

Nazarenes and the Trustworthiness of the Bible from 1908 to 1988: Eighty Years of Changing Definitions in the Church of the Nazarene

Dr. Daryl McCarthy
Executive Director, The Leadership Anvil
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Abstract: During the early years of its history, the Church of the Nazarene—both its leaders and its people—unequivocally affirmed a high view of the authority of Scripture which included the historic doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Nazarene leaders unabashedly identified themselves with the fundamentalist movement in responding to the growing liberalism of the day. But beginning in the 1930s, a subtle and gradual move away from an affirmation of biblical inerrancy began. Eventually, many Nazarene leaders and scholars adopted a more restricted view of inspiration and inerrancy. Some asserted that inerrancy was intrinsically a Calvinistic doctrine, and hence inconsistent with true Wesleyanism. This paper will examine the changing definitions and the shifting positions regarding the authority and inerrancy of Scripture during the history of the denomination from the early 1900s until the late 1980s.

As a lifelong Wesleyan-Arminian, I am deeply interested in the history of Methodism and its theological offspring. As a participant in the International Council for Biblical Inerrancy in Chicago, along with a small little group of other Wesleyan leaders such as Wilber Dayton and Delbert Rose, inerrancy and Wesleyanism has long been a topic of intense interest to me.

This study is important because the Church of the Nazarene emerged during the second half of the twentieth century as the largest and most prominent holiness denomination, promoting the understanding of Christianity known as Wesleyanism, which was named after the famous British evangelists, John and Charles Wesley. The Wesleys work led to one of the greatest and longest-lasting surges or revivals of authentic Christian faith in history. Many non-Wesleyans see the Nazarene position as the default position for Wesleyan-Arminians in general. In 2013 there were 2,150,883 members of the Nazarene Church worldwide and 28,130 churches.¹ The Nazarenes developed the strongest chain of denominational colleges in the holiness movement as well. The Nazarene Theological Seminary, founded in 1945, has served as one of the leading holiness seminaries in North America. So the Nazarene position on key doctrines is significant and worthy of attention.

¹ “Annual Report of The Board of General Superintendents To The 90th General Board, Church Of The Nazarene,” February 24, 2013, p. 4.

A High View of Scripture: 1908-1920

I have discussed in other places how the founders of Wesleyanism all held an unequivocal and high view of Scripture and its authority.² For decades the Methodist Church, which grew out of the Wesleyan revivals, maintained a high view of Scripture. But gradually during the 1800s Methodists began departing from the historic Wesleyan understanding of Scripture as well as other central Wesleyan doctrines.³

But as the Methodist church became more formal and less committed to the biblical teachings of their founders, the fires of revival began spreading across America. During the late 1800's there was a revival of interest in a deeper walk with God. Thousands of people from a wide spectrum of denominations experienced a "second work of grace" in which they were cleansed and filled with the Holy Spirit after their conversion. This experience was significant in helping them live in obedience to God on a daily basis. Many of them left their Calvinistic or Reformed denominations and became part of this burgeoning "holiness" movement. The Church of the Nazarene was birthed as thousands of people left or were forced out of their old denominations. Early Nazarenes embraced the historic Wesleyan message that challenges believers to receive the Holy Spirit and to live obedient lives in response to God's grace of forgiveness. That was the message that had radically changed their lives and ignited a fresh walk with God.

Because of its reputation for conservative lifestyles in the first half of the twentieth century, many people outside the holiness movement still see Nazarenes as a very conservative denomination. Because of this many people today are surprised to find out it no longer officially affirms biblical inerrancy. And that is the sad story we will look at today.

But it was not so in the early years of the denomination. This is why it is important to understand the historic context of their founding. The Church of the Nazarene was forming and beginning to grow during the final years of theological ferment that had been shaking American Methodism for decades. Many of the early Nazarene leaders came out of the Methodist Church during that conflict. They were all staunch opponents of liberalism and the destructive aspects of higher criticism and stood unequivocally for biblical inerrancy.

The union of the Church of the Nazarene and the Holiness Church of Christ in 1908 (considered to be the birth of the Nazarenes as a national denomination) was celebrated by the publication of E. P. Ellyson's *Theological Compend*. It was a popular and much used handbook for the fledgling denomination for many years. Ellyson emphasized the infallibility of Scripture as well as verbal inspiration and the inerrancy of the original manuscripts.⁴ In a later work Ellyson responded to claims that the Bible taught only religious matters and that it had scientific errors in it. "The Holy Spirit knows all the truths of nature, and would not inspire an untruth." "Logically and morally we are as much bound by the geological writings of Moses as by the theological

² I have thoroughly documented the early Wesleyan view of Scripture in an unpublished paper entitled, "Wesleyan Founders and Scripture: John Wesley, Adam Clarke and Richard Watson," 2001.

³ I discussed these trends in the American Wesleyan movement, including the Church of the Nazarene in a chapter entitled, "Inerrancy in American Wesleyanism," in *Inerrancy and the Church* edited by John Hannah (Chicago: Moody, 1984) pg. 279-321.

⁴ Edgar P. Ellyson, *Theological Compend* (Chicago: Christian Witness, 1908), pp. 77-78.

writings of Saint Paul.”⁵ Certainly, the Bible is not the sole source of scientific knowledge, but it is a reliable source, in Ellyson’s view.

Strong opposition to any position other than a high view of Scripture is evident during the early years of the *Herald of Holiness*, the official denominational organ, which began publication in 1912. From 1912-19 there are frequent references to the infidelity and higher criticism so prevalent in the old denominations from which many Nazarenes emerged. References were frequently made to that “poisonous scepticism,” the “illogical conclusions,” and the “pernicious and disastrous effects” of the new theology and higher criticism.⁶ Numerous affirmations were expressed declaring the plenary, verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible.

Verbal inspiration is the only theory of inspiration which furnishes us an absolutely restful and reliable basis for confidence in the pre-Book....The Bible ought to be absolutely reliable, for it is the basis and the book of authority of the only pure and undefiled religion known to human history....This inspiration is verbal in the most acute, intense, literal, all inclusive sense.⁷

For the early Nazarenes, the reliability of the whole Bible was inextricably related to the reliability of all the parts of the Bible—the historic, scientific, spiritual—all of it. “It can not be relied on anywhere if it be false in one place. Here is our challenge—all or none. Proof of falsity or untrustworthiness established as to one chapter or one great historic fact...loses to us the whole Bible.”⁸ This is remarkably reminiscent of John Wesley’s own clear affirmation of biblical inerrancy.⁹

In an editorial defense of verbal inspiration in the *Herald*, B.F. Haynes stated: “There was an inexplicable power of the Holy Spirit put upon the authors and writers of these books of the Bible, in order to their guidance even in the employment of the words they used, and to preserve them alike from all error and from all omission.”¹⁰ During those early years, the *Herald* featured many editorials and articles on the battle over inspiration. Editor Haynes made “no apology for

⁵ Edgar P. Ellyson, *The Bible in Education* (Kansas City: Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene Publishing House, 1913), pp. 101-2, 148; cf.; 91, 144.

⁶ *Herald of Holiness*, Oct 30, 1912, p. 4. The following issues also dealt with higher criticism: June 12, 1912, p. 4; July 17, 1912, p.4; Sept 4, 1912, p.2; Sept 25, 1912, p. 2; Nov 20, 1912, p. 3; Dec 11, 1912, p. 5; Feb 5, 1913, pp. 1-2; Apr 2, 1913, pp. 1-2; Apr 9, 1913, p. 41; May 14, 1913, p. 3; June 4, 1913, p. 4; June 25, 1913, p. 5; Aug 13, 1913, p. 4; Sept 17, 1913, pp. 3-4; Sept 2, 1914, p. 2; Oct 21, 1914, p. 1; June 28, 1916, p. 2; Sept 27, 1916, p. 4; Oct 11, 1916, p. 4; Feb 6, 1918, p. 1; Mar 27, 1918, p. 2; Aug 29, 1917, p. 1; Feb 5, 1919, p. 2; May 14, 1919, pp. 6-7.

⁷ B. F. Haynes, “Verbal Inspiration,” *Herald of Holiness*, Oct 15, 1913, p. 1.

⁸ B. F. Haynes, “Does it Matter,” *Herald of Holiness*, Jenyn’s Dec 1, 1915, p. 1.

⁹ In 1776 Wesley commented in his *Journal* on Jenyn’s tract *Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion* by saying though it was an admirable piece, it was hard to tell whether Mr. Jenyn was a Christian, a deist, or an atheist. “If he is a Christian, he betrays his own cause by averring that “all Scripture is not given by inspiration of God, but the writers of it were sometimes left to themselves, and consequently made some mistakes.” Nay, if there be any 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.” John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, A.M., 8 vols., ed. Nehemiah Curnock (London: Epworth Press, 1909; rep. Ed. 1938), 6:117.

¹⁰ Haynes, “Inspiration of the Scriptures,” *Herald of Holiness*, Feb 20, 1918, p. 2.

the frequent reference to this pernicious work of these enemies of an inspired Bible.”¹¹ In 1915 the *Herald* featured a thoroughgoing article by Andrew Johnson, demonstrating that the Bible was a “divine-human book.”

If God had any hand in the Bible at all, He would doubtless take enough interest in it to preserve it from error....If there are errors, God is more responsible for them than man, for His eye was on every word, His presence was ever near, His commands were implicitly obeyed, therefore it was His prerogative to prevent any error from creeping into the original record.

