

“CHRISTIANIZING CHRISTIANITY:” THE HOLINESS MOVEMENT AS A CHURCH, *THE* CHURCH, OR NO CHURCH AT ALL?

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Just a year after the end of the American Civil War, a casual conversation between a northern Methodist minister and a wealthy northern Methodist laywoman led to a plan to pump new life into the “holiness revival.” This revival, emphasizing the spiritually “perfecting,” “fully sanctifying,” empowering, and “victoriously overcoming” possibilities of divine grace, had reached its apex on the very eve of the Civil War. Spreading to many American denominations (mainly in the North), the revival had inspired its true believers to hope that Christian perfection might carry America and its churches into a millennium of righteousness, justice, and peace.¹

Of course, the hoped-for “righteous millennium” had instead turned out to be a four year holocaust of vicious conflict, death and destruction on an appalling scale. Spiritual perfection, perfect love, “fully sanctifying grace” – these appeared to be hollow, even mocking concepts in the wake of the war. The “holiness revival” had been shattered, it seemed, along with everything else good and hopeful in the “divided” states of America.

Yet, Christians whose lives had been transformed by the gospel of Christian holiness in pre-war years were not prepared to give up quite so easily; they

¹ The standard account of the pre-war revival is of course Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1957). A more recent study, influenced by Smith’s work, that focuses on the connection between Christian perfection and “radical” political movements prior to the Civil War, especially abolitionism, is Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999). A general overview of the pre-war and post-war holiness movement is Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980).

longed to see the power of the pre-war revival rekindled. Thus it was that the Methodist minister, John A. Wood, and the wealthy Methodist laywoman, Mrs. Harriet Drake, traveling to a Pennsylvania Methodist camp meeting in the summer of 1866, chatted about the state of holiness preaching and teaching. The two were especially concerned that many Methodist camp meetings no longer gave special attention to the "doctrine and distinctive experience of entire sanctification." Together they decided that what were needed were camp meetings *especially* devoted to the promotion of Christian holiness. Mrs. Drake volunteered to contribute half the cost of such a "holiness camp meeting," should one be held.²

Drake's generous offer helped to galvanize those who shared her interest in reviving the "holiness revival." Within a year a group of ministers had made plans for a camp meeting especially for the promotion of Christian holiness. Announcements were quickly printed and distributed to churches and published in religious papers and magazines. There would be a special camp meeting of the "friends of holiness" at Vineland, Cumberland County, New Jersey. It would be open to "all, irrespective of denominational ties interested in the subject of the 'higher Christian life.'" It would be distinct from the usual camp meetings held by Methodists and other Protestants in that, "the *special* objects of this meeting will be to offer united and continued prayer for the revival of the work

² Cited in Delbert Roy Rose, *A Theology of Christian Experience: Interpreting the Historic Wesleyan Message* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1956), 36. This book provides an account of the development of the National Holiness Association (now Christian Holiness Partnership), an organization that was originally founded to sponsor and promote holiness camp meetings. See also Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 79-116 and Charles E. Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion: the Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1936* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1974), 16-78.

of holiness in the Church” and to “help any who would enter into this rest of faith and love.” The meeting would also aim to “strengthen the hands of those who feel themselves comparatively isolated in their profession of holiness.” And it would seek “the descent of the Spirit [of God] upon ourselves, the church, the nation, and the world.” All would be “with a view to increased usefulness in the churches of which we are members.”³

Even though somewhat quickly planned and hastily advertised, the meeting at Vineland found a ready response. Several thousand people attended, and the organizers declared it a success. It appeared that there was still a great interest in and yearning after Christian perfection. And it appeared that special camp meetings for the promotion of holiness just might be divinely blessed means of encouraging and responding to that interest. The organizers decided to form an ongoing committee to plan and conduct more holiness camp meetings – the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness. Although it is unlikely that anyone involved recognized it at the time, this decision had results that literally changed the course of the holiness movement in the years following 1867.⁴

³ From an insert with the heading “General Camp-Meeting” carried in *The Guide to Holiness*, July 1867. Eyewitness accounts of the Vineland camp meeting and several subsequent holiness camp meetings are contained in Alexander McLean and J.W. Eaton, editors, *Peniel, or Face to Face With God* (New York, NY: W.C. Palmer, Jr., Publisher, 1870) and George Hughes, *Days of Power in the Forest Temple: A Review of the Wonderful Work of God at Fourteen National Camp Meetings, from 1867-1872* (Boston, MA: John Bent and Company, 1873).

