Discipline 'and may occur at any moment' be stricken and that the first sentence of the paragraph read as follows: 'We believe the return of Christ is certain and will occur soon.'[658]

The General Conference referred the document to the Study Commission on Doctrine (SCOD) for further study.[659] The report clearly indicated a strong premillennial understanding and includes Darby's rapture theology, but it still does not support a

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[658] Paper 373 under the Resolutions tab in the 1985 Free Methodist Church General Conference Guide Book, p. 62.

[659] *Official Minutes of the Fourth Sitting of the 1985 General Conference of the Free Methodist Church*, July 5-6, p. 379-80.

dispensational position.[660] They also note in the paper that Article XIX on The Return of Christ was a new edition to the *Discipline*, but they are concerned that it did not go far enough. This is an interesting point as it seems clear that the change to Article XIV in 1974 was made because of the merger talks. Since 1974, there have been no changes to the statements on eschatology, in spite of the resolutions that were brought to General Conferences in the 1960's and 1970's.

In 1989, the Study Commission on Doctrine (SCOD) of the Free Methodist Church presented its report to the General Conference of the FMC. Among other things, SCOD included a statement entitled, "The Return of Christ." The statement came in response to paper 373 (see footnote),[661] which was presented to the 1985 General Conference. The

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[660] Paper number 373, p.62 in Resolutions
WHEREAS we have always believed in the return of Christ and have reflected that belief in our Articles of Religion, and
WHERAS the 1974 and 1979 Articles of Religion contain a section on the Return of Christ (Par 127, Article XIX) that had never previously appeared in a Free Methodist DISCIPLINE, and
WHEREAS the current Articles of Religion never mention the rapture or the controversial issue of when the rapture will take place in relationship to the great tribulation, and
WHEREAS the words (Par. 127, Article XIX) "and may occur at any moment" in reference to the return of Christ, are not substantiated by any Scripture given in the apparatus fllowing (sic) the Articles of Religion, and
WHEREAS the word, "soon," as found in Revelation 22 obviously cannot be equated with immediacy, and
WHEREAS the current clause under question reflects a theological prejudice in favor of pre-tribulation rapture viewpoint that reflects some contemporary ideas and not historic Methodist understanding, and
WHEREAS the Scripture teaches very clearly that although He is coming soon and the Christian should be waiting for His return, the Anti-Christ must be revealed before His coming, which for many, places the rapture in the mid- to post-tribulation position, and
WHEREAS the Free Methodist pastors and laymen will hold differing views concerning this issue and should not be obligated to believe something that has never been a part of the historic Wesleyan movement prior to 1974,
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT
The words of Par. 127 in the DISCIPLINE "and may occur at any moment" be stricken and that the first sentence of the paragraph read as follows: "We believe the return of Christ is certain and will occur soon."
[661] Paper number 373, p.62 in "Resolutions"
WHEREAS we have always believed in the return of Christ and have reflected that belief in our Articles of Religion, and
WHERAS the 1974 and 1979 Articles of Religion contain a section on the Return of Christ (Par 127, Article XIX) that had never previously appeared in a Free Methodist DISCIPLINE, and
WHEREAS the current Articles of Religion never mention the rapture or the controversial issue of when the rapture will take place in relationship to the great tribulation, and

debate raised by paper 373 centered around paragraph 127 in the *Book of Discipline* and the Free Methodist position on eschatology. The 1989 SCOD report recommended the FMC make no additional changes to this statement (excepting some grammatical edits).[662]

This section has focused on the case of the potential merger between the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Free Methodist Church. Here we have considered how another doctrine that is of import for fundamentalists, premillennial dispensational theology, was received by these two holiness churches that come from such similar beginnings. I have demonstrated here that as with inerrancy, the WMC embraced a fundamentalist position on eschatology. The WMC has revealed, through her actions and decisions, attitudes that could also be considered fundamentalist. The FMC also received these ideas and considered them, while finally adopting conservative, though not fundamentalist, evangelical positions.