The critic...must choose between an errorless Bible or an errorless God.... If there is error in the Bible, there is error in God. If there is no error in God, then there is no error in the Bible.

The only way...the ideal God of the Bible can be fully vindicated and truly glorified is to affirm an inerrant Bible. If God does not tolerate error, if God does not commit error, if God can prevent a divinely inspired prophet from error while recording the words of divine revelation, then we have an infallible Bible.¹²

The 1915 General Assembly heard the General Superintendents declare that all Nazarenes were agreed on “the great fundamentals.”¹³ Through their writing they had made it clear that one of those great fundamentals was most certainly the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture.

The Battle Over the Fundamentals Intensifies: The 1920s

During the 1920s the Nazarenes maintained and even intensified their defense of the Bible, especially in the pages of the *Herald*. In 1920 a series, “Is the Bible Inspired?” by Warren Slote was featured. Slote made the following observations, among others. First, there was disagreement concerning whether inspiration came in thoughts, with the authors using their own words, or whether the Spirit “supervised” the choice of words as well. Slote argued strongly for verbal inspiration in which the Holy Spirit selected or censored the words of Scripture.¹⁴ Second, even though the Bible is not primarily concerned with scientific matters, its “language is

¹¹ Haynes, “A Warning Voice from the World,” *Herald of Holiness*, Apr 30, 1913, p. 3. Other *Herald* editorials dealing with the inspiration issue appeared in the following issues: Oct 22, 1913, pp. 1-2; Apr 8, 1914, pp. 2-3; May 13, 1914, p. 2; July 15, 1914, p. 1; Jan 6, 1915, p. 2; Apr 21, 1915, p. 2; May 19, 1915, p. 4; June 9, 1915, p. 4; Sept 1, 1915, p. 2; Nov 3, 1915, p. 1; Nov 10, 1915, p. 1; Dec 1, 1915, p. 1; Dec 29, 1915, pp. 1-2; July 5, 1916, p. 3; May 23, 1917, pp. 4-5; Sept 5, 1917, p. 2; Dec 26, 1917, pp. 1-2; Feb 20, 1918, p. 2; Apr 2, 1918, p. 2; Sept 11, 1918, p. 61; June 4, 1919, p. 1. Several articles dealing with inspiration also appeared in the following issues: May 8, 1912, p. 7; Oct 9, 1912, p. 3; Nov 13, 1912, p. 6; Oct 27, 1915, p. 5. It is interesting to note that as early as that, the term inerrancy was used frequently and was considered to be closely related to the whole issue of inspiration and infallibility. It was not a question of infallibility *or* inerrancy. Cf. Oct 28, 1914, p. 4, editorial entitled “Inerrancy.”

¹² Andrew Johnson, “The Confusion of the Higher Critics,” *Herald of Holiness*, Aug 4, 1915, pp. 5-6.

¹³ *Proceeding of the Fourth General Assembly of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene Publishing House, 1915), p. 53.

¹⁴ J. Warren Slote, “Is the Bible Inspired?” *Herald of Holiness*, Mar 10, 1920, p. 8. Cf. Section 6 of the same series, Apr 7, 1920, p. 10.

always accurate” and “wonderfully correct.”¹⁵ Finally, Slote argued for the authority of Scripture on the basis of Christ’s view of the Old Testament.

There is no record anywhere that He ever criticized any part of them. This argues most conclusively for their absolute accuracy, for if there had been any errors in them, or if any of the parts had been spurious, He who rebuked sin wherever He found it and corrected error as it came to His notice would surely have made some mention of these mistakes.¹⁶

Others explicitly affirmed the reliability of Scripture.

- Basil Miller charged in the *Herald* that the lack of spiritual power in the church was due to the “doubting of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible.”¹⁷
- Editor J. B. Chapman reasserted the interdependence of the doctrines of “the Word of God, the blood of Jesus and the operation of the Holy Spirit.” When “men begin to question the inerrancy of the Bible,” they will later change their beliefs concerning the blood and the Spirit.¹⁸
- Donnell Smith asserted that the Spirit kept the Scriptures “free from all error.”¹⁹
- C. W. Ruth declared the Bible to be “absolutely reliable.”²⁰
- Sam Curtis declared that “the suggestion that the Bible is not the unerring Word of God...is a most wicked thrust at morality, law, and government. If the story of Jonah and the great fish is not true, then many would argue that the Ten Commandments may not be true.”²¹
- Numerous other articles were written about the conflict with higher criticism and the doctrine of inspiration.²²

Increasingly, the controversy was described in terms of the fundamentalism versus modernism controversy which was sweeping across the American Church and one of the great fundamentals was the inspiration of the Word. The Christian world was divided into two opposing camps,

¹⁵ Ibid., Mar 24, 1920, p. 6.

¹⁶ Ibid., Mar 31, 1920, p. 8. Paul Basset, in “The Fundamentalist Leaving of the Holiness Movement,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 13 (1978): 73, commented on the point by Slote that “this side of the controversy, Slote’s reasoning appears to be quite naïve, even circular.”

¹⁷ Basil Miller, “The Crisis of Christianity,” *Herald of Holiness*, Oct 28, 1925, pp. 4-5.

¹⁸ J. B. Chapman, “The Word, the Blood, and the Spirit,” *Herald of Holiness*, Feb 18, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁹ Donnell J. Smith, “The Inspiration of the Bible,” *Herald of Holiness*, July 30, 1924, p. 7.

²⁰ C. W. Ruth, “If Modernism Were True: What?” *Herald of Holiness*, July 21, 1926, p. 1.

²¹ J. Sam Curtis, “God and the Bible,” *Herald of Holiness*, Mar 5, 1924, pp. 4-5.

²² *Herald* articles on higher criticism include the following, among others: Jan 7, 1920, pp. 4-5; June 16, 1920, pp. 1-2; June 23, 1920, p. 3; Sept 22, 1920, p. 11; July 28, 1920, p. 3; Feb 2, 1921, p. 6; Mar 2, 1921, p.3; Aug 3, 1921, p.2; Sept 21, 1921, pp.1-2; Feb 2, 1922, pp. 4-6; May 31, 1922, pp. 5-6; Aug 23, 1922, p. 11; Sept 13, 1922, pp. 3, 5; May 2, 1923, p. 5; May 14, 1924, pp. 3-4; Aug 13, 1924, p. 6; May 27, 1925, pp. 4-5; July 8, 1925, p. 5; Aug 12, 1925, pp. 4-5; Feb 10, 1926, pp. 2-3; Feb 24, 1926, p. 6; Apr 7, 1926, p. 3; Aug 25, 1926, pp. 6-8; Dec 22, 1926, pp. 10-11; July 20, 1927, pp. 7-8; Nov 28, 1928, pp. 6-8; Jan 15, 1928, pp. 5-7. *Herald* articles dealing with the inspiration of Scripture include the following among others: June 8, 1921, pp. 1-2; Feb 22, 1922, p. 6; June 7, 1922, p. 3; Dec 27, 1922, pp. 5-6; Feb 7, 1923, p. 51; Apr 4, 1923, p. 4; Sept 12, 1923, p. 5; July 16, 1924, pp. 1-2; Apr 8, 1925, p. 2; June 3, 1925, p. 11; July 1, 1925, pp. 3-4; July 29, 1925, p. 1; Sept 30, 1925, p. 1; May 5, 1926, pp. 10-11; May 12, 1926, pp. 10-11; June 22, 1927, p. 141; Feb 29, 1928, p. 5; Sept 26, 1928, p. 13; Oct 2, 1929, p. 17.

fundamentalists and modernists.²³ The rejection of the Bible was understood as tantamount to, or even worse, than modernism. Chapman declared, “When one has rejected the Bible as the inerrant standard of truth he has opened the door for the incoming of theosophy, Christian Science, spiritualism, and every form of error of human or diabolical invention.”²⁴

Early Nazarene leaders did not hesitate to quote non-Wesleyan scholars to support their traditional doctrine of inerrancy. Sometimes the term “fundamentalist” was used to designate *all* those who held to such fundamentals as inerrancy, including Wesleyans, Calvinists, and others.²⁵ But more often Nazarenes viewed fundamentalists as a group of Calvinists with whom they sympathized on several major Christian doctrines. Chapman declared, “Of course, our sympathies are entirely with the Fundamentalists and we rejoice in their boldness for God and truth....May God bless and prosper all who stand up for God and His Holy Book!”²⁶ Haynes, in a earlier editorial, affirmed, “Our sympathies are naturally with the fundamentalists” and spoke of the bitter opposition of others to maintaining “the infallible correctness of every word contained in the Bible.”²⁷

Editor Chapman realized that the term “fundamentalism,” a common noun, had become a proper noun, “Fundamentalism.” Admittedly, many of the “self-termed Fundamentalists” were Calvinists and included in their fundamentals some doctrines that Wesleyan-Arminians viewed as unbiblical, such as divine election and unconditional security. And at the same time these early Nazarenes would insist that their Calvinistic fundamentalist brethren failed to emphasize other important truths which are fundamental to Wesleyans, such as entire sanctification. Chapman expressed the dilemma like this:

It follows, then, that if we are asked whether we are a Fundamentalist or not, we must know whether the word is used as a common noun or as a proper name. If it is used in the former sense, we answer in the affirmative, but if it is used in the latter sense our answer is “Yes, with reservations.” In our own category of Fundamentals we would include nothing that is not positively necessary to life in Christ Jesus....Our list then would include: The Inspiration of the Scriptures, The fallen state and condition of man, The Virgin Birth and deity of Jesus Christ, The personality, and office work of the Holy Spirit, regeneration and entire sanctification.²⁸

Even though the early Nazarenes were frank in admitting the doctrinal differences they had with their fundamentalist brethren, during these years of controversy in my research I have never

²³ J. B. Chapman, “Fundamentalism versus Modernism,” *Herald of Holiness*, Oct 31, 1923, pp. 1-2. Cf. A. M. Hills, “A Creedless Christianity Impossible,” Oct 17, 1923, pp. 3-4. Other similar articles: Nov 5, 1924, p. 1; Sept 23, 1925, p. 5. In the Feb 20, 1924 issue (p. 14), an advertisement for *The Battle Over the Bible*, a debate between John Roach and Charles Francis Potter claimed the “fundamentalist controversy” is “agitating the entire Christian church.”

