This report is intended to be a resource to help Fundamentalist Christians in studying and evaluating religious leaders and movements. It draws primarily upon materials housed in the Fundamentalism File in the J. S. Mack Library on the campus of Bob Jones University.

Although every effort has been made to provide an impartial study of the topic, this work will naturally reflect the interpretations and viewpoint of its author. This report should not be taken as representing an official statement of the position of Bob Jones University. The University’s theological position is well expressed by its creed.

The staff of the Fundamentalism File would welcome any questions or comments concerning the content of this report.
The Conservative Holiness Movement

The history of American Christianity is not the story of a single “Church of the United States.” Rather it is the weaving together of numerous other stories into one tapestry. The denominations of American history have historically been a major component in that story. The Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Catholics, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and numerous smaller groups have all contributed their strands to the warp and woof. Beyond the denominations are numerous other movements, many of them trans-denominational in character. The Holiness movement falls in this category, for although it has had its greatest impact on Methodism, the impact of this movement has been felt outside of Methodist circles.

Nathan Hatch has argued that in their retelling of the history of Christianity in America, historians have slighted Methodism more than a little, an omission that puzzles Hatch, considering the importance of that denomination in American history. The Holiness movement, as a subset of Methodism, shares in that neglect perhaps to an even greater extent as a smaller segment of an overlooked subject. Indeed, even when the Holiness movement is discussed apart from Methodist history, writers sometimes present it more as the forerunner to the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements of the twentieth century.

If the Holiness movement receives thin treatment from historians, then the thinnest of discussions must be the fate of the Conservative Holiness movement. Little recognized outside of Holiness circles, the Conservative Holiness movement has grown quietly, particularly since World War II. Scholarly note of the movement is limited mostly to work by participant-observer Wallace Thornton, who traced the movement in a journal article and his book Radical Righteousness: Personal Ethics and the Development of the Holiness Movement. Yet the movement does not deserve such neglect. The movement raises valid questions concerning the nature and application of personal standards of holiness. Furthermore, it provides a counterpoint to the assumptions that characterize the majority of the adherents to the modern Holiness movement about the history and nature of their movement. Also, the Conservative Holiness movement offers an unusual perspective concerning the nature of the Bible’s teaching about separation.

Early History of Holiness Movement

John Wesley’s Teaching

The roots of the Holiness movement lie with Methodism’s founder, John Wesley. Undoubtedly Wesley’s teachings concerning entire sanctification and Christian perfection are key to understanding the Holiness movement, but such an observation can lead to distortion. The movement embraces the whole of Wesleyan Methodist teaching while stressing especially the aspects of that teaching which its adherents believe other Methodists were (or are) neglecting. Entire sanctification, Christian perfection, and holiness provide the watchwords of the movement, but they do not constitute the whole of the movement’s beliefs.

John Wesley set down his teaching concerning perfection most fully in “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection” (1777), but the teaching is present in his other writings as well. In brief, Wesley held that by a special work of grace after salvation, the Holy Spirit would eliminate the root of original sin. This event is often called “entire sanctification” or “eradication.” As a result of this work of grace, a believer is able to live free of conscious sin. In this state of Christian perfection, a Christian may still grow in grace and maturity and is still subject to human weaknesses. Furthermore, the experience of entire sanctification is no guarantee that the believer may not later fall from grace. Nonetheless, a Christian can enjoy “perfect love” in which he, from pure motives, pursues after holiness without taint of sin.

Such is the central teaching of not only Wesley but also the Holiness movement. But, as mentioned before, the movement is about more than just the details of Wesleyan perfectionist teaching. It is also deeply concerned about how this teaching works out in practice. Thornton, for
example, notes Wesley’s strictures on entertainment and dress as being vital expressions of the application of entire sanctification to daily life. Taking Thornton’s perspective, one could say that, symbolically, John Wesley’s sermon “On Dress” could be just as representative of Holiness concerns as “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.”

Holiness Teaching Comes to America

Methodism came to America about the time of the American Revolution and holiness teaching arrived with it. Such teaching was, as John L. Peters has pointed, part of the Methodist message but received no special emphasis. In fact, Peters contends that “the 1820s and early 1830s may be characterized as a period when the doctrine of Christian perfection with an emphasis on entire sanctification was generally acknowledged to be one of the standards of American Methodism. There was little or no opposition at that point. If it was not actively opposed, however, it was definitely neglected.”

As Methodism grew to become America’s largest denomination by the time of the Civil War, some argued that segments of the church were ignoring holiness teaching. Many Methodists feared that growth brought with it a desire for social respectability. This desire led, critics said, to the diminishing or elimination of some teachings, and Christian perfection was among the casualties.

But the teaching had its champions. Chief of these was Phoebe Palmer. Beginning in the 1830s, she began to promote holiness teachings in the “Tuesday Meetings,” prayer meetings in her sister’s home in New York City. The ministers and leading laymen affected by these prayer meetings, as well as what developed into a career for Palmer as a lay evangelist, helped spread that teaching.