WHEREAS the words (Par. 127, Article XIX) "and may occur at any moment" in reference to the return of Christ, are not substantiated by any Scripture given in the apparatus fllowing (sic) the Articles of Religion, and
WHEREAS the word, "soon," as found in Revelation 22 obviously cannot be equated with immediacy, and
WHEREAS the current clause under question reflects a theological prejudice in favor of pre-tribulation rapture viewpoint that reflects some contemporary ideas and not historic Methodist understanding, and
WHEREAS the Scripture teaches very clearly that although He is coming soon and the Christian should be waiting for His return, the Anti-Christ must be revealed before His coming, which for many, places the rapture in the mid- to post-tribulation position, and
WHEREAS the Free Methodist pastors and laymen will hold differing views concerning this issue and should not be obligated to believe something that has never been a part of the historic Wesleyan movement prior to 1974,
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT
The words of Par. 127 in the DISCIPLINE "and may occur at any moment" be stricken and that the first sentence of the paragraph read as follows: "We believe the return of Christ is certain and will occur soon."

[662] Minutes of the 31st General Conference of the Free Methodist Church of North America August 3-13, 1989, 150.

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Conclusion

This thesis has focused on the interplay between the Free Methodist Church and the doctrines and mindset of fundamentalism. Utilizing reception theory as a methodology, the thesis has examined the way in which Free Methodists have received and handled both the theological tenets as well as the mentality of fundamentalism. This relationship has been going on for over one-hundred and fifty years, and it is exemplified in a brief example captured in the denominational magazine, *Light and Life*. The Jan/Feb 2003 issue published an article by David McKenna, a leading Free Methodist thinker who has served as president of Asbury Theological Seminary and has written a monograph on the history of the FMC. In the article, "What's so Important About Being Wesleyan," McKenna reminded readers of the importance of the quadrilateral as a methodological tool for interpreting Scripture.[663] In a letter to the editor that was published in that year's May/June edition of *Light and Life*, reader Marlin Foster reacted to McKenna's article. The letter typifies the issues that this thesis has been addressing. Foster wrote:

> May I say that I disagree with David McKenna's statement, 'Those who claim that they need nothing but Scripture as the basis for their real faith tend toward a fundamentalism that saps the vitality out of our faith and pushes our reaches towards fanaticism.' Doesn't that contradict what he wrote in the fourth paragraph? 'Scripture is the primary source of authority in Wesleyan theology. John Wesley was a man of one book.' I personally prefer to fill my mind with the Word of God rather than the word (theology) of man. Consequently, I would rather be a Christian than a Wesleyan.[664]

There has been a tension between the theological conservatism of Free Methodists and their temptation to turn to fundamentalism, which can realistically be expected of any

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[663] David L. McKenna, "What's So Important About Being Wesleyan," *Light and Life,* Jan/ Feb 2003, 14-16.
[664] Marlin Foster, "Letter to the Editor," *Light and Life,* May/June 2003, 5.

church seeking to maintain a conservative Biblical orthodoxy. As mentioned in the opening chapter, calling a group evangelical or fundamentalist largely meant the same thing through the first quarter of the twentieth century. However, approximately twenty years after the Scopes trial, two ways of moving forward as conservative evangelicals emerged. The first was composed of those who were willing to work with other Christians and consider new ways forward which would allow them to focus on the ministry of evangelism. Scholars from this movement sought to reengage with the culture and the challenges of Christian thought. This group called themselves neo-evangelicals, and churches which aligned within this subculture became recognized as evangelical. Their flagship magazine was *Christianity Today* and their primary, but not sole, spokesperson was Billy Graham. The second group that emerged chose to remain separate and chose not to work with other Christians. Churches from this group actively opposed modernism and have held onto the name fundamentalist.[665]

Based on the evidence raised in this study, I would suggest that Free Methodists have a very mixed track record when it comes to fundamentalism. As has been demonstrated, characteristics of its founding certainly fall well within the parameters defined by scholars of the fundamentalist movement, even if the FMC was birthed around a quarter century before the real rise of said movement in America. Like many Christians from differing traditions, Free Methodists have shared many beliefs that have been defined as fundamentalist but are clearly not limited to fundamentalism, such as the virgin birth

[665] Nancy T. Ammerman, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism" pp. 1-63 in *Fundamentalisms Observed. Edited by* Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 4.

and the bodily resurrection of Christ. As has been demonstrated, they also have entertained the doctrines of inerrancy and premillennial dispensationalism and have focused many of their resources and energies on evangelism and church growth.

Moving forward, Free Methodists would be wise to continue to reflect on their Wesleyan roots and Wesley's theological methodology. They should continue to differentiate between the Word of God (Jesus) and the Word of God (Scripture), understanding the appropriate place and usage of Scripture, and appreciating that Christianity is about relationship with God. Reason, experience and tradition are all important elements in interpreting Scripture and assisting a person in their faith journey. Propositional truth has an important place in theological inquiry, but is not central for Free Methodists.