²⁴ *Herald of Holiness*, Oct 31, 1923, pp. 1-2.

²⁵ Cf. July 6, 1921, p. 2; Sept 20, 1922, p. 4; Aug 29, 1923, p. 3; Oct 29, 1924, pp. 5-6; Nov 5, 1924, p. 7.

²⁶ J. B. Chapman, “The Victories of the Fundamentalists,” *Herald of Holiness*, Feb 7, 1923, pp. 2-3.

²⁷ *Herald* May 24, 1922, p. 1. Cf. Henry Rell, in “The Impending Church Split,” Sept 19, 1923, p. 5, who also sympathized strongly with the fundamentalists but viewed them as a separate group from the Nazarenes. Chapman did the same thing, *Herald* Oct 13, 1926, pp. 3-4.

²⁸ J. B. Chapman, *Herald* “What Is Fundamentalism?” Oct 6, 1916.

found the slightest hint of any basic differences in the Wesleyan view of inerrancy vis-à-vis the Calvinistic view.

The *Preacher's Magazine*, which was published by the fledgling Nazarene denomination for its preachers, in its very first issue in 1926, featured the fundamentalist controversy. In the lead article, "Modernism and Christianity," F. M. Messenger averred, "If the Bible cannot be taken at its face value, it should be discredited altogether, for it claims too much to be authentic only in part." Either "accept the revelation which God has given" or declare yourself an agnostic.²⁹

Even in those stressful years of the Fundamentalist/Liberal conflict, some Nazarene leaders spoke unequivocally but with charity and without bitterness, advocating a balanced, calm approach even to one's opponents. Floyd Nease pointed out in an outstanding article in *Preacher's Magazine* that though the term *higher criticism* was usually used as "an introduction to a discussion of infidelity and as a precursor for the vehement utterance of certain stock phrases decrying the justly condemned rationalism," the term properly "deserves better treatment at our hands." There is a "reverent" and "scholarly" use of the term, designating "the study of the historic origins, the dates, and authorships of the various books of the Bible." Nease maintained that this type of critical work was an invaluable, indeed indispensable, aid to preachers of the Word.³⁰

Conversely, Nease noted, in the hands of anti-supernaturalists, it becomes "destructive higher criticism." He traced the roots and development of destructive higher criticism and its relationship to the theory of evolution. Ultimately, such criticism aims to destroy "faith in an infallible and inerrant book, 'the Bible.'" With the historical reliability of the gospels discredited and significant doctrines removed, "the New Testament is devitalized and shrinks to the status of an Elizabethan drama." To such a philosophy, the "evangelical minister can have but one attitude, that of unalterable opposition."³¹ But in all of that controversy there should be fairness. Our attitude and spirit should exemplify our doctrine. Wesley himself had encouraged his followers to work with others whether Calvinists or Catholics as far as is possible. In that same spirit Nease urges, "Is it basically more fair to the representatives of fundamentalism to assume that the literalists are a set of knaves than for the latter to assert that the fundamentalists are ignoramuses and fools?"³²

In the mid-1920s Basil Miller's *Cunningly Devised Fables* was published. This was the first major Nazarene rebuttal to destructive higher criticism and infidelity. It was frequently advertised with "enthusiastic testimonials" in the *Herald of Holiness*. The book, which included an introduction by J. B. Chapman, spoke repeatedly of the "inerrancy" of the Bible.³³ Miller

²⁹ *Preachers Magazine* 1 (1926), p. 5. Other early references to the controversy appear in the following issues, among others: Feb 1926, pp. 6-9; Oct 1926, pp. 12, 20-21; June 1926, p. 1; Aug 1926, pp. 4-6; May 1929, p. 133.

³⁰ Floyd W. Nease, "The Preacher's attitude Toward the Critical Study of the Bible," *Preacher's Magazine* 2 (1927), pp. 23, 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³³ Basil Miller and U. E. Harding, *Cunningly Devised Fables* (n.d.), pp. 8, 12, 20, 27, 31, 34, 38-39, 41-42, 44. One *Herald* advertisement of the book appeared on July 22, 1925, p. 16.

asserted that “the *Bible itself* affirms that it is the inerrant, infallible, inspired, and completed Word of God.”³⁴

As an aside, let me mention that unfortunately, some opponents of inerrancy among Nazarenes have equated inerrancy as requiring mechanical dictation by God. But in the thousands of pages I have read from this early period of Nazarene history, among all the adamant and unequivocal statements by Nazarene leaders in this era affirming inerrancy, hardly ever have I seen a clear endorsement of the mechanical dictation approach to inspiration. Nor have I seen any of these early Nazarenes make the over-claim that translations are without error. It was commonly granted that there are some errors in our translations. But it was also commonly argued that the character of God and the Bible itself demands inerrant autographs.³⁵

During the 1920s there seemed to be an increasing awareness of the threat that modernism posed to the life of the young, growing denomination. Warnings were issued to Nazarenes. Chapman editorialized in the *Herald*:

Our own Church of the Nazarene must be always vigilant to keep the Bible destroyers out (for, thank God, they are out until now) of the pulpit, out of our schools, out of our general boards, out of our missions and out of our books and literature; for in this way, and in this way only we will be able to keep them out of our homes and out of our pews.³⁶

Cornell issued a similar alert, “Nazarene ministers, beware! Stick to the Old Book from cover to cover: Let no trace of doubt or unbelief impregnate your nature.”³⁷

At the 1923 General Assembly the General Superintendents rejoiced in the fact that though many denominations were debating and dividing over the basic doctrines of the church, the Nazarenes could say that “on the great fundamental truths of God’s Word and of the Church we stand today without a single exception.”³⁸

According to Nazarene church historian Timothy Smith, “An editorial which J. B. Chapman published in the *Herald of Holiness* in 1924, entitled ‘An Apology for the Church of the Nazarene,’ was the high-water mark in the effort to make common cause with embattled fundamentalists....Chapman expressed the hope that many conservative Christians would find a home with the Nazarenes.” He explained that the Nazarenes were “orthodox on all historic

³⁴ Ibid., p. 36. He cited as support for his point the following Scriptures: Matt 5:18; John 10:35; Ex 4:10-12; Deut 5:32; 2 Sam 23:2; and Isa 1:10. On p. 37, R. A. Torrey is approvingly quoted as saying that, on the authority of Christ, “I am compelled to accept the entire Book which He endorsed as being the inerrant Word of God, as being in reality such.”

³⁵ *Herald of Holiness*, Aug 23, 1922, p. 1; July 29, 1925, p. 1. Of course, this is not to say that some less educated Nazarenes might not have held to mechanical dictation or the inerrancy of translations, as no doubt they did and some probably still do.

³⁶ *Herald of Holiness*, Mar 1, 1923, p. 2.

³⁷ C. E. Cornell, “Uncovering the Cesspool and Letting Out the Stink,” *Herald of Holiness*, Aug 29, 1923, p. 3.

³⁸ Church of the Nazarene, *Journal of the Sixth General Assembly* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1923), p. 183.

doctrinal matters.” He went on to assure non-Nazarenes that there was not one “Modernist nor a Higher Critic” in the denomination.³⁹

By 1928 there was clearly a need to declare with even more clarity the Nazarene stand on inspiration. In the 1908 *Manual*, the article on Scripture was basically borrowed from the Thirty–Nine Articles of Americanism and the Twenty–Five Articles of Methodism.

By the Holy Scriptures we understand the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments given by Divine inspiration, revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation; so that whatever is not contained therein, and cannot be proved thereby, is not to be enjoyed as an article of faith”⁴⁰

There were only minor changes in that article until 1928, when major revisions were made. In an earlier day it had been sufficient to declare one’s belief in the inspiration of the Bible. There was a basic understanding of what inspiration entailed. But later there were those who arose and declared their belief in inspiration but not inerrancy or infallibility. And thus, the church needed to continually define its position in the light of present controversies. In the 1928 General Assembly Article Four of the Nazarene Articles of Faith was amended to read:

We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures by which we understand the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation; so that whatever is not contained therein is not to be enjoyed as an article of faith. ⁴¹

Throughout their 1928 address to the General Assembly, the General Superintendents made clear their stand for a high view of Scripture.

We must stand for the whole Bible. We do not as a movement believe merely that the Bible contains the Word of God. We believe the Bible is the Word of God. We believe it from Genesis to Revelation....The Bible has received the bitterest attack of the enemy for centuries, but today the Old Book stands as impregnable as the Rock of Gibraltar.... The church must stand first, last and all the time for the whole Bible, the inspired, infallible, revealed Word of God....