Both contemporary Methodists and later writers have noted how Palmer modified the Wesleyan teaching. In simplest terms, she contended that entire sanctification came when the Christian claimed it by faith. There is a subtle difference at work here between proclaiming what the Holy Spirit has done in sanctification (which is more as Wesley taught) and claiming that promise and holding to it until the blessing is given (Palmer’s view). Her modification influenced the development of Holiness teaching, although not all embraced it.

One should note that Palmer also influenced the development of another brand of Holiness teaching, what is called the “Keswick” view, named after the site of a conference in England where the teaching was propounded. Many involved in the formation of the Keswick approach, such as William E. Boardman, owed a debt to Palmer. The main difference is that Wesleyan Holiness stresses the eradication of the sin nature in entire sanctification whereas the Keswick version teaches that the Holy Spirit suppresses (rather than eliminates) the sin nature so that one can live a life of practical holiness. Keswick holiness teaching eventually proved more acceptable to groups of Reformed heritage (Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Baptist). The Wesleyan version dominated what is usually called the Holiness movement.

The Holiness Controversy

If one may distinguish between an emphasis on holiness teaching and a conscious Holiness movement, then the movement came into being after the Civil War. That era saw the emergence of real controversy over Holiness doctrine and practice. The advocates of Holiness teaching saw Methodism slipping into a complacent middle-class respectability, what Thornton calls embourgeoisement. They sought to turn the church from this course. Conflict resulted when a significant portion of Methodism refused to be turned.

The traditional date of the founding of the modern Holiness movement is 1867, the year of the organizing of the National Camp-meeting Association for the Promotion of Christian Holiness, eventually to become known as the National Holiness Association and even later as the Christian Holiness Partnership. The reference to camp meetings is significant. The frontier camp meeting had been, along with circuit riding, one of the chief methods of Methodist growth in the first half of the nineteenth century. Although the practice of camp meetings had never entirely died out, by the later 1800s large segments of American Methodism disdained the meetings as an obstacle to achieving religious respectability. The Holiness movement’s embrace of the camp meeting made a statement that the movement was
calling the Methodists back to the old ways despite the social “scandal.”

Yet there was also a practical side to the use of camp meetings. As a nondenominational movement (albeit primarily within the northern and southern branches of the Methodist Church), the Holiness movement needed a means to rally its supporters and spread its teachings without interfering with normal church life. The camp meetings gave the Holiness movement that means. Camp meetings, camp meeting associations, and other Holiness associations allowed the Holiness Christians to remain within their denominations while promoting their distinctive teachings. Wesleyan Holiness teaching even reached beyond Methodism, manifesting itself in Daniel Warner’s Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), the Salvation Army, the Brethren in Christ (of Mennonite origins), and among some groups in the Friends (Quakers).

Nevertheless, the Holiness crusade led to a battle within Methodism. Both branches of the Methodist Church but especially the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, endured conflict and controversy. The bulk of the Southern Methodist hierarchy, along with a large segment of the ministers and laity, opposed the movement. The 1890s saw “war” in which many leaders in the Methodist Church sought to curtail the influence of Holiness preachers. The Church clamped down particularly on the ministry of itinerant Holiness evangelists, requiring them to get ecclesiastical clearance and the permission of local Methodist pastors before the evangelists could hold meetings.10

This conflict created a divide in the Holiness movement, splitting it into the “stay-inners” and the “come-outers.” The first group is typified by H. C. Morrison. One of the strongest and most eloquent advocates of Holiness doctrine in the Southern Methodist Church, Morrison experienced constant opposition. The limits on Holiness evangelists in particular seemed directed at him. Yet he refused to leave the Southern Methodists and rode out the storm until quieter times came. Through his preaching and later his leadership of Asbury College and Theological Seminary in Kentucky, Morrison maintained an strong Holiness presence within the Methodist Church.11 Others despaired of winning over either the northern or southern church to Holiness doctrine. They advocated a withdrawal over principle.12 Some writers regard the withdrawal of Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1843 and the Free Methodist Church in 1860 as early expressions of the Holiness “come-out” mentality. The real separatist impetus, however, occurred as a result of the “war” of the late 1800s and early 1900s, when several groups left the Methodist Church—North but especially South—to form independent Holiness denominations. The most notable of these “come-out” groups were the Church of the Nazarene and the Pilgrim Holiness Church. It is primarily from the “come-out” side that the Conservative Holiness movement eventually emerged.

Rise of the Conservative Holiness Movement

In a sense, the essence of Conservative Holiness is an insistence on “old Holiness standards” in dress and entertainment. More specifically, however, it refers to a self-conscious segment of the Holiness movement that has taken form since World War II. The difference lies between simply a conservative stance against innovation and the consciousness that one belongs to a distinct Conservative Holiness movement. In other words, there is a conservative Holiness attitude and a Conservative Holiness movement, although the two obviously overlap. One must observe an irony in this situation too. The Holiness movement arose originally in response to a perceived shift in Methodism from traditional (and what were viewed as biblical) standards. The Conservative Holiness movement, in turn, arose in response to a perceived shift in the Holiness movement away from such standards.