As was discussed in the introduction, Luke Timothy Johnson offers a constructive way for churches to move forward, reminding us that "(d)ecision making is a fundamental articulation of a group's life (and that) the process by which decision is reached tells of the nature of the group in a way that other forms of ritual sometimes miss."[666] Free Methodists need to continue to be keenly aware of how decisions are made, who is making the decisions, and what factors (or received materials) are influencing the decisions being made by the church.

Free Methodists must remember that their theology springs from their roots in the Church of England and that their theology has often been more pastoral and experiential than propositional. They understand the Bible as the truly revealed will of God to guide people to a right and restored relationship with God. People of the FMC also need to be

[666] Johnson, 15.

careful not to get sucked into the apocalyptic mindset of us vs. them that is so prevalent not just in Reformed theology, but also generally in American culture today.

What does this mean moving forward? Throughout history, the doctrines of the church have been fleshed out as the church has continued to encounter, or receive from, everchanging cultures. There should be no doctrine that is untouchable in terms of thought and reflection. The FMC has a group, The Study Commission on Doctrine (SCOD), that has served the church for generations in engaging with new ideas and new theological challenges. This has been a great vehicle for ensuring that the church is not fearfully reacting to culture, but is instead encouraging some of their best thinkers to wrestle with the issues of the day, while retaining Free Methodist heritage and methodology. Likewise, as raised earlier, Luke Timothy Johnson offers

During the difficult days following World War II, a thoughtful article was printed in *The Free Methodist* challenging the FMC to be aware that as times change, so must the church. The author noted that at the founding of the FMC, great care was taken to "set up a program which would make an appeal to the common people." But, he argues, we must look at the way society has changed and adjust to it. This includes "analyz(ing) the social, economic, educational and religious trends in the world and choos(ing) a type of program most suited for (this) day." He gives examples of changes that have been experienced in society. For example, at one time it was a mark of worldliness to drive in a 'buggy' with rubber tires. In 1948, he points out, no one sees driving with rubber tires as worldly. Likewise, it was uncommon a few decades previous to this for most persons to pursue higher educational opportunities. But, by 1948, the attitude of most of society had changed, and it had become much more uncommon for people not to go to college. Thus, he says,

"The point to keep in mind … is that while the standards of heart experience and spiritual life are clearly set forth in the Bible, their application to everyday living will change in accordance with changing social conditions."[667]

The relationship between the Free Methodist and Wesleyan Methodist Churches has been explored as a part of this thesis. As noted, these two churches were founded within twenty years of each other over similar issues (slavery/ perceived declension) within the parent Methodist Episcopal Church. Over a sixty-year period in the twentieth century, the two churches danced around the issue of union, coming close to consummating a merger on several occasions, but finally ending dreams of unification in 1976. The study has closely examined how both churches have responded to two key fundamentalist doctrines: the inerrancy of scripture and premillennial dispensational theology.

While this thesis particularly analyzed the historical interaction of the FMC with the doctrines and principles of fundamentalism, there are still many lacunae available for future studies to consider. The way that these are handled by future Free Methodists will be important, and hopefully this historical study will serve as a lens through which these may be undertaken. The ensuing paragraphs address some current issues that Free Methodists will need to continue to explore. Once again, we recognize that Free Methodists continue to 'receive' and sometimes embrace fundamentalist ideas. This is seen, for example, in the Facebook page formerly known as, "Free Methodist Talk Shop/ Anything Goes- The Good, Bad and Ugly," where we find that everything does not 'go.'[668] People who

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[667] C. Hoyt Watson, "Keeping the Fragrance of Our Church," *The Free Methodist.* 81:18 (May 4, 1948), 5.

[668] The name of the group was recently changed to "Evangelical Believers With a Wesleyan Doctrine in Common. The Good, The Bad," perhaps through pressure from the FMC. There note at the time of their name change that they are "tired of carrying a cross" for the FMC. https://www.facebook.com/groups/2356636674602078/2637967789802297/?comment_id=2661155900816819&notif_id=1595535875606320&notif_t=group_comment_mention&ref=notif

do not support the fundamentalist ideology of the founders are berated, mocked, and sometimes even evicted from the group. The battle for the soul of the Free Methodist Church is very real. This group is countered by another Facebook group, "The Justice Network of the Free Methodist Church." This is a closed group, in part to protect members from the scrutiny of fundamentalists within the FMC.