⁴ For an account of early events and leaders of the National Camp Meeting Association, see Kenneth O. Brown, *Inskip, McDonald, Fowler: “Wholly and Forever Thine,” Early Leadership in the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness* (Hazleton, PA: Holiness Archives, 1999).

Beginning with a very modest and restricted agenda – organizing and promoting one “general” (i.e., national) holiness camp meeting per year – the National Camp Meeting Association quickly expanded its efforts. One annual camp meeting soon became two, then three, then more. By 1871 the eastern United States-based National Camp Meeting Association was active as far west as the Pacific Coast, holding three of five “national camp meetings” that year in California.⁵ These camp meetings drew tens of thousands of participants. Many attendees testified to experiencing a mighty baptism with the Holy Ghost and to being perfected in love. It seemed that the flagging interest of Americans in the doctrine and experience of “full sanctification” was indeed being reignited. For some this brought back into view the millennium. One minister attending the third “national” holiness camp meeting at Round Lake, New York in 1869 exulted, “This meeting has rolled the world a hundred years toward the millennium! We are coming into Isaiah’s holy visions.”⁶

Multiple camp meetings and growing interest led to expanded activities on the part of the National Camp Meeting Association. Using the name the National Publishing Association for the Promotion of Holiness, it issued a holiness paper in 1869 called *The Christian Standard and Home Journal*. The editor was Rev. John S. Inskip of New York City, the president of the Association. This was followed in

⁵For these developments see McLean and Eaton, *Penuel: or Face to Face With God* and Hughes, *Days of Power in the Forest Temple*. Also see William McDonald and John E. Searles, *The Life of Rev. John S. Inskip* (Boston, MA: McDonald and Gill, 1885), 146-184.

⁶ McLean and Eaton, *Penuel: or Face to Face With God*, 381. It is interesting to note that the “millennial” theme is present – albeit in muted form – in the announcement of the first “national holiness camp meeting” at Vineland, NJ – where participants will make “supplication for the descent of the Spirit upon ourselves, the church, the nation, and the world” – see p. 3 above.

1870 by a second paper, *The Advocate of Christian Holiness*. Eventually the two were merged into one and renamed *The Christian Witness*. This publishing arm of the Association also published books and inexpensive holiness literature of all kinds.⁷ Somewhat later, following the growing American Protestant passion for “foreign missions” (the popular interdenominational Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions which sought “the evangelization of the world in this generation” was organized in 1876), the Association also formed the Missionary Society of the National Association for the Promotion of Holiness (later renamed the National Holiness Missionary Society) to support the work of missionaries committed to propagating Christian holiness abroad.⁸

The most significant development of all, however, in the constantly expanding activities of the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness after the Civil War was the formation of local and regional holiness associations. These were grass-roots organizations that began to sprout early in the 1870s. By 1880 or so they had become widespread throughout the United States, with their greatest strength being in the Midwest, South, and Southwest. Some were local in focus and had names like the South Providence Holiness Association of Providence, Rhode Island (organized in 1886). Others were regional in scope,

⁷ See Rose, *A Theology of Christian Experience*, 43-47; Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 22-23. It is worth noting that the name of the second publication, *The Advocate of Christian Holiness*, could be interpreted as “provocative” within the context of Episcopal Methodism. A number of regional papers published by both the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church South carried the name *The Christian Advocate*. The Association’s paper *could* be seen as implying that these papers of official Methodism were not sufficiently advocate Christian holiness.

⁸ This organization eventually became the World Gospel Mission (WGM). The history of the organization is recounted in William Walter Cary, *Story of the National Holiness Missionary Society* (Chicago, IL: National Holiness Missionary Society, 1940); Laura Trachsel, *Kindled Fires in Africa* (Marion, IN: World Gospel Mission, 1960); Laura Trachsel, *Kindled Fires in Asia* (Marion, IN: World Gospel Mission, 1960); Laura Trachsel, *Kindled Fires in Latin America* (Marion, IN: World Gospel Mission, 1961).

with names like the Western Holiness Association of Illinois (organized in 1872), or the Southwestern Holiness Association (representing parts of Missouri and Kansas and organized in 1879). All such groups were interdenominational, although the largest percentage of members was almost always Methodist.