Every man in this body is a fundamentalist and so far as we know there is not a modernist in the ranks of the Church of the Nazarene. We believe the Bible and accept it as being the revealed Word of God, immutable, unchangeable, infallible and sufficient for every human need. A modernist would be very lonesome in this General Assembly.⁴²

³⁹ Timothy L. Smith, *Called Unto Holiness—The Story of the Nazarenes: The Formative Years* (Kansas City, Missouri: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962), 319.

⁴⁰ *Manual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene* (Los Angeles: Nazarene Publishing Co., 1908), pp. 22-26.

⁴¹ *Manual of the History, Doctrine, Government, and Ritual of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1928), p. 22.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 58. Cf. pp. 49, 63. It is interesting to note that “fundamentalist” is not capitalized in those references.

The Change Begins, A. M. Hills: The 1930s

In 1931 the first major Nazarene systematic theology was published—A. M. Hills’ *Fundamental Christian Theology*.⁴³ Hills, a Congregationalist who was sanctified and later joined the Nazarenes, began writing what he considered to be his “Master Work,” while he was trying to start a holiness college in New Mexico in 1911. A review of his original manuscript reveals that he wrote the first half of the text for his systematic theology, including his discussion of revelation and inspiration while in New Mexico. He had finished a draft of the entire work by the spring of 1915 in Great Britain. However, it was not until 1931 that C. J. Kinne, a dedicated Nazarene lay leader, published it for Hills (at the urging of General Superintendent Chapman).

Hills’ chapter on “Revelation and Inspiration” is confusing, because it’s difficult to figure out what he actually believed about inerrancy.⁴⁴ A reader of the published version of his theology can almost feel that she is reading a schizophrenic author, because in one paragraph Hills affirms inerrancy and in the next he denies or seriously modifies what he had just said in the previous paragraph. When I first read this chapter years ago, it was a total mystery to me how one man could hold such a bifurcated position, that is, until I examined his handwritten manuscript in the Nazarene Archives. My examination of the manuscript of the book, comparing sections written in 1911 with additions he made sometime in the twenty years that elapsed before publication, led me to conclude that in 1911 Hills was an unqualified inerrantist, but by 1931 he had modified his position to allow for errors and a denial of what he calls “universal plenary inspiration.”⁴⁵ The way a reader can discover the approximate date of Hills’ later writing is that it is written on his Pasadena College letterhead where he was serving in 1931.

In the “1911” sections Hills cited several definitions of inspiration, all of which assumed inerrancy and infallibility as an integral part of inspiration. They all included such phrases as “communicate truth without error,” “without error, infirmity, or defect,” “without error or mistake,” and “infallible communication.” He cited without apology non-Wesleyans as well as Wesleyans. Apparently, he saw no basic difference in a Wesleyan view of inspiration and other views. He was careful to point out that such definitions applied only “to the original documents of Scripture as they came from the hands of their authors....”⁴⁶

The inspiration of the ordinary Christian which we by no means underrate, may co-exist with many errors, and crude notions; but the Divine inspiration of the authors of the Word enabled them to give us the mind of God without crudity or error.⁴⁷

⁴³ A. M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, 2 vols. (Pasadena: C. J. Kinne, 1931). A. M. Hills “A Handwritten Autobiography,” copy at Nazarene Theological Seminary Library, pp. 190, 217.

⁴⁴ Cf. Bassett, pp. 80-81.

⁴⁵ An examination of Hills’ handwritten manuscript of his *Theology*, in the Church of the Nazarene Archives, Kansas City, Missouri, is a fascinating study in pre-computer cutting, pasting and inserting techniques. It is clear that certain sections (as it turns out the modifications of his earlier affirmations of inerrancy) were inserted later, because they are written on Hills’ Pasadena College letterhead where he was serving in 1931. Major additions were made to the text. Most of these additions had to be made sometime after 1915, while Hills was living in Pasadena, written on his Pasadena College stationary). One of these later additions appears on 126b (paragraph beginning, “We have stated the two strongest theories....”) through 127b (closing at the end of the first full paragraph on p. 127). Another addition is to be found on pp. 132c (paragraph beginning with “We are compelled to conclude....”) through 134d (addition ends with the last full paragraph on that page).

⁴⁶ Hills *Theology*, 1:117-18.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:118-19.

Jesus and His Apostles...treat all they quote from [of the Old Testament] as the Word of God. They also refer to all classes of facts as infallibly true.

Not only great *doctrinal* facts, such as the creation and probation of man; his apostasy;...not only great *historical* facts, as the deluge, ...but incidental circumstances, and things of minor importance...are all mentioned with a childlike faith in their absolute truthfulness.⁴⁸

One of the greatest proofs against the “occasional inspiration” theory, as he discusses it in his “1911” portion, is that the writers would not always be

...writing, under the influence of the Spirit which rendered their writings the unerring Word of God; and that consequently, when they were writing without it, they were liable to make mistakes like other men. So that, as a result, there is in the Bible, an admixture of error and truth, the human and the divine. The logical difficulty of this theory is that, if it be once granted that there is an alloy of error in the Word, an opening is made for the assumption of every imaginable corruption.⁴⁹

By verbal inspiration the Spirit guided and assisted the writers as they exercised their own faculties so they would “convey ‘the mind of the Spirit’ in its full and unimpaired integrity.”⁵⁰ “Such verbal inspiration is always affirmed of Jesus.” From statements throughout the Bible, “it is evident that very much at least of the Bible is verbally inspired, so that the authors recorded the very words God would have them use.”⁵¹

In the 1911 portion of his manuscript, Hills asserted that inerrancy was strictly applicable only to the original manuscripts. Because of the discrepancies in translations, Hills urged that we admit that we no longer have an absolutely inerrant Bible, i.e., translations.⁵² Yet he believed that this should not lead to a denial of the original inspiration of the Holy Word.

If we knew all the facts, these trivial discrepancies, could probably most of them be satisfactorily explained. But some of them would doubtless remain, as unexplainable. They are the human elements that have accrued in the transmission through the ages of our blessed Bible.⁵³

But by 1931 it is clear that Hills had shifted to a much more limited inerrantist position. In the post-1915 revisions of his working manuscript, he claimed that “absolute inspiration” puts “too great a tax upon faith.” He now believed that the Bible does not claim “absolute inspiration,” and it is a theory that cannot be proven.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1:119-20.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 1:123.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1:124. Hannah, quoted by “Field’s Theology,” p. 74.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1:125-26.

⁵² Such a position is a common concession among strong inerrantists who affirm the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

⁵³ Ibid., 1:131-32.

To...claim the absolute accuracy of all minute statements of fact, or the absolute harmony of all these statements geographical, historical, and scientific with one another—this is a task which the broadest and most thorough scholarship would not undertake. But if the inspiration of the *original text* were absolute and complete, and were absolutely proved [Hills now seemed to assume it was not], no one can maintain that we have that text in every minute particular.⁵⁴

By 1931 Hills preferred the “essential inspiration” of Scripture or a dynamic theory of inspiration. “The Scriptures are inspired to such a degree as to present, with all required fullness and accuracy, the great truths which it is the purpose of Scripture to present.” That approach avoids the “insuperable difficulties” of the plenary, verbal inspiration of all Scripture. He quoted the Methodist theologian John Miley. This is significant because Miley’s *Systematic Theology* (1894) has been called “a major point of theological transition” within American Methodism.⁵⁵ Hills endorses Miley’s looser, more fluid theory of inspiration which emphasizes that the Holy Spirit works in and through the human agent without reducing him to a mere implement pointing out that an “exact set of words” is unnecessary to have a true statement. The two major proofs against “universal verbal inspiration” were the “inaccurate quotations” by New Testament writers of the Old Testament and the varying records of the Lord’s words. That seems to point to the fact that “not always the *very words, but the man himself is inspired.*” While many twenty-first century inerrantists would agree with some of Miley’s emphasis they would probably disagree with Hill’s conclusion about the human writers of Scripture, “In the human element there is always room for inaccuracy.”⁵⁶

Hills concluded that “in spite of all discrepancies, and disagreements, and errors, and minor inaccuracies, the Bible still remains God’s inspired and infallible book. But *infallible for what?*...It is infallible as a revelation of God’s saving love in Christ to a wicked world.” But we should not claim the literal accuracy of the Bible because it is not free from error.⁵⁷

Now here is the big surprise. Evidently, at least from what I have found in my research, there was little apparent public reaction or even recognition of the impact of Hills’ shift on inspiration in the Nazarene denomination.⁵⁸ Throughout the 1930’s the attack on liberalism and higher criticism continued in the *Herald*, though not with the frequency of the previous two decades.⁵⁹ But that is to be expected because the Fundamentalist-Liberal schism was subsiding, and other issues were being addressed.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 1:126, quoting Fairchild.

⁵⁵ Fredrick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), p. 2.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1:126-27, 132-33.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1:134, quoting Marcus Dodd, “The Bible,” pp. 135-55.

⁵⁸ Bassett points out in his “Fundamentalist Leavening” article in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* that some have suggested that the Nazarene Publishing House did not publish Hills’ *Theology* because he was considered “too liberal with respect to the authority and inspiration of Scripture” (p. 80). Sources: conversations with Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, Oct 27, 1977 and C. B. Widmeyer, summer 1972.