The following example is just one illustration of how Free Methodist and Wesleyan theology and methodology leads to very different theological conclusions today. In the fall of 2018, I had a brief Facebook interaction with Dr. Everett Piper, who was raised in the Free Methodist Church and educated in a Free Methodist university, but later became president of Oklahoma Wesleyan University. I felt that he and another commenter had denigrated Greenville University in their remarks about the school. Desiring to defend Greenville, I entered the conversation and wrote, "No school is perfect, but I think that we want to be careful of disparaging any of our schools." In response to me, he wrote,

> I agree that we don't want to be uncharitable to any school that is holding the line on the inerrancy of the word and the orthodoxy of our faith but my problem is that MANY CCCU schools are no longer doing so. One of the schools mentioned in this thread for example has featured speakers such as Rachel Held Evans who is clearly promoting an unbiblical agenda that should be refuted at every turn and not affirmed by "our schools."[669]

Notice that he points specifically to inerrancy in his response. In a later post, he returned to inerrancy and spoke specifically about his reasons for leaving the FMC and becoming a Wesleyan. He wrote,

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[669]https://www.facebook.com/search/posts/?q=bob%20munshaw&epa=FILTERS&filters=eyJycF9hdXRob3IiOiJ7XCJuYW1lXCI6XCJhdXRob3JcIixcImFyZ3NcIjpcIjYxMzE2NDUyOFwifSIsInJwX2Nocm9ub19zb3J0Ijoie1wibmFtZVwiOlwiY2hyb25vc29ydFwiLFwiYXJnc1wiOlwiXCJ9In0%3D. Accessed June 12, 2019. The school he is referring to was Greenville.

When I was being interviewed for the OKWU presidency 17 years ago, one of the concerns the board of trustees had of me was that I was not Wesleyan at the time. I came from a sister denomination. I was Free Methodist.

I remember being specifically asked about this during my candidacy. I also remember my candid response.

I told the OKWU board that I frankly felt more comfortable with certain aspects of Wesleyan doctrine than I did my own denomination's. Because many considered the differences between FM and Wesleyan to be minor and quite insignificant, I went on to explain.

A major distinction, I said, was in the difference in the definition of Scripture between the two denominations. Whereas The Wesleyan Church still held to "inerrancy" the Free Methodist Church had decided some time ago to step away from this descriptor and instead use terms like "uniquely inspired" and "authoritative" to define the Bible.

I concluded by saying that the difference between a church that subscribed to "inerrancy" in all 66 original manuscripts and one that argued for the mere "authority" of the Word is not insignificant in the least.

In fact, what a church believes of the Bible is perhaps the most significant thing about it, for your view of God's Word determines all else: It determines your view of morality. It determines your view of eternity. It determines your view of sexuality. It determines your view of sin. It determines your view sanctification. It determines your view of judgment. It determines your view of Jesus.

The Bible is the "measuring rod outside of those things being measured" (CS Lewis) and any church that chooses to minimize rather than maximize the fact that it is God's inerrant and immutable revelation to man, will quickly find itself to be a church that Christ himself warned of; one that is lukewarm; one that will be spit out by the very King we claim to serve and the very culture we seek to save. ….

I said then and I say now that a low view of scripture will lead not only to an irrelevant church but to one that is apostate and lost. Any church and any "Christian" that can't tell you sodomy is a sin is one that can't tell you Jesus is both our final judge and our only savior.

Words matter and the definition of The Word matters most, for it determines all other definitions. …

Inerrancy matters. Without it, we become our own measuring rod of what is moral and immoral, right and wrong, good and evil.[670]

[670] Everett Piper, https://www.facebook.com/everett.piper/posts/10157363647799529. Accessed May 19, 2019.

This example from Dr. Piper is instructive in disclosing a difference in the way that Wesleyans and Free Methodists continue to approach and interpret Scripture in an ever-changing cultural landscape.