These holiness associations served several purposes. One was to aid the National Camp Meeting Association in its efforts to promote holiness evangelism through holiness camp meetings. The local and regional associations usually began with a handful of people who organized to bring holiness camp meetings to their communities. Another purpose was to provide fellowship and a strong sense of identity for "holiness folks" who might find little support for their commitment to the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification in their local congregations. This concern had been hinted at in the advertising for the first "national" holiness camp meeting in 1867: the meeting intended "to strengthen the hands of those who feel themselves comparatively isolated in their profession of holiness."

Another purpose of the holiness associations was to give their members opportunities for Christian service in an environment where the Wesleyan-Holiness understanding of Christian perfection was honored and explicitly proclaimed. Very often this kind of service took the form of "compassionate ministry" or holiness social work. In the tradition of Phoebe Palmer, and John Wesley before her, many holiness believers sought out prostitutes, orphans, prisoners, the unemployed, and other oppressed and powerless people in order

to offer them a gospel of both material aid and spiritual transformation. Through city "rescue missions," orphanages, "rescue homes," prison visitation, and other means, Christians supportive of the holiness movement attempted to give "perfect love" practical expression.

Taken together, all these developments after 1867 led to a national, and even to some extent international, network of "holiness" associations, organizations, and ministries. Prior to the Civil War, the holiness movement had had no organizational structure at all. It had been a broad movement that had touched many American churches, but it had mostly flowed within the existing channels of the various denominations. The formation of the National Camp Meeting Association changed that. The Association gave an organizational focus to the movement that it had never had before; it came to stand at the center of an extensive web of "organized holiness" institutions that conducted evangelistic work of various kinds (including missionary work overseas), published religious literature, carried on "compassionate ministries," and even sponsored holiness schools.⁹

These various arms of "organized holiness" gave a breadth and visibility to the holiness movement that it had not had before. They also drew Christians who were committed to the doctrine of Christian perfection as it was taught in the movement into small bodies of believers that were separate and distinct from any denomination. These holiness associations did not intend to be "churches,"

⁹ For an account of the proliferation of local and regional holiness associations and "bands" see Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 47-77.

but their local activities (which sometimes included forms of public worship) together with their obvious connection to a larger national body (the National Camp Meeting Association) gave them the strong *appearance* of being churches. At the very least they seemed to be “churches-in-the-making.” And as such, they presented a challenge to the existing denominations.

Methodists in particular, both North and South (since the largest percentage of members of most holiness associations were Methodist), began to react strongly to the rapid spread of “organized holiness” after the Civil War. Daniel Whedon, editor of the respected journal, *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, charged in 1878 that, “The holiness association, the holiness periodical, the holiness prayer-meeting, the holiness preacher, are all modern novelties. They are not Wesleyan. We believe that a living Wesley would never admit them into the Methodist system.”¹⁰ W.D. Kirkland, editor of the *Southern Christian Advocate* declared that, “No self-constituted and irresponsible ‘association’ with its many objectionable features, must be allowed to stand forth before the world as the only, or even as the chief, exponent of holiness”¹¹ And *The Christian Advocate and Journal*, the official voice of Northern Methodism, made the point so clear that no one could miss it. In an editorial in 1875, after mentioning and criticizing some of the activities of the National Camp Meeting Association, the *Advocate* maintained that the Association (and presumably its local and regional partners) is “an irresponsible agency, the outcome of which will be another and

¹⁰ Quoted in John L. Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 139.

¹¹ Quoted in Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism*, 139.

mischievous secession."¹² This was perhaps self-fulfilling prophecy. Within five years independent holiness churches were indeed forming, drawing many Methodists into their ranks.

By the final two decades of the nineteenth century, both holiness believers and those who opposed the "special means" of "organized holiness" could see the handwriting on the wall. Things were moving toward a decisive culmination. The "Church Question" had to be faced head-on. Would "holiness people" remain loyal members of their denominations and yield to denominational authority – which they believed by this time to be increasingly hostile to them – or would they leave their denominations in order to form independent holiness churches?¹³

The leaders of the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness generally opposed "come-outism," as the movement away from the established denominations was called. They urged believers in entire sanctification and Christian perfection to remain in their denominations and to work within them to promote holiness teaching and general spiritual vitality. The National Association leaders intended for the National Association and the local

¹²Cited in Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 177. The writer no doubt was referring to several earlier schisms in American Methodism, including the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church (1830), the Wesleyan Methodist Church (1843), and the Free Methodist Church (1860). Methodism had also divided along regional lines prior to the Civil War with southern Methodists forming the Methodist Episcopal Church South in 1845. In addition the church had experienced the loss of African-American members through the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1816) and the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Zion (1821). The doctrine of Christian Perfection had not been the major issue in any of these divisions, although it did play some role in the formation of the Wesleyan and Free Methodist Churches.

¹³ The term is used by Timothy L. Smith in *Called Unto Holiness, the Story of the Nazarenes: the Formative Years* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962). See chapter II, "The Church Question, 1880-1900," 27-53.

and regional holiness associations to be interdenominational, and to supplement – not duplicate or replace – the work of the existing churches. They vigorously denied that the network of holiness associations and ministries was, or should become a launching pad for an independent holiness church, or churches.

Nevertheless, at the grass-roots level of the holiness movement, in the growing number of small bands, missions, and holiness associations, support for “come-outism” was growing. More and more holiness believers were concluding that God intended the holiness movement to have its primary home outside the existing denominations.

The issue of “come-outism” hung darkly over a series of national holiness conventions that were held during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ In these conventions National Association leaders tried to avoid discussion of come-outism and to discourage the growing come-outer tide, while at the same time encouraging those believers that had become supporters of “organized holiness” to “stay the course” in their denominations even in the face of growing opposition. This was a losing battle, however. This was clear by the time the last national holiness convention met in 1901. By then at least a dozen separate independent groups of churches and religious associations with entire

¹⁴ See *Proceedings of Holiness Conferences Held at Cincinnati, November 26th, 1877, and at New York, December 17th, 1877* (Philadelphia, PA: National Publishing Association for the Promotion of Holiness, 1878); S.B. Shaw, editor, *Proceedings of the General Holiness Assembly Held in the Park Ave. M.E. Church in Chicago, May 20-26, 1885* (Grand Rapids, MI: S.B. Shaw, 1885); S.B. Shaw, editor, *Echoes of the General Holiness Assembly Held in Chicago, May 3-13, 1901* (Chicago, IL: S.B. Shaw, 1901).

sanctification as their distinguishing doctrine had been formed. A significant exodus of holiness believers from the American churches was now in full swing.¹⁵

“COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST, AND BE SEPARATE, SAYS THE LORD”

The exodus of holiness “come-outers” from the American denominations was by no means a carefully orchestrated, coherent movement. It was in fact, anything *but* this. Individuals and groups of people made the fateful decision to abandon their spiritual homes and join in the formation of new independent holiness churches for a variety of reasons. And, they held to a variety of ideas about what it was that they were doing; they entertained different ideas about the nature of the Church and the meaning of the “holiness movement.” And, we must not forget that a sizeable group of fervent supporters of “organized holiness” decided to stay right where they were -- they refused to be budged by the “come-outer” tide.

While it is well beyond the scope of this present study to examine every variety of “come-outism” and to probe the consciences of all “holiness people” that “stayed put” in their denominational homes, it is possible to uncover and analyze some central theological convictions and practical considerations that influenced how “holiness people” responded to the “Church Question.” In the rest of this paper we will seek to do just this.

¹⁵ Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism*, 148-149 lists ten groups, but his list is incomplete. It does not, for example, list D.S. Warner’s Church of God, or similar Restoration groups that claimed not to be “churches” or denominations at all, but were nevertheless independent holiness religious bodies.

More than forty years ago now, Sidney E. Mead published his classic collection of essays, *The Lively Experiment: the Shaping of Christianity in America*.¹⁶ In the very first essay, "The American People: Their Space, Time, and Religion," Mead reflected on, among other things, the profound psychic toll taken on European-Americans in the process of "subduing" a continent. Looking below the surface of American pioneer "hero" mythology, Mead touched on the fears, reluctance, and regret that dogged at least some of those caught up in the great American westward migration. He then suggested that we might divide the "pioneers" into three separate categories, which he calls: the "eager beavers" (doers, lusty extroverts, largely without nostalgia for the home left behind); the "reluctant pioneers" (swept on with the stream, dragging feet and eyes turned back toward home); and the "settlers" (followed on the heels of the "eager beavers", the true builders and stabilizers).¹⁷ Although our topic is a very different one from Mead's, I would like to suggest that these same categories might be helpful in understanding how "holiness people" dealt with the "Church Question" at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

THE "EAGER BEAVERS"

The first independent (i.e., "come-outer") holiness "church" or religious body to emerge from the holiness movement was organized in 1881. This was the

¹⁶ Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: the Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1963).