Some expressions of this conservative Holiness attitude predated the emergence of the movement and later contributed to that movement. The Church of God (Holiness) was founded in 1883 in the middle of the “come-outism” crisis of Methodist Holiness. The group maintained its adherence to traditional standards in dress and entertainment through the years and naturally gravitated to Conservative Holiness circles later on. Some schools that serve the Conservative Holiness constituency, such as God’s Bible School in Cincinnati, likewise predate the emergence of the movement proper.
Other divisions foreshadowed the Conservative Holiness position on standards. Wallace Thornton notes the Emmanuel Association, which left the Pilgrim Holiness Church in 1937, and the Reformed Free Methodist Church, which left the Free Methodist Church in 1942. Both breaks resulted from protests against perceived laxity in the parent body and represented the tenor of the Conservative Holiness position. Clearly, by World War II, unrest was building within the “come-out” segment of the Holiness movement.

Although not himself sympathetic to the Conservative Holiness cause, Nazarene historian W. T. Purkiser has suggested that the emergence of television after World War II may have precipitated the movement. The suggestion has merit. Television—unlike the theater, motion pictures, the dance hall, and other forms of worldly entertainment shunned by Holiness Christians—intruded directly into the home. It therefore provided a direct challenge to Christian standards of purity, much as cable television and the Internet (with its access to pornography) would challenge Christians a few years later. It is little wonder, then, that television became one of the battlegrounds of the controversy.

**Glenn Griffith**

With any movement there are individuals who serve as pioneers, receiving notice for how they both blazed the way and set the tone for those who followed. One such leading figure was Glenn Griffith (1894-1976). J. Gordon Melton actually calls the entire Conservative Holiness movement the “Glenn Griffith Movement.” As Wallace Thornton notes, this claim is overstated. Nonetheless, Griffith was an important leader in the formation of the movement, and he clearly typifies its central concerns.

Converted in 1925, Griffith became an evangelist and superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene. He became disenchanted with what he viewed as a slack attitude toward worldliness and a growing spiritual coldness in the church. In 1955 Griffith returned his credentials to the denomination and, following a revival in Nampa, Idaho, issued a call for the formation of a new group: the Bible Missionary Union, later renamed the Bible Missionary Church.

At his separation, Griffith wrote a pamphlet titled *Nineteen Reasons Why I Left the Church of the Nazarene.* Griffith’s reasons represent the concerns of the Conservative Holiness churches toward the established Holiness denominations. He claimed he saw a cold, dead formalism in the Nazarene churches and a reluctance to preach the law as a prelude to offering the gospel. He charged that many in the Church of the Nazarene stressed loyalty to the church more than loyalty to God and that they favored a seminary-educated ministry over a self-educated ministry. Some charges resembled Fundamentalist positions against liberalism, such as Griffith’s complaint that the church was using the Revised Standard Version of the Bible in some denominational literature. Most of the specifics, however, dealt with the toleration of worldliness—of women wearing the wedding band and other jewelry, cutting their hair, and wearing slacks, for example. Griffith reaffirmed opposition to watching television, participating in Sunday sports, and holding church dinners and said that Church of the Nazarene scorned those who still preached such standards.

Griffith’s stay with the Bible Missionary Church proved brief. He came to believe that any Christian who was a party in a divorce could not remarry. When the Bible Missionary Church reaffirmed its stand that the innocent party could remarry, Griffith left. In 1959 he helped found the Wesleyan Holiness Association of Churches. The Bible Missionary Church remained one of the larger denominations in the Conservative Holiness movement. Griffith’s new group, although much smaller, likewise continued as a force in the movement.

**Interchurch Holiness Convention**

Despite Glenn Griffith’s symbolic significance, there were other persons and organizations at least as important to the Conservative Holiness movement. Some of these predated Griffith in his break from the Church of the Nazarene. One of the most important organizations—and perhaps the central organization of the Conservative Holiness movement—is the Interchurch Holiness Convention (IHC). As Thornton notes, the IHC “has united the conservative holiness people as no other instrument.”
The origin of the IHC lay in a meeting of two Holiness preachers at the Wesleyan Methodist Campground in Fairmont, Indiana, in 1951. H. Robb French and H. E. Schmul discussed the need for an interdenominational meeting to rally Holiness forces. Schmul then organized a series of meetings in Salem, Ohio, over the New Year’s holidays of 1951-52 with French and R. G. Flexon, foreign mission secretary of the Pilgrim Holiness Church, speaking. The success of the meetings sparked another effort in March 1952 at the Vine Street Wesleyan Methodist Church in Cincinnati. The crowds proved too large for the building, so the meeting was moved to the nearby campus of God’s Bible School. The convention then began to meet annually at GBS for fourteen years, before growing crowds forced it to meet elsewhere, first in Huntington, West Virginia, and from 1976 in Dayton, Ohio. In addition, the IHC sponsors smaller regional meetings.

The Interchurch Holiness Convention has consistently refused to become a new denomination, although it has offered encouragement to the various separatist movements discussed in the next section. Instead, it has served to rally and encourage Conservative Holiness denominations, churches, schools, and individuals. Edgar Bryan cites the parallel example of the camp meetings of the late nineteenth century. The IHC, like those meetings, promoted a cause more than a new denominational movement. Bryan, in fact, argues that the interdenominational stance of the IHC prevents “inbreeding” by exposing Holiness Christians to others outside their immediate circle. This interdenominational flavor is reflected in a popular chorus sung at IHC meetings:

I don’t care what church you belong to,
Just as long as for Calvary you stand.
Just as long as your heart beats with my heart,
You’re my brother, so give me your hand.

The Interchurch Holiness Convention is only one segment of the Conservative Holiness movement. Thornton notes, for example, that the Bible Missionary Church and the Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Connection, two of the largest Conservative Holiness denominations, “have minimal representation” at IHC meetings. Nonetheless, the IHC represents an important cross-section of the movement. It clearly embodies the movement’s “sweet, radical holiness” emphasis. Entire sanctification and traditional holiness strictures on dress and entertainment hold a prominent place in convention sermons. The convention takes a stance that is both countercultural and militant, rejecting and resisting contemporary fashions, whether secular or Christian. For instance, Leonard Sankey, General Secretary of the Interchurch Holiness Convention, says that the music at the IHC “cannot be ‘market-driven’” and rejects contemporary Christian music because of not only its musical qualities but also “the lifestyle of many of its performers.” An idea of the sweep of the IHC’s viewpoint, as well as the overall Conservative Holiness approach, is seen in Sankey’s summary of early IHC meetings:

While there was a common thread of preaching against the swelling divorce rates, the envisioned papal take-over of America, the relentless spread of communism, the in-rush of immodesty and jewelry into the churches of the day, and the growing conformity to the world, there were also voices raised exposing our own prayerlessness, joylessness and lack of clear victory. Television, the break-down of distinctives between the sexes, and the thirst for entertainment, were dealt with without mercy; but so also were topics such as critical attitudes, ungoverned speech and writing, and selective obedience to the commandments of the Lord.

Conservative Holiness Denominations

Despite its refusal to become the nucleus of a new church, the IHC was one force in fostering a new wave of “come-outism,” this time from the ranks of the Holiness denominations. Discontent with the erosion of traditional Holiness standards, among other issues, led finally to a break. Bryan writes, “Several of the movements in fellowship with the IHC are daughters or granddaughters of Methodism. … It is not so much that these movements have left the mother church, as it is that the mother churches have changed from what they previously believed to Scriptural positions.”

Standards were not the only issue driving the come-out movement. In a retrospect of the life of H. E. Schmul, Sankey says that not only concerns about worldliness but also fears of centralized government among Holiness denominations was a concern in the founding of the IHC. Such concerns were natural, particularly when hierarchies
did not prove sympathetic to the Conservative Holiness cause. The issue of centralization clearly emerges among the new groups starting in protest over the merger of Pilgrim Holiness Church and Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1968. Philip Brown identifies six bodies that left the Wesleyans and the Pilgrim Holiness Church over the merger: Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Connection (Original Allegheny Conference), Bible Methodist Connection, Tennessee Bible Methodists, the Pilgrim Holiness Church of New York, Pilgrim Holiness Church of the Midwest, and the Wesleyan Church.²⁶

In all, some 154 congregations and 4,252 people withdrew from the Pilgrim Holiness Church and the Wesleyan Methodist Church in protest over the merger.²⁷ Nor were these the only divisions in this period. In addition to the Bible Missionary Church, mentioned earlier, the Church of the Bible Covenant formed in 1967 in protest against trends in the Church of the Nazarene. This group grew to some ninety churches and two thousand members by the 1980s, but then broke apart within a few years in conflicts over Holiness standards.²⁸

Understanding these splits is made more difficult by sparse records and sometimes unsympathetic reporting. The official histories of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Pilgrim Holiness Church note only in passing, and with little sympathy, opposition to their merger.²⁹ The Wesleyan historians acknowledge the opposition of the Allegheny Conference, the Tennessee Conference, the Alabama Conference, and the Ohio Conference to the merger. In doing so, however, they omit the issues raised by the protestors and instead stress the lack of submission by those opposing the merger, emphasizing their alleged refusal to listen to church leadership.³⁰ In reality, the questions involved were not nearly so clear-cut.³¹

The formation of the Bible Methodist Connection of Churches illustrates the issues involved in the splits. Although it is not the largest of the groups that left in protest of the merger, the Bible Methodist Connection is perhaps typical, particularly since it represents the uniting of two conferences with slightly different motivations. Tensions had existed in the Wesleyan Methodist Church since 1950s, beginning with the failure of a proposed merger with the Free Methodist Church. Many in the Wesleyan Church opposed the episcopal polity (rule by bishops) of the Free Methodists. Other concerns from the 1950s centered on encroaching worldliness, especially the wearing of gold and watching television.

Part of the protest arose within the Ohio Conference. Here centralization was the key issue. Edsel Trouten, leader of the Ohio group said, “The primary issue was never standards [worldliness]; it was always government.”³² Noting the comment of McLeister and Nicholson that many of the protestors “had not been trained in Wesleyan Methodist principles and polity,” Brown points out that Trouten credited Chester Tulga’s *The Doctrine of the Church in These Times* in shaping his ecclesiology. “Thus it was Baptist fundamentalism,” observes Brown, “which provided the initial foundation for the polity of the man most instrumental in articulating the reasons for withdrawal.”³³

The other group involved in the formation of the Bible Methodist Connection, however, gave several reasons for its opposition. The Alabama Conference listed five points in objection: the wearing of wedding bands, watching television, allegations of worldliness in Central Wesleyan College (now Southern Wesleyan University), opposition to any connection with the National Council of Churches, and opposition to centralization of government.³⁴ In 1966 part of the Ohio Conference pulled out of the Wesleyan Church, and in 1967 the Alabama Conference also withdrew. The two joined in 1970 as the Bible Methodist Connection of Churches. A large portion of the Tennessee Conference also left, taking the name Bible Methodist Connection of Tennessee, but it did not join the Alabama and Ohio Conferences.

The “Constitution of the Bible Methodist Connection of Churches” expresses the concerns of the denomination in its opening “Declaration of Purpose”:

Recognizing from past histories of holiness bodies that a decline in emphasis upon personal holiness seems to coincide with the increase of emphasis upon organization, centralization of authority and the machinery of church life, the Bible Methodist Connection of Churches wishes to state that the
whole and sole cause and purpose of this connection of churches is to spread scriptural (second blessing) holiness over the lands, building up a holy and separated people for the first resurrection.\(^35\)

Even listing Conservative Holiness denominations does not necessarily give a clear indication of the size of the movement. Aside from residual sympathy within the older Holiness denominations, there are also independent Holiness congregations. Thornton cites an estimate by Marlin E. Hotle that there are some two thousand churches in the Conservative Holiness orbit.\(^36\)

**Other Conservative Holiness Agencies**

One should note that the Interchurch Holiness Convention and these denominations are far from the only means of promoting the Conservative Holiness cause. H. E. Schmul, for example, launched Schmul Publishing to reprint classic Holiness works and print new works defending the Conservative Holiness position.

Another important contributor to the Conservative Holiness testimony has been the schools adhering to the movement. Some of the denominations in Conservative Holiness circles have their own colleges, such as the Kansas City College and Bible School associated with the Church of God (Holiness). Other leading institutions are God’s Bible School and College in Cincinnati, Ohio; Hobe Sound Bible College in Hobe Sound, Florida; and Union Bible College in Westfield, Indiana. These and other schools both preserve and further the Conservative Holiness cause.

**Evaluating the Conservative Holiness Movement**

One cannot adequately evaluate a movement as complex as the Conservative Holiness movement in a few paragraphs. Two questions form the framework for the present discussion. First, what is the relationship today of the Conservative Holiness movement to the overall Holiness movement? Second, what is its relationship (if any) to Fundamentalism?

**Preserving the Holiness Movement**

The name “Conservative Holiness movement” is appropriate in that the movement seeks to conserve—or preserve—the traditional views of the Holiness movement. One sees this fact most evidently in the insistence on Holiness standards in dress and entertainment, standards which have become the hallmark of the Conservative Holiness movement. Moreover, the movement appears to be a preserver of other Holiness distinctives for which some in the mainstream movement no longer seem so zealous. For example, Conservative Holiness leaders remain staunch in their belief in entire sanctification: “We believe that holiness encompasses a second, definite work of grace, subsequent to regeneration, in which the believer is cleansed from inbred sin, and is empowered to live a life above sin.”\(^37\) By contrast, Kenneth Collins notes with concern that some among the intellectual leaders of the Holiness movement doubt or downplay entire sanctification.\(^38\)

Another manner in which the Conservative Holiness movement may be said to “preserve” the Holiness movement is in strongly distinguishing the Holiness movement from Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement (or “tongues movement,” as Conservative Holiness Christians often refer to both groups). Pentecostalism emerged from the Holiness movement. The earliest Pentecostal leaders, such as Charles Parham and William Seymour of the Azusa Street Revival, were originally Holiness preachers. The Pentecostal movement was, in a sense, taking the Holiness stress on spiritual gifts a step further. Pentecostals carried the idea of the “second blessing” and baptism of the Holy Spirit beyond eradication (which only some Pentecostals believed in) to a belief that speaking in tongues is the sign of the Spirit’s baptism. The popularity of Pentecostalism and, after the 1960s, its transdenominational offshoot, the Charismatic movement, confronted Holiness groups anew with this challenge.

Generally, the Holiness denominations have resisted the introduction of tongues speaking in their midst, although elements in their churches have sometimes agitated for the practice.\(^39\) The Conservative Holiness movement has distinctly drawn a line against the “tongues movement.” Leslie Wilcox warns of the tongues movement as an example of modern groups that do not “properly present the doctrine of holiness as it is taught in the Bible.”\(^40\) Edsel Trouten cautions against applause and hand clapping in worship
because, he asserts, these practices originated in Pentecostal circles and may prove a means of introducing Pentecostal theology into Holiness churches.\footnote{A good example is the difference is seen in views of divine healing. Pentecostals and Charismatics have popularized the idea that individuals possess a special gift that allows them to heal others directly. The Holiness view tends to be that healing comes as special work of God in answer to prayer but that is not the special province of a “gifted” believer.\textsuperscript{42}}

Still, in its efforts to preserve historic Holiness emphases, the Conservative Holiness movement struggles to preserve balance between tradition and change. The opposition to some modern forms of entertainment, notably television, can potentially lead to an opposition to technology. Leonard Sankey mentions how once a speaker at the Interchurch Holiness Convention used an overhead projector in his presentation. One minister, on walking in and seeing the projector, said, “That’s not for me,” and walked out again.\footnote{On the other hand, social change constantly confronts Conservative Holiness Christians with challenges to their standards and how to maintain them. The Church of God (Holiness) in 1999 removed a ban on owning televisions as a requirement for all delegates to its General Convention, and it adopted a resolution urging caution and charity over “the ownership or use of television, videos, movies, the internet, and such like.”\textsuperscript{44}}

Maintaining balance is ever a tricky matter.\footnote{“Fundamentalist Leaven”?—The Holiness movement predates Fundamentalism, and historians generally agree that Holiness teaching, at least of the Keswick variety, influenced Fundamentalism. They debate, however, how much Fundamentalism influenced the Holiness movement or whether the two movements ever identified with each other.\textsuperscript{47} Paul Bassett notes some such influence, although he characterizes it as “leaven” foreign to Wesleyan thought and theology. He argues that the Church of the Nazarene edged toward holding to biblical inerrancy only under the pressure of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy and that Holiness theologians rescued the movement from such tendencies.\textsuperscript{48}}

The Conservative Holiness Movement and Fundamentalism

For many people, any kind of strongly conservative, traditional form of religion is “fundamentalist,” but such a definition ignores two important factors. First, this definition does not give sufficient weight to the historical context that spawned and shaped Protestant Fundamentalism in twentieth-century America. Second, it does not take into account how religious adherents view themselves—either as Fundamentalists who embrace the label or other religious conservatives who shun it.

In terms of both historical context and self-identification, the Conservative Holiness movement reveals some links with Fundamentalism. For example, the following description of H. Robb French’s preaching at the Interchurch Holiness Convention certainly displays similarities to the Fundamentalist position: “Brother French also was very conscious of the political tides and the dangers of communism and socialism. More than once, he pointed out the coming world church and exhorted his audiences to ‘come out from among them.’ He had little time for those who would sacrifice scriptural principle on the altar of compromise with the elements that would deny the substitutionary atonement of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, and others of the great doctrines of the church.”\textsuperscript{45} Yet a closer examination also reveals some significant differences.

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Susie Stanley has examined this question in even greater depth, contending that the Wesleyan and Holiness churches were “innocent bystanders” in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy.\footnote{She identifies four areas in which she concludes that Holiness Christians differed from Fundamentalists: the inerrancy of the Bible, premillennialism, women as ministers, and “social holiness” (by which she means “social justice activities undertaken by Wesleyan Holiness adherents”). She argues that the first two are characteristic of Fundamentalism but are shared by only a few within the Holiness movement. The last two are, in her view, points to which Holiness Christians hold but which Fundamentalists reject. Based on her study, Stanley questions the identification of the Holiness movement with Fundamentalism. The case of the Conservative Holiness movement suggests either that the movement has been}.
touched by Fundamentalist leaven or that the conclusions of Basset, Stanley, and others may require some revision. Conservative Holiness adherents, for instance, have been staunch supporters of the doctrine of inerrancy. The Articles of Religion of the Bible Missionary Church say, “We believe the Holy Scriptures inerrantly reveal the will of God concerning all things necessary to our salvation.”

A doctrinal statement from the Pilgrim Holiness Church of New York, the Wesleyan Holiness Association of Churches, and God’s Bible School refers to the Bible as “the inerrant, infallible Word of God.”

Edsel Trouten published in the Convention Herald, the voice of the Interchurch Holiness Convention, a multipart defense of inerrancy. Clearly, inerrancy is an important doctrine to many in the Conservative Holiness movement.

Premillennialism is likewise important. The Church of God (Holiness) is explicitly premillennial in its Articles of Faith: “The second advent of our Savior, Jesus Christ, is premillennial and visible.”

The Bible Missionary Church (and Griffith’s offshoot, the Wesleyan Holiness Association of Churches) as well as the Pilgrim Holiness Church of New York are not only premillennial but also explicitly pretribulational, a position generally associated with dispensationalist Fundamentalism.

However, one must offer two qualifications. First, the link between Holiness groups and premillennialism is not necessarily a link to Fundamentalism. When Methodist minister John Lakin Brasher embraced the Holiness cause in the late nineteenth century, he accepted premillennialism along with the “second blessing” of entire sanctification. Before Fundamentalism ever arose, then, some Holiness Christians identified with premillennialism.

Second, not all Conservative Holiness Christians are avowedly premillennial in their statements of faith. The Doctrinal Statement of Hobe Sound Bible College makes no explicit reference to the millennium. The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches teaches the imminence of Christ’s return in its constitution (para. 23) as well as a separation between the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked (para. 24), but it says, “It is not to be understood that a dissenting understanding of the millennium shall be held to break or hinder either church fellowship or membership” (para. 25).

One should note in this connection a group tangentially related to the Conservative Holiness movement that reflects some of these concerns, the Fundamental Wesleyan Society (FWS) formed in 1979. The FWS reckons itself a part of the Holiness movement in general, and some sources identify it as a part of the Conservative Holiness movement. But the group does not count itself as a part of the Conservative Holiness movement today. The chief difference is that those aligned with the FWS believe that entire sanctification is not identified with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which they say happens at regeneration. In addition, many in the FWS are not as committed to the lifestyle issues that mark the Conservative Holiness movement. However, the FWS strongly asserts the doctrine of inerrancy, declaring in its Statement of Faith “that the Scriptures are inerrant, infallible, and correct even when they speak on points of history, science and philosophy.”

At the same time, the FWS expressly rejects premillennialism, asserting that postmillennialism is the more truly Wesleyan and biblical teaching.

Separatism—Perhaps the chief distinctive of contemporary Fundamentalism has been its stress on “separation,” that the Christian should strive to free himself from worldliness, from false doctrine, and even from ecclesiastical connections to other Christians who willfully persist in sin. The Conservative Holiness movement obviously owes its origin to concerns about growing worldliness. Furthermore, it is a “come-out” movement that has emerged from another come-out movement. Some in the movement acknowledged their debt to Fundamentalism. Edsel Trouten’s use of Baptist Fundamentalist Chester Tulga has been previously noted. Conservative Holiness ministers warn other believers against “compromising their convictions of separation.”

Yet the context of these separatist comments is often different, sometimes subtly so, sometimes more obviously. Generally, Conservative Holiness Christians stress a separation based more on practice than on doctrine. Dale Hallaway writes, “We are currently faced with the necessity of ‘earnestly contending for the faith,’” but he means by this “that we stand firmly for old-
fashioned principles which govern one’s conduct in all areas of life.”66 One could perhaps view the original Holiness secessions of the late 1800s and early 1900s as doctrinal, since they involved a defense of the doctrine of entire sanctification against the hostility of denominational leaders. But the Conservative Holiness withdrawals centered more on behavioral questions, matters of dress and entertainment. Conservative Holiness leaders expressed doctrinal concerns, but they gave them second place generally to concern about eroding standards of holiness. In this emphasis, the Conservative Holiness movement differs from Fundamentalism, whose basis of separation revolved, theoretically, around more purely doctrinal concerns.

Making a Distinction—The most obvious evidence for or against viewing the Conservative Holiness movement as Fundamentalist is how those within the movement identify themselves. Even this approach yields only a qualified answer at best. A writer in the Fundamental Wesleyan Society says plainly, “We are fundamentalists,”67 as the very name of the organization would indicate. Still, elsewhere he writes with qualification, “While we may feel that the rest of the holiness movement should have taken more seriously the contributions of fundamentalism, yet inherent in fundamentalism is a spirit of legalism and intolerance passed down from its Calvinistic roots. Today the conservative holiness movement is not only contending for fundamental Christian doctrine, but it is also infected with the dogmatic spirit of fundamentalism.”68 Even then, the FWS is only at the edge of the Conservative Holiness movement.

Tom McCasland, brought up in the Conservative Holiness movement, says that he was “taught to identify myself as a fundamentalist evangelical.” However, he has come to reject Fundamentalism, which he identifies with the conservative faction within the Southern Baptist Convention. He charges that Fundamentalism is hostile toward the use of reason, that it rejects historical tradition as a guideline, and that it reduces the Bible to “limp leather” and “a book of propositions.”69

Discounting McCasland’s critique of current application of the term, it is significant that some Conservative Holiness Christians at one time thought of themselves as “Fundamentalist.” The sticking point in such identification would likely be how far self-professed Fundamentalists and Conservative Holiness believers are willing to agree to disagree. The Fundamentalist movement has never had a particularly strong Methodist contingent,70 and the since the 1950s the movement has been overwhelmingly Baptist in composition. The question would be how much Fundamentalists would be willing to overlook Wesleyan Holiness distinctive (notably falling from grace and entire sanctification) and how much Conservative Holiness adherents would be willing to cooperate with those who reject their distinctive.

The history of the Evangelical Methodist Church illustrates the tensions inherent in a Fundamentalist-Holiness relationship. Founded in 1946 as a protest against growing liberalism in the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Methodist Church contained both Holiness and non-Holiness factions. Eventually, the tension grew too great, and in 1952 the denomination split over the issue of entire sanctification. The non-Holiness segment, led by W. W. Breckbill, took the more ardently Fundamentalist position, aligning itself with the American Council of Churches of Christ, a Fundamentalist alliance.71 In this case, mutual opposition to liberalism was not sufficient to make up for deep differences over the doctrine of sanctification. Once the split took place, those opposed to entire sanctification found themselves more comfortable in the Fundamentalist camp. This story reproduces in miniature the general outline of Fundamentalist-Holiness interaction.

Conclusion

In his History of Fundamentalism in America, George Dollar uses the label “Orthodox Allies” to describe conservatives who were not in the Fundamentalist camp. His definition of the term is too narrow, excluding some self-professed Fundamentalists.72 But the concept has value nonetheless, as in the present case. One cannot honestly equate Fundamentalism with the Conservative Holiness movement. To do so would sweep too much evidence under the rug. Nonetheless the two movements have similar concerns in addition to their differences. Both reject theological liberalism and both enunciate a strong separatist position. The Holiness view may place
more stress on personal separation, and Fundamentalism may be known more for its ecclesiastical separation, but neither group would deny the other aspect. Their interaction, although limited, suggests they are orthodox allies. The closeness of their alliance will likely depend on the nature of the foe they face and their willingness to forego some of their distinctive for the sake of unity.

Notes


5This essay is found in The Works of John Wesley (1872; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 11:366-446.


7The sermon “On Dress” is found in The Works of John Wesley, 7:15-26. Thornton discusses the implications of this sermon in Radical Righteousness, pp. 36-37, and reproduces the whole sermon in an appendix (pp. 302-7).

8Peters, p. 121.

9See Dieter, pp. 27-32; Thornton, Radical Righteousness, pp. 49-54.

10On the conflict of the late 1800s and early 1900s, see Charles Jones’s Perfectionist Persuasion and Peter, pp. 133-80.


12Some of these “come-outers,” however, contend that they were forced out by denominational leaders, not that they had left. See, e.g., Richard Payne, “The Church of God (Holiness): Our Name—Part 1,” Church Herald and Holiness Banner, 13 Aug. 1999, p. 5.

13Thornton, Radical Righteousness, pp. 95-106.


16Radical Righteousness. p. 132.


18Thornton includes this pamphlet as Appendix H of Radical Righteousness, pp. 312-15. He also includes a Nazarene response, Nineteen Reasons Answered, by A. O. Hendricks as Appendix I, pp. 316-19.


Bryan, “The Interchurch Holiness Convention,” p. 8. Looking back on the early days of the IHC, Steve Herron notes that the original purpose of the IHC in holding the line for Holiness standards had shifted, because “[m]ost of the constituency of the I.H.C. are no longer in the denomination we sought to hold to the original principles. There has sprung up a number of smaller movements as well as independent churches established specifically along those lines I.H.C. sought to maintain.” Schmul, et al., Profile of the I. H. Convention, 1952-1987, p. 50.


On the Church of the Bible Covenant, see Thornton, Radical Righteousness, pp. 138-43; Melton, Encyclopedia of American Religions, p. 375.


McLeister and Nicholson, pp. 293-98, 309-11. The Pilgrim Holiness historians, Thomas and Thomas, acknowledge the concerns of the protestors but do not discuss the rationale behind those concerns.

A good counterbalance to McLeister and Nicholson and to Thomas and Thomas is Thornton, Radical Righteousness, pp. 144-64, where he discusses from the Conservative Holiness viewpoint the schisms resulting from the merger.

Quoted by Brown, p. 4.

Ibid., p. 4.

Ibid., p. 5.


Thornton, Radical Righteousness, p. 164.


One writer notes that early Holiness leader John Lakin Brasher and his circle “believed the prayers of the faithful could be effective in bringing physical healing by the Spirit but they disagreed with the pentecostals’’ claim that particular individuals possessed the spiritual ‘gift’ by which to heal others.” J. Lawrence Brasher, The Sanctified South: John Lakin Brasher and the Holiness Movement (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), p. 144.


Ibid., p. 190.

J. Gordon Melton, ed., The Encyclopedia of American Religions: Religious Creeds (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1988), p. 323. The wording comes originally from the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene. Commenting on the Nazarene version, Stanley notes (pp. 178-79) that inerrancy is applied only to things “necessary to our salvation,” not in matters of history and science, as most Fundamentalists affirm. However, Bassett notes (p. 74) that this phrase was added in 1928 by factions within the Church of the Nazarene sympathetic to Fundamentalism. There is every indication that Glenn Griffith and the others who founded the Bible Missionary Church understood this article, in the case of their church, as teaching full inerrancy.


Brasher, The Sanctified South, p. 62.

It says only that Christ “is coming again to receive the church as His bride” and that “There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the unsaved and the unsaved”; the Doctrinal Statement is found at http://members2.visualcities.com/fwp/statement.html. See also Vic Reasoner, “Plugging the Holes,” Arminian Magazine, Fall 1993. In his rebuttal, Reasoner charges that the Conservative Holiness movement is not really “conservative” because its view of entire sanctification modifies the teaching of John Wesley.