All churches must engage with culture in their own day and age, and as Cardinal Newman reminds us, doctrine develops as the Gospel encounters culture. In 1845, Newman wrote *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. In this work, he argued that doctrine develops over time. Time, he argues, "is necessary for the full comprehension and perfection of great ideas; and that the highest and most wonderful truths, though communicated to the world once for all by inspired teachers, could not be comprehended all at once by the recipients, but, as being received and transmitted by minds not inspired and through media which are human, have required only the longer time and deeper thought for their elucidation."[671] This has been true throughout the history of the church. The question is how best to faithfully engage culture as the church. A fundamentalist response can offer confidence and assurance with the sense that there is one truth. But, as has been demonstrated, this assurance comes more from a modernist methodology. A response utilizing Wesley's theological methodology which is nicely modeled by Luke Timothy Johnson,[672] as we witnessed in the opening chapter,[673] is much more nuanced, and also leaves the potential for a variety of interpretations, which can be very uncomfortable for many people. This is why it is imperative to return to the point raised in the

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[671] John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian* Doctrine, (Notre Dame, In: UND Press, 1989), 29-30

[672] While Johnson is a Roman Catholic, it is worth noting that he has been faculty and emeritus faculty at Candler School of the Theology, a United Methodist University since 1992.

[673] As we saw in the first couple chapters, Wesley's methodology of utilizing traditions of the church, reason, and experience all through the lens of Scripture has been nicely explored through the work of both Albert Outler and Donald Thorsen.

introduction about the importance of prayerfully making decisions as a community. This has been the praxis of the FMC over the past 150 years. It may prove to be frustrating for some, as it takes time to discern together how God is leading the church. But, difficult though it may be, we must carefully work out our theology together as new issues continue to arise.

The Free Methodist Church has not been unwilling to revisit issues that have seemed closed for the church. For almost her entire history, the FMC forbade members from drinking alcohol. Free Methodists were deeply involved in the temperance movement, and for decades, *The Free Methodist* included a section of the paper focused on promoting the complete abstinence from alcohol.[674] It has only been within the last decade that the FMC has backed away from this stance. Some would argue that this demonstrates theological and moral drift within the church, but perhaps it exposes the reality that the temperance movement reflected a historical climate in which alcohol abuse was far more rampant than can be imagined today.

In its earliest days, the Free Methodist Church was on the cutting edge in terms of fighting for the abolition of slavery. Racism continues to be a part of American culture today. It is easy to claim with Paul that "there is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male or female, for you are all one in Christ,"[675] but what does that mean in terms of following Jesus today? The earliest Free Methodists were staunch abolitionists. How do Free Methodists fight racism today? The easiest thing to do is say that racism is wrong and do nothing. However, this accomplishes very little. The Black

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[674] For at least the first fifty years of the church, the *Earnest Christian* contained this section concerning temperance in every issue published.
[675] Galatians 3:28 (NRSV)

Lives Matter movement has been polarizing, and conservative evangelicals have been quick to dismiss it for a number of reasons. However, as Ben Wayman and Kent Dunnington have recently argued, perhaps "#BLM is alive in the world today because we have not been Christian enough."[676] If Christians (including Free Methodists) were willing to take social justice issues such as racism seriously, they argue, "one might expect them to develop even more specific and thorough proposals from the more adequate perspective that they purport to occupy."[677] As a conservative denomination, many Free Methodists may have legitimate concerns with the #BLM movement, but the Free Methodist Church must do better in engaging with racial inequities and injustice today. This would at least be consistent with the FMC's social engagement with the challenges of racism and slavery in the past.

Human sexuality is an enormously important issue for the church today because of the way in which it impacts all human lives. The easiest thing to say is that humans are either male or female and that the only Biblically sanctioned sexual union must be between married men and women. This is in fact how fundamentalists handle this issue. They can point to the requisite Biblical texts such as Romans 1, I Corinthians 6, or the Levitical texts. However, utilizing Wesley's methodology allows for other potential interpretations that take into consideration what has been learned about sexuality through scientific research and the testimony of experience.

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[676] Kent Dunnington and Ben Wayman, "How Christians should – and should not – respond to Black Lives Matters," *ABC Religion and Ethics*, June 3, 2019. https://www.abc.net.au/religion/how-should-christians-respond-to-black-lives-matter/11173976 Accessed June 26, 2019.
[677] Ibid.

Not only has the understanding of human sexuality advanced greatly since the writing of the Scriptures; the church must question exactly which issues from the Scriptures are cultural and which are intended to be eternal truths. Christians do this tacitly on seemingly minor issues. For example, Paul's admonitions to Timothy concerning the dress and adornment of women, and the lifting of men's hands in prayer during worship, are seen as merely cultural. Meanwhile, the admonition of Paul that immediately follows those verses concerning a woman's place of full submission in the church is considered by some to be binding for all times.[678]

It is integral for Free Methodists to realize that there is a way forward for the church which honors the Scriptures while seeking to recognize that God is not static, but is alive and at work in the world. They need to remember what kind of truth they are seeking; it is not propositional truth, but rather experiential truth and authentic relationship with God lived out in community.