¹⁷ Mead, *The Lively Experiment*, 1-15.

Church of God (now Church of God, Anderson, Indiana), founded by Daniel Sidney Warner (1842-1925). The Church of God formed less than fifteen years after the establishment of the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness had initiated "organized holiness." Warner's group was followed in a few years (1883) by a similar group, also using the Church of God name (Church of God, Holiness), and known as well as the "Independent Holiness People."

These first "independent" holiness bodies were on the cusp of the "come-outer" movement. They led the way, showed that "independency" could work, and absorbed the heat of opposition from those both outside and within the holiness movement who were distressed about its increasingly "sectarian" direction. In addition, these earliest independent "come-outer" groups espoused a "Restorationist" ecclesiology that enabled them to separate from the established denominations with little regret, and to zealously go about the task of "setting in order" congregations of true "New Testament believers." Thus the Church of God and "Independent Holiness" people served as the "eager beavers" among holiness come-outers.

The story of Warner's Church of God movement is quite well known.¹⁸ The story of the Church of God (Holiness)/"Independent Holiness People" is perhaps less well known. This latter group was a direct outgrowth of one of the many Midwestern holiness associations that formed after the Civil War. This was the

¹⁸ See John W.V. Smith, *Quest for Holiness and Unity: A Centennial History of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1980) and Barry Callen, *It's God's Church!: The Life and Legacy of Daniel Warner* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1995).

Southwestern Holiness Association, founded in 1879 at Bismark Grove (near Lawrence), Kansas, and active in eastern Kansas and western Missouri. In 1882 six of the leading ministers of this Association decided to withdraw from their denominations (five were ministers in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and one was a Congregationalist). The next year several small groups of holiness believers affiliated with the Association began "setting in order" independent congregations that they were convinced faithfully duplicated (in contrast to those of the existing denominations) the New Testament pattern for the "true Church." Controversial in the Association at first, this "Restorationist" ecclesiology – which became known as the "One New Testament Church Idea" -- eventually carried the day. It led to the dismantling of the Southwestern Holiness Association and to the creation of the Church of God (Holiness).¹⁹ Thus, the "Independent Holiness People" of Missouri and Kansas quickly adopted the same sort of "Restorationist" or "primitivist" understanding of the Church that had led Daniel Sidney Warner and his followers into independence.²⁰

¹⁹ See Arthur M. Kiergan, *Historical Sketches of the Revival of True Holiness and Local Church Polity, 1865-1916* (Overland Park, KS: Board of Publication of the *Church Advocate and Good Way*, 1972); Clarence Eugene Cowen, *A History of the Church of God (Holiness)* (Overland Park, KS: Herald and Banner Press, 1949).

²⁰ There are many books that examine the Restorationist Movement (sometimes also called Christian "Primitivism") in the United States. Among them are Richard T. Hughes, editor, *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988) and Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Also see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), which analyzes several of the elements in Restorationist or Primitivist thought and practice. For the wedding of Restorationist and Holiness ideals, see Melvin E. Dieter, "Primitivism in the Holiness Tradition," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 30, no. 1 (Spring 1995), 78-91; Steven Ware, "Restorationism in the Holiness Movement, Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 34, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 200-219.

The chief theologian of the “One New Testament Church Idea” among the “Independent Holiness People”/Church of God (Holiness) was John Petit Brooks (1826-1915). Brooks was a minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church for thirty years (1850-1880) and a part of the Church of God (Holiness) movement and its antecedent groups for the last thirty years of his life (1885-1915).²¹ Brooks was an influential figure in the Midwestern holiness movement, editing a widely-circulated holiness paper, *The Banner of Holiness*, for twelve years, and serving as one of the chief organizers of three national holiness conventions between 1877 and 1885. However, during this time, Brooks’ ideas about the nature of the Church and the meaning of the holiness movement were gradually growing more “radical,” and he was relieved of his editorial duties at *The Banner* in 1883. He soon moved from Bloomington, Illinois to Mound City, Missouri, where he became active in the emerging