⁵⁹ The following *Herald* articles deal with the continuing higher criticism controversy: Feb 1, Feb 8, and Feb 15, 1933; May 31, 1933, p. 31; Apr 12, 1935, p. 51; Oct 5, 1935, pp. 898-99; July 2, 1938, p. 484; July 18, 1936, p. 546; Sept 12, 1936, p. 814. The *Herald* Nov 18, 1931, p. 14 carries a satirical poetical attack on liberal theologian Harry Emerson Fosdick.

Still, frequent defenses of the inspiration of the Bible continued to appear in the *Herald*. For instance, once again as editor Chapman made this declaration:

When we are presented a Bible which is said to be a mixture of truth and error and we are left to judge which is the one or the other we are really no better off than if we had no Bible at all.... There is not a single *fact* of history or science which does not wholly agree with it.⁶⁰

However, in the mid- to late 1930's, we see some indications of a move away from Nazarene identification with fundamentalists. In fact, Editor Corlett in the *Herald* clearly repudiated (for the first time, as far as I can tell) a close alignment with Calvinistic Fundamentalism.

We have no desire to partake of the spirit generally manifested by the average Fundamentalist. It is absolutely impossible for us to accept their extreme positions on the verbal inspiration of the Bible as differing from the plenary inspiration as held by our Church, nor do we find ourselves in accord with their emphasis on eternal security, their radical Calvinistic Pre-Millennial position, or their allowance made for "sin in the flesh." They are too judgmental and defensive.... We are willing to go with the Fundamentalists as far as they travel our path or accept our doctrinal standards. But where our paths separate we will part peaceably.⁶¹

My research did not encompass determining the causes for this beginning shift away from identification with fundamentalism by several of the Nazarene leaders. There were probably several causes. Maybe there was a quiet, even private softening of some theological positions among some of the Nazarene leaders. More likely, the increasing stridency in the Calvinistic wing of fundamentalism and an accompanying antagonism toward Wesleyan-Arminians made the theological differences more evident. It's one thing to find common cause with others on certain core beliefs, but it's another thing when your allies launch strident attacks on you. Indeed as Stan Ingersol points out, "The Princeton theologians even regarded holiness theology as a Pelagian highway and thus part of the liberal problem."⁶² Timothy Smith pointed out that in the second half of the 1920s, the non-Wesleyan inerrantists such as J. Gresham Machen who founded Westminster Seminary in 1924, "strove to identify conservative Christianity with orthodox Calvinism."⁶³

During the 1930s the term *verbal inspiration* was increasingly identified with mechanical dictation by the opponents of inerrancy. In the *Herald of Holiness* greater stress was laid on the experiential proofs of the authority of the Bible, than was the case in earlier decades.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ J. R. Chapman, "April Gleanings," *Herald of Holiness*, Apr 30, 1930, p. 5. Cf. May 16, 1930, p. 11; Oct 15, 1930, pp. 11-12; June 3, 1931, p. 11; July 22, 1931, p. 8; Sept 9, 1931, p. 13; Nov 18, 1931, p. 14; Dec 29, 1934, p. 1294; Feb 15, 1936, pp. 1514-15; Nov 12, 1936, pp. 1132-33; Apr 5, 1939, pp. 98-99.

⁶¹ D. Shelby Corlett, "Nazarenes and the Fundamentalists," *Herald of Holiness*, Apr 20, 1935, p. 132; cf. May 30, 1936, p. 331; Oct 2, 1937, p. 909.

⁶² Stanley Ingersol, "Strange Bedfellows: The Nazarenes and Fundamentalism," 40:2 (Fall 2005), 135.

⁶³ Smith 319.

⁶⁴ *Herald of Holiness*, Feb 28, 1934, p. 5; Feb 29, 1936, p. 1580; Jan 19, 1935, pp. 1378-79. In 1936 a revised edition of E. P. Ellyson's *Theological Compend* appeared as *Doctrinal Studies*. Even though a whole chapter was

Wiley's *Christian Theology*: The 1940s

The decade of the 1940s was inaugurated (as were the 1930s) with the publication of a new major Nazarene theology, this time, H. Orton Wiley's classic *Christian Theology*. I was required to read these heavy tomes as an undergraduate at the Kansas City College and Bible School. Wiley affirmed inerrancy, but it is interesting to see that he laid greater stress on the primacy of Christ as the Logos and the Spirit as the primary witness to the Word than had most of his Nazarene predecessors. (Again, this is an emphasis most modern inerrantists would apply as a helpful and necessary teaching to make sure we're worshipping God and not the Word of God as important as it is.)

Both the revelation and the Christian faith are co-incident with the Scriptures. We do not say identical, for Christian Theology must ever make Christ, the Living and Eternal Word, the supreme revelation of God. But the Holy Scriptures as the true and inerrant record of the Personal Word, and the medium of continued utterance through the Holy Spirit, must in a true and deep sense become the formal aspect of the one true and perfect revelation.⁶⁵

“‘The Oracle and the oracles are one.’ The Scriptures, therefore, become the perfect disclosure and finished revelation of the will of God in Christ Jesus.”⁶⁶ Wiley warned against the danger of separating the personal Word from the written Word, because that leads to mere formal knowledge without spiritual knowledge, creedalism without spirituality, and orthodoxy without life. He obliquely chided the fundamentalists for a “mere legalistic defense of Scripture,” in their response to liberalism.⁶⁷

Wiley defined inspiration as “the actuating energy of the Holy Spirit through which holy men were qualified to receive religious truth, and to communicate it to others without error.”⁶⁸ Three factors were involved in all revelation: (1) superintendence—“God so guides those chosen as the organs of revelation, that their writings are kept free from error,” (2) elevation—“an enlargement of understanding,” and (3) suggestion—direct suggestion from God of thoughts “or even the very words” the writer was to use. Inspiration is constantly “guiding the writer at every point, thus securing at once the infallible truth of his material, and its proper selection and distribution.”⁶⁹

Though as we will see later some modern Nazarene scholars read him differently, Wiley repeatedly affirmed biblical inerrancy.⁷⁰ “Only as we are convinced that the writers were aided by a supernatural and divine influence, and this in such a manner as to be infallibly preserved

now devoted to the inspiration of the Bible, it was clearly not in the same spirit as the earlier edition. Little more than a vague spiritual inerrancy of the Bible was affirmed.

⁶⁵ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1940), 1:125.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:33; cf. 138-39.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:141-43, 35-37, 148.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:169; cf. 1:167-68.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:171.

⁷⁰ Later I will discuss how Paul Bassett reads Wiley very differently, as he points out in his article “The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement: 1914-1940,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Vol. 13, Spring 1978), 65-91.

from all error, can the sacred Scriptures become a divine rule of faith and practice.”⁷¹ This seems to me, to be an unequivocal affirmation of biblical inerrancy. He goes on to approvingly quote Hannah’s definition of inspiration as the enablement given by the Holy Spirit “to embrace and communicate the truth of God without error, infirmity, or defeat [*sic*, defect].”⁷² One reason inspiration was necessary was so that “a true and inerrant account” could be provided of historical facts such as the creation and the Deluge.⁷³

Wiley called his own view “dynamical inspiration” and cites it as being the same view as that of Pope, Watson, Wakefield, and Ralston (all inerrantists), as well as Miley and others. He places “dynamic” in contradistinction to “mechanical.” His plenary, dynamic view was that “the whole and every part is divinely inspired.”⁷⁴

Throughout the 1940s the battle for the Bible in the Nazarene denomination and elsewhere was subsiding. But occasional references in the *Herald* still maintained its inspiration and trustworthiness. Ross Price, writing on John 10:35, declared,

Our Lord, in this argument, assumed the absolute truth of the Scripture, and its changeless, indestructible authority....The Bible is correct astronomically, geologically, historically, medicinally, botanically, zoologically, meteorologically, prophetically, and spiritually. It is the final court of appeals on matters of faith and practice.⁷⁵

In a book published by the Nazarene’s own Beacon Hill Press, Stephen White propounded a dynamic theory in which “the thoughts of the writers of the Bible were so dominated by the Holy Spirit that the truth recorded is an infallible rule of faith and practice.”⁷⁶ But he presented no clear affirmation of the inerrancy of the Word.

The debate over Fundamentalism continued when Oscar F. Reed, one of my professors at Nazarene Theological Seminary, argued in *The Preacher’s Magazine* that fundamentalism was thoroughly Calvinistic and had no place in Wesleyan theology. Stanley Ingersol, Nazarene historian and archivist, summarizes Reed’s argument, “Since Calvinism is antithetical to Wesleyan-Arminian theology, Wesleyans cannot be fundamentalists without betraying their most cherished theological principles.”⁷⁷

⁷¹ Wiley, 1:173. He also on pg. 172 quoted Wakefield, an earlier Methodist theologian, as saying: “The more important the communication is...the more reasonable it is to expect that God should make the communication free from every admixture of error” (Wakefield’s *Christian Theology*, p. 72).

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1:167.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1:172.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:177, 184.

⁷⁵ Ross Price, “The Immutability of the Scriptures (John 10:35),” *Herald of Holiness*, Nov 29, 1948, pp. 670-71. Cf. Jan 8, 1945, p. 613; Feb 3, 1940, p. 1485. J. B. Chapman in his *Nazarene Primer* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1949) defended the absolute veracity of the Word.

⁷⁶ Stephen White, *Essential Christian Beliefs* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1940), p. 92.

⁷⁷ Stanley Ingersol, “Strange Bedfellows: The Nazarenes and Fundamentalism” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 40:2 (Fall 2005), 123. Reed’s article cited by Ingersol was “Definitive Statements Concerning Nine Philosophies of Religion,” *The Preacher’s Magazine* (March-April 1949), 12-13, and (May-June 1949), 11. As Ingersol notes in a footnote, “A similar argument was used by Wesley Tracy as editor of the *Herald of Holiness* to answer the question, ‘Do Nazarenes belong in the Fundamentalist camp?’ Tracy responded that ‘Nazarene thinkers have usually made

Silence: The 1950s

During the 1950s, it is difficult to find many unequivocal affirmations of inerrancy in the *Herald of Holiness* or other Nazarene publications. The truth and authority of the Bible was affirmed in general terms of faith and practice but not in other areas such as history and science. There was now room in the Church of the Nazarene both for those who held a loose, dynamic view, as well as for those who held to a stricter view, such as White.⁷⁸

Editing History: The 1960s

Throughout the 1960s it became clear that many Nazarene scholars had definitely moved away from the traditional Wesleyan doctrine of biblical inerrancy. However occasional general warnings continued to be sounded about the dangers of rejecting the Bible.⁷⁹

Exploring Our Christian Faith, a Nazarene introductory theology text edited by W. T. Purkiser, appeared in 1960. This text shows a very evident attraction to neo-orthodox thinkers with frequent quotes from Barth, Brunner, C. H. Dodd, and John Baillie, among others. Such stock neo-orthodox terms as “salvation-history” and references to the Bible as “a record of revelation” were used.⁸⁰ “Historical act becomes a revelation of God when interpreted through the eye of faith.”⁸¹ Inspiration was limited to providing an accurate and true record of the “Christ-event.” Wiley’s three factors of inspiration are referred to. The writers seem to opt for dynamic, plenary inspiration. Though it does specifically affirm inerrancy, still inerrantists today could agree with a number of their conclusions as far as they go.

While it contains nothing, properly understood, which is unscientific or unhistorical, yet the Bible is not a book of science or history. Its purpose is to make known the will of God, not to answer questions about nature or to satisfy our curiosity about general human history....

It is only when limited and arbitrary standards of judgement are set up that the Bible may be charged with error. When considered in the light of its own purposes and by reasonable canons of value and truth, the Scriptures will be found to be without material

careful distinctions between themselves and Fundamentalists. Nevertheless, many Nazarenes embrace the Fundamentalist *ethos*.” “The Question Box,” *Herald of Holiness* (Sept 1998): 20.

⁷⁸ Stephen White, “The Question Box,” *Herald of Holiness*, May 7, 1952, p. 207; cf. July 16, 1951, pp. 447-48; Nov 9, 1955, p. 850; “The Spirit of Truth,” Oct 31, 1956, pp. 824-25; “What We Believe,” Mar 13, 1957, p. 33; “Mathematical Intolerance,” Oct 2, 1957, p. 792. An official Nazarene Old Testament survey text, *Exploring the Old Testament*, ed. W. T. Purkiser (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1955), basically quoted Wiley concerning the inspiration of Scripture, p. 24.

⁷⁹ Stephen White, “The Question Box,” *Herald of Holiness*, Apr 20, 1960, p. 181; W. T. Purkiser, “The Answer Corner,” Nov 15, 1961, p. 758.

⁸⁰ W. T. Purkiser, ed., *Exploring Our Christian Faith* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1960), pp. 64, 66. Some of the contributors to *The Beacon Bible Commentary* (10 vols., ed. A. F. Harper, Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1964-69), a commentary I use often, seem quite enamored with neo-orthodox scholars by their frequent and approvingly quotes.

⁸¹ Purkiser, *Exploring Our Christian Faith*, p. 63.

error.... It is perverse to insist that the Bible conform to modern attitudes and thought patterns.⁸²

The first major denominational history of the Nazarenes came in 1962 with *Called unto Holiness* by the distinguished historian Timothy L. Smith. Though admitting that many of the early Nazarenes held to a high view of inspiration, Smith views such persons as inordinately infected by Calvinistic fundamentalism. Inerrancy is viewed as an alien doctrine in Nazarene circles. He speaks of “Wesleyan fundamentalism” and seems to view much of Nazarene history as an attempt to rid itself of old, narrow views.⁸³ He blames the Laymen’s Holiness Association, one of the many disparate holiness groups which joined the Nazarenes in the early days, for bringing their more rural fundamentalism into the fledgling denomination and thereby infecting much of the denomination.⁸⁴ J. G. Morrison, a prominent Methodist who had joined the Nazarenes, “repeatedly explained that Wesleyans stood for *both* an inspired Bible and salvation from all sin, whereas other fundamentalists, nurtured chiefly in Baptist and Presbyterian traditions, gave little or no place to the doctrine of entire sanctification....On issues other than the doctrine of holiness, however, the fundamentalist outlook made steady progress among Nazarenes.”⁸⁵ Smith clearly believed that affirmation of biblical inerrancy was an alien doctrine for Nazarenes and was never and should never be adopted by Wesleyan-Arminians.

Wesleyanism and Inerrancy Incompatible: The 1970s

The 1970s found still more Nazarene scholars not only being silent about inerrancy, but in vocalizing their denial of biblical inerrancy. In 1978 *Herald* editor W. E. McCumber stated that the Nazarene Articles of Faith are committed to “all things necessary to our salvation” but left untouched the question of whether Scripture is inerrant on all other matters, such as history or science. “Among evangelical and holiness scholars, opinion has always been divided on the meaning and extent of inerrancy.” He observed that such affirmation of Scripture’s authority as 2 Timothy 3:14-15 and John 10:35 relate only to extant manuscripts and not to the “original, indefectible manuscripts not longer extant.”⁸⁶

One of my favorite professors at Nazarene Seminary was the outstanding church historian Paul Bassett. Dr. Bassett made church history come alive. I loved his teaching style, his breadth of knowledge and his love for God. So it is disappointing that in a definitive article entitled “The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement, Bassett says early Nazarenes who were committed to inerrancy were infected with non-Wesleyan fundamentalist “leavening.”⁸⁷ He claims that such inerrantists as J. B. Chapman were by no means speaking for “a certain significant leadership” of the Church of the Nazarene.⁸⁸

⁸² Ibid., p. 75.

⁸³ Timothy L. Smith, *Called Unto Holiness* (Kansas, City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962), pp. 306-310. Cf. 293, for a discussion of issues associated with fundamentalism which caused anxiety within the denomination.

⁸⁴ Smith 315-316.

⁸⁵ Smith 316.

⁸⁶ W. E. McCumber, “The Answer Corner,” *Herald of Holiness*, Dec 15, 1978, p. 31.

⁸⁷ Paul Bassett, “The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement: 1914-1940, The Church of the Nazarene: A Case Study” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Vol. 13, Spring 1978), 65-91.

⁸⁸ Bassett pp. 76-81.

After finding hundreds of references to the widespread controversy over biblical authority and inspiration from many leaders in the Nazarene archives, it is shocking to hear Bassett claim that “Methodism and the holiness movement did not concern themselves more than very minimally with the issues being raised by the so-called ‘higher criticism’ in the period 1870-1914.”⁸⁹ In the face of the innumerable affirmations of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible throughout the history of Wesleyanism in general and Nazarenes in particular, Bassett asserts that the rationale for inserting an affirmation of the full inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible into the Nazarene creed in 1928 was found nowhere but “in the broader context of American Protestant wars over the Bible.”⁹⁰ He waves aside the hundreds of clear and unequivocal affirmations of biblical inerrancy in early Nazarene publications. He points out that “informed sources” claimed that Wiley wrote the new affirmations of plenary inspiration, but Bassett is baffled. “Certainly, the phrase ‘plenary inspiration’ is his—not originally of course but as it commends itself to the doctrines of Wiley’s denomination. But there is much room to doubt that the word ‘inerrantly’ is his as well.” Bassett claims that Wiley felt that in Wiley’s theology, the term “‘inerrance’ seems to be deliberately avoided as saying both too little and too much.”⁹¹ Bassett offers no evidence for this, except to assert, “The word itself [inerrance] had, by 1928, become one of the shibboleths of Fundamentalism, and much more an emotional than a cognitive term.”⁹²

Bassett’s *Wesleyan Theological Journal* article asserts that Wiley actually did not believe in inerrancy. Bassett claims that because of the “fundamentalist leavening” of the church, Wiley “came in on cat’s paws, and a generation or two of holiness preachers thought he was basically a Fundamentalist. The contrast between his position and the ‘received’ position of the great majority was not perceived, though the clues are ample and Wiley does not dissemble.”⁹³ Bassett cites many passages from *Christian Theology* in which he seeks to show how Wiley maintained the supremacy of Christ and the proper relationship of the personal Word and the written Word.⁹⁴ Interestingly enough, none of the passages in which Wiley clearly affirms inerrancy is quoted or referred to. Bassett argues mostly from silence or from inference.

Part of the evidence Bassett offers to show that Wiley rejected Fundamentalism is the fact that during his tenure as *Herald* editor 1928-1936 there are almost no editorials on the struggle over inerrancy.⁹⁵ Bassett concludes his article thus: “Fundamentalism could not leaven the whole lump. But it has continued to affect the Church of the Nazarene, especially as it has become more and more clear that she has inherited two basically incompatible points of view; not on some peripheral item, but with regard to the central issue of spiritual-theological authority.”⁹⁶

In an earlier 1973 article in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* Bassett pled for a response from the conservative Wesleyan movement to secular humanism. But he made sure to remind his readers that Wesleyanism got saddled with a Fundamentalist view of Scripture “that is quite out

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 74

⁹¹ Bassett p. 74.

⁹² Bassett p. 74.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 65.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 66-67, 82-85.

⁹⁵ Bassett p. 79.

⁹⁶ Bassett p. 85.

of place in Wesleyanism” because it, Bassett claimed, separates “the doctrines of biblical authority and inspiration from Christology.”⁹⁷

Bassett granted, “It is true, of course, that Wesley seems on many occasions to sound as if he believed the authority of Scripture to be impositional.”⁹⁸ But he goes on to assert that really Wesley grounded his belief in the authority of Scripture in experience. In other words “the ultimate authority is that of the Living Word **by way of** the written Word.” Bassett is heading toward his central point that “the methodological linchpin for both conservative Wesleyan theology and secular humanism is the authority of experience.”⁹⁹

In yet another *Wesleyan Theological Journal* article in 1983, Bassett is even more direct in his disavowal of inerrancy. His article, entitled “The Holiness Movement and the Protestant Principle,” insists that the Holiness movement must certainly be Protestant. But he wastes no time in defining inspiration differently than the historic Protestant view.

But the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* makes no idol of the Bible...Scripture is not ultimate as a written document though it is the ultimate written document. It is the ultimate vehicle of truth, but it is not the ultimate truth itself....the reliability of Scripture is understood not to lie in its mere words....Scripture speaks savingly only as the Spirit enlivens it and witnesses to its truth. Apart from this witness of the Spirit, it is only another religious book.¹⁰⁰

Bassett quotes some of Wesley’s affirmations of inerrancy, beginning the sentence with this telling introduction, “In language typical of his time,...” Now, I greatly admire Bassett as a servant of Jesus, but I really see this as Bassett’s way of saying, “Don’t accept the clear and unequivocal meaning of Wesley’s affirmations of inerrancy. They must be deconstructed.” So after quoting Wesley, Bassett goes on to explain, “Yet, for all that, it is unwise to count him among the forebears of Fundamentalism.” He then cites some of Wesley’s comments on the difficulties in Scripture, the normal challenges with which most informed inerrantists grapple. He then claims, “Wesley is farthest from the Fundamentalist understanding when he insists on the exercise of the venerable notion of the *testimonium Spiritus sancti* as a hermeneutical *sine qua non*.”

Bassett says, “for Wesley, the revelation is, strictly speaking, Christ, not ideas nor ideals, not even Scripture. To the true Revelation, Christ, Scripture is attuned. From this Revelation, Scripture takes its authority. There could be Christ without Scripture; there could be no authoritative Scripture without Christ.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Paul M. Bassett, “Conservative Wesleyan Theology and the Challenge of Humanism,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Vol 8, Spring 1973), 74-75.

⁹⁸ Bassett 1973, p. 75. For a study on Wesley’s view of Scripture, cf. Daryl McCarthy, “Wesleyan Founders and Scripture: John Wesley, Adam Clarke and Richard Watson.” (unpublished, 2001).

⁹⁹ Bassett 1973, p. 75-76.

¹⁰⁰ Bassett, “The Holiness Movement and the Protestant Principle” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* Vol. 18, No. 1 (Spring 1983), 9.

¹⁰¹ Bassett 1983, 14.

Inerrancy With Limits: The 1980s

A brave but lone voice seeking a return to the historic Nazarene position came in 1980 with the publication of noted Nazarene theologian Richard S. Taylor's *Biblical Authority and the Christian Faith*. Taylor writes with a different outlook and a fresh approach to the problem of biblical inspiration. He freely criticizes (in a way few leading Nazarene scholars had done for years) neo-orthodox theologians and their tenets. He just as freely and without apology quotes non-Wesleyan inerrantists.¹⁰² He charges that destructive higher criticism destroys the authority of the Bible and the teaching of its tenets renders men "unfit to serve the Savior," in the words of William Beck. He warns against "excessive exposure" to critics such as Bultmann.¹⁰³

Taylor emphasized the primacy of Scripture. "The ultimate authority of God himself is necessarily in the Bible."¹⁰⁴ Thus the issue of infallibility becomes most crucial. Is the Bible "unfailing and unerring in disclosing God's self-revelation to man?" (Taylor believed it is "semantically difficult" to distinguish infallibility and inerrancy).¹⁰⁵ Taylor identifies three types of inerrancy: (1) salvation inerrancy holds to inerrancy on matters of faith only (Taylor says this is where "most neoorthodox and some neoevangelicals" fit), (2) total inerrancy holds that "to concede any error at all of any kind is fatal to the authority of the whole" (e.g., Harold Lindsell and John Wesley), and (3) qualified inerrancy holds to inerrancy in all salvation matters, as well as cosmology and anthropology, but not necessarily in "every chronological, numerical, and grammatical detail."¹⁰⁶ Taylor asserted that this is the position of Rene Pache and the Lausanne Covenant and he calls it "a qualified inerrancy." Again, after all the years of distancing themselves from non-Wesleyans, it is significant that Taylor readily and approvingly cited non-Wesleyan inerrantists, including the Lausanne Covenant which affirms inerrancy for the Bible "in all that it affirms" and Abraham Kuyper.¹⁰⁷

Taylor points out that the 1928 revision of the Nazarene creedal statement on Scripture was attributed to Wiley. Later generations took the words, "inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation" as limiting inerrancy to matters of faith and practice. But Taylor asserts that, "According to Paul Culbertson [another Nazarene leader] Wiley explained to him that he deliberately articulated a moderate statement because he wanted 'to leave elbow room in there.'"¹⁰⁸ Taylor explains in a footnote, "The objective was not to limit inerrancy but to exclude tradition" (as in Catholic theology) from being a determining

¹⁰² Richard S. Taylor, *Biblical Authority and the Christian Faith* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1980). He criticizes the purely existential view of biblical authority (p. 39), i.e., the view that the Bible is merely a record of revelation, e. g., John Baillie and James Barr (p. 40). He quotes C. S. Lewis's criticism of Bultmann's form criticism (p. 42). He advises caution by evangelicals in using Oscar Cullman's term *Heilsgeschichte* since it "allows for a deviation between the facts of real history" and the biblical account (p. 65). Taylor charges that Paul Jewett's hermeneutics in *Man as Male and Female* is dangerous in that it divides the organic unity of the Bible (p. 76). Some of the well-known non-Wesleyan inerrantist scholars he approvingly quotes include the following: Carl F. H. Henry (p. 20), John Gerstner's article in the International Council for Biblical Inerrancy volume, *The Foundation of Biblical Authority* (pp. 30, 33, 58), Grant Osborne (p. 43), Francis Schaeffer (p. 52), Harold Lindsell (p. 62), R. C. Sproul (p. 70), and J. I. Packer (p. 75).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-92.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Taylor pg. 34-34.

authority of dogma.¹⁰⁹ Once the terms *plenary* and *inspired* are understood in their historical meaning, and especially as used by the early Nazarenes, Taylor declares, “Obviously, therefore, the total statement limits the size of the ‘elbow.’ The claim of plenary inspiration would rule out serious error of any kind.” Thus the statement leaves only room for debate about whether there are “inconsequential” errors and whether there were any in the original autographs.¹¹⁰ Taylor claims that “Wiley himself intended that the inerrancy which is affirmed by taken very seriously, as a careful reading of his *Christian Theology* will show.” He then cites several of Wiley’s clear affirmations of inerrancy.¹¹¹

Taylor readily grants that “the whole question about ‘inconsequential error’ remains debatable.”¹¹² He made no claim that he had resolved the questions as to “whether (1) there is such a thing as *inconsequential* error, and (2) whether indeed such inconsequential errors were in the original autographs.” Some of the variations in the gospel accounts might fit in the category of “error.”¹¹³ We do know that “every part of the Bible is divine and every part is human.” The only way to reconcile that with the possibility of errors is “to say that the Holy Spirit (and He alone) would know whether a particular error was truly inconsequential, and therefore would permit it.”

But Taylor assures the reader that he is definitely “not assuming that such error existed in the autographs.”¹¹⁴ He insists that “Even if some room for debate about inconsequential error were legitimate, this latitude does not extend to what by any legitimate criteria would be *major* error.” Major errors, according to Taylor would be the historicity of Adam and Eve, the Fall, the Virgin Birth, the sayings of Jesus and other teachings of Scripture. This is important, because

If the Bible on these matters is wrong, such error would undermine the very foundations of biblical authority. The Bible’s obvious assumption of the factualness of these accounts is so clearly in the very warp and woof of the literature, whether history, poetry, or prophecy, that to weed these elements out—to “demythologize” thoroughly—would leave little Bible left. The remainder would be a feeble reed of support for historic Christianity.¹¹⁵

I believe Taylor’s position on “inconsequential errors,” especially in light of the qualifying phrase he cites in his declaration of biblical inerrancy, “in all that it affirms,” is quite compatible with the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. Most signers of the Chicago statement believed that inerrancy is compatible with phenomenalist language, a lack of historical precision, approximate citations of the Old Testament by New Testament authors, free renderings of the words of Jesus, and a lack of comprehensiveness of historical accounts.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ Taylor p. 35.

¹¹⁰ Taylor p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37

¹¹⁶ Cf. Paul Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), pp. 299-302.

The Chicago Statement itself declares, “We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of metrical, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.”¹¹⁷ In another section, the Chicago Statement also states, “Since God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired and to maintain the need of textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission.”¹¹⁸ So it is refreshing to hear a distinguished modern Nazarene scholar reaffirming such a high view of Scripture, especially in the face of broad rejection of the doctrine by his Nazarene colleagues.

Another of my favorite Nazarene Seminary professors, Kenneth Grider weighed in on the issue with an article in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* in 1984. Grider and I enjoyed good discussions on the issue of Scripture. As any student of his could anticipate, he was always most gracious and encouraged me to keep writing, even though most of what he read of my writing had to do with this issue about which he and I disagreed. But he personified the irenic spirit that followers of Jesus should exhibit, even when disagreeing about central issues, such as the authority of Scripture.

In his 1984 *Wesleyan Theological Journal* article Grider explains why he was glad that just five years into its history, he had helped the Wesleyan Theological Society eliminate the requirement that members affirm biblical inerrancy, a requirement many of them had carried over from their membership with the Evangelical Theological Society.¹¹⁹ But he quickly assures the reader, “I have never taught that there were errors in the autographs. I teach only that there might have been, and that it would not matter greatly to faith and practice if there had been certain inconsequential errors in such areas as mathematics or geography.”¹²⁰ He dubs his position an “agnostic-like kind of view.”¹²¹

Grider applauded the “historical sleuthing” of Fuller Seminary professor Jack Rogers in his debunking of inerrancy as a historic teaching of the church. He claims that Harold Lindsell’s, Francis Schaeffer’s and Norman Geisler’s views are really a departure from the historic teaching of the church, not Rogers¹²² But again, he reassures us that he himself is not admitting “any errors of any kind in the autographs” and that he is “non-committal about any possible non-faith, non-practice errors in those non-extant manuscripts.” But “I hold, as a faith confidence which I cannot altogether support, that the autographs would not have contained errors on doctrine and practice matters—if I am allowed to interpret with wide-brush strokes the manuscripts which we do possess.”¹²³

¹¹⁷ “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” Article XIII, International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1978.

¹¹⁸ Chicago Statement, Exposition, section E.

¹¹⁹ J. Kenneth Grider, “Wesleyanism and the Inerrancy Issue,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19:2 (Fall 1984), 52.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 53

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

Grider was confident that the Holy Spirit's inspiration would protect the writers from any significant errors. However, he goes on to present several reasons why he does not believe that errors on such matters as math, science, or geography would be of any consequence. He argues that the Hebrew and Greek languages, the necessity of supplying Hebrew consonants, the lack of punctuation and the very process of translating, all militate against "total accuracy."¹²⁴ He claims that "Scripture itself is not interested in inerrancy. It makes a claim for inspiration, but not for inerrancy—at least, not for total inerrancy." He cites 2 Timothy 3:16 as his support.¹²⁵

His final argument against total inerrancy is that "we would be expressing a 'higher' view of Scripture than the church usually expresses on Christ our God-Man Savior." While clearly Christ was sinless, "Scripture does not declare outright that Christ never did err in any way whatever." Grider is quick to add, "I myself would not state that He erred in any way." But Jesus might have in some simple way, such as looking for Joseph in the shop when he was elsewhere.¹²⁶

Then Grider tries to convince the reader that Wesley did not believe in "total inerrancy." In spite of Wesley's statement that "Nay, if there be any 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...." Grider claims "even this statement is not a clear teaching of total inerrancy." The parallelism with which Wesley expresses his position, viz., making a "mistake" synonymous with "falsehood," is evidence that therefore Wesley "seems to be talking about consequential matters...." Grider goes on to exegete several other statements by Wesley deconstructing them to show Wesley was not an inerrantist. He then does the same for Adam Clarke.¹²⁷

He asserts that H. Orton Wiley's position is very similar to his. Grider, who studied under and later taught with Wiley as Pasadena College, says, "We discussed specifically the matter of the Bible's total inerrancy, and he told me clearly that he did not hold to that position. One reason I remember this so clearly is because, at that time, I myself tended toward the total inerrancy view." Later Grider searched through Wiley's *Christian Theology* and concluded, "I am confident that Wiley nowhere taught total inerrancy."¹²⁸ He insists that Wiley only believed in the trustworthiness of Scripture on matters of faith and practice, just as he had worded the change in the Articles of Faith in 1928.¹²⁹

When Grider discusses A. M. Hills' position, he seems to have noted the confusing amalgamation of Hills' earlier and later positions because he uses terms such as, "Sometimes, it seems that Hills means..." and "At other times, though..."¹³⁰ At the end though Grider seems amazed that Hills actually goes so far as to say "there were inconsequential errors and discrepancies in the autographs, and not just in the copies.... Hills might be the only major

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 54.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 55.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp. 57-58. In another paper, Grider said, Christ is the aim of Scripture, not "wooden, indifferent matters." Grider, "The Biblical Inerrancy Issue"(n.d.), pp. 1-4.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 56-58.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 58.

¹²⁹ A similar interpretation is presented by Stanley Ingersol, "Strange Bedfellows: The Nazarenes and Fundamentalism," 40:2 (Fall 2005), 132-133.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 59.

Holiness Movement theologian to teach that there were unimportant errors in the autographs.” Grider then distances himself from this position. “I myself understand that there might have been inconsequential errors, not that there were.”¹³¹

Grider adds that the views of Richard S. Taylor, his colleague at the Nazarene Seminary, “are remarkably similar to my own.”¹³² He concludes with this appeal, “Let it be hoped that we will do our theological work with care, not accepting readily spillovers from the right wing of the larger segment of the evangelical camp: Calvinistic evangelicalism.”¹³³

I have always wished that my dear Professor Grider would have recognized that the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy adequately addressed most all of his concerns. I can’t help but think much of the time he was rebutting arguments for inerrancy that had been more than adequately clarified with the Chicago Statement. It seems to me that he was near to the parameters set forth in the more-carefully nuanced Chicago Statement than some of the carelessly-worded declarations of “total inerrancy” put forth by earnest but overzealous proponents of a total inerrancy and even, at times, of mechanical dictation.¹³⁴

Looking Back and Looking Forward

In summary, it is clear from their own words that early Nazarenes strongly affirmed a high view of Scripture, its inspiration, infallibility and inerrancy. To be sure, often this view was simple, unstudied and unsophisticated. But their affirmation came from the white heat of revival fires, transformed lives, and a passionate love for the living Word, Jesus. It seems both tragic and ironic that A. M. Hills who had such a positive influence in other ways, along with other Nazarene leaders in the 1930s and onwards, played such a significant role in changing the theological direction of the denomination.

My research only covers the period from the early 1900s up to the late 1980s. I hope I’m wrong, but it’s my impression from my reading and personal acquaintances that since the late 1980s the majority of Nazarene scholars have only become more vocal in denying the full authority of Scripture. They do this primarily by restricting its inerrancy to matters of faith and practice. This is doubly strange, first, because it is a rejection of the historic Wesleyan and Nazarene doctrine. For several years I attended a great Nazarene church, College Church in Olathe, Kansas. In addition I have spoken in and visited various Nazarene churches. As the saying goes, many of my best friends are Nazarenes. So I find it doubly strange because at least in my observation over the years, a significant percentage (I would say the vast majority) of Nazarene laypersons and pastors still affirm the inerrancy of Scripture, as long as it is carefully defined and not overstated.

¹³¹ Ibid. p. 59.

¹³² Ibid., p. 60.

¹³³ Ibid., 60. In an unpublished, undated paper Grider pointed out that though “some holiness scholars teach that the Bible autographs’ inerrancy extends to such matters as science and history...almost all Nazarene scholars hold the positive confidence that the autographs were inerrant on matters of doctrine and practice.”

¹³⁴ In class, Dr. Alvin Lawhead, one of my other professors at the Nazarene Theological Seminary, equated verbal plenary inspiration with mechanical dictation. It was disappointing that these astute scholars who were excellent professors sometimes resorted to caricatures of the historic high view of Scripture.

The most sobering issue is this. If history, especially the history of Methodism, is any indicator, in another generation or two, even the inerrancy of matters of faith and practice will likely be questioned by scholars, as well as by pastors and laypeople at the grassroots.

Let us hope and pray that in this generation—in the first decades of the twenty-first century—the deep and authentic commitment of Nazarene leaders, scholars, pastors and laypeople around the world will lead once again to a thoughtful and unequivocal affirmation of Scripture’s trustworthiness, indeed of its inerrancy, as the Written Word, testifying to the Living Word. The world needs the strong and robust witness of transformed living rooted in the authority of the Word from the Church of the Nazarene. The larger Church globally needs a challenge to holy living empowered by the Holy Spirit which can come from the Church of the Nazarene.

Afterword on June 1, 2020.

During the years since I wrote this article, the Church of the Nazarene has become even more direct and intentional in its disavowal of biblical inerrancy through its official statements. Even more alarming has been the increasingly strident and militant opposition to inerrancy which has been voiced by many individual leaders, especially by professors at Nazarene colleges with their appeals to open theism and to making the Church fully affirming of the LGBTQ agenda. I hope to update this article in order to document the sad developments of the Nazarene denomination’s further decline from biblical truth.