The FMC must prayerfully seek God's will and direction while using the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to interpret Scripture. This was the approach taken by James H. Zahniser and Lisa Cagle in a recent article concerning homosexuality. They acknowledge something that I have been raising here, writing, "Perhaps because of the complexity and openness to multiple sources of data inherent in the quadrilateral, our analysis actually served to increase our level of uncertainty of the 'proper position' to take on homosexuality – on which 'side' we should take our stance. Uncertainty can be a boon, however, if it makes the believer more sensitive to and dependent upon the leading of the Holy Spirit, and humble

[678] I Timothy 2:8-15.

enough to learn from the experience of gay and lesbian persons."[679] It is also important to remember that Scripture never stands alone. It is always interpreted within a historical community of faith, which considers both experience and tradition.[680]

In many ways, fundamentalism offers an easy way out of difficult theological questions. By literally interpreting Scripture, a fundamentalist can proclaim, "The Bible says it! I believe it! That settles it!" In fact, literal interpretations of Scripture can be dangerous and wrong. For example, in the nineteenth century, those who wanted to keep slaves in bondage in the southern states were quick to cite Paul's admonition to slaves to obey their masters. Likewise, Hitler used the portrayal of the Jews in the Gospels (particularly John) as a partial justification for genocide. Thus, Mieka Bal rightly claims, "(t)he Bible, of all books, is the most dangerous one, the one endowed with the power to kill."[681] David Martin goes even further, asking, "(i)s religion, more particularly Christianity, more trouble than it's worth?"[682] There is no question that literal interpretations of the Bible have led to hatred, slavery, and even genocide,

There are dangers to the left and to the right theologically. Both sides take turns villainizing the other. That is why it is important for Free Methodists to stop and reflect on their Wesleyan and Anglican history and why an overview of those roots of FM theology was necessary in arguing this thesis. There is a reason that returning to the views of the Wesleys and the Church of England is important. Understanding our history and historic methods of theological inquiry puts us in a place where there is more leeway for an

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[679] James H. Zahniser and Lisa Cagle, "Homosexuality: Toward an Informed, Compassionate Response," *Christian Scholars Review* XXXVI:3 (Spring 2007), 325.
[680] Ibid, 328.
[681] Mieke Bal, *On Story Telling: Essays in Narratology*. (Polebridge Press, 1991), 19. Quoted in Gary A. Phillips and Dana Nolan Fewell, "Ethics, Bible, Reading As If," *Semeia* 77 (1997), 3.
[682] David Martin, *Does Christianity Cause War.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 6.

individual or church to wrestle with difficult theological issues utilizing tradition, reason and experience as interpretive lenses for Scripture.

Bishop Marston of the FMC remarks that "while always conservative in doctrine, the Free Methodist Church has never been characterized in any general sense by the temper of a belligerent fundamentalism."[683] This is not completely true, for as has been addressed in this thesis, there have been times when individuals and the church have embraced fundamentalist doctrines and have demonstrated fundamentalist belligerence. However, the rejection of inerrancy and biblical literalism, as well as the choice not to antagonistically fight for entrenched positions, will enhance the church's ability to engage with and interpret Scripture in a healthy and supportive environment, with honesty and integrity in an ever-changing cultural landscape.

The Free Methodist Church may purport to value the components of Wesley's theological methodology as essential hermeneutical lenses, but it is important to recognize, as Scott Jones reminds us, that how a person or group conceives of Scripture and how they use it do not always line up.[684] Most people find it easier to embrace interpretations that line up with their own theology – not recognizing that their opinions have been formed by culture, family and the church – than to rigorously and consistently follow a demanding methodology that can push them to question their own views. Generic modern evangelicalism has been rightly critiqued for offering a Gospel that is comfortable, and that often allows one to ignore the ethical entreaties of the Gospel which begin with the call to love God and neighbor. This is why it is so important for Free Methodists to look back at

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[683] Leslie Ray Marston, *From Age to Age: A Living Witness.* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1960). 298.
[684] Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1995),14.

their history and methodology, and to have these inform the church as it continues to engage culture in the future.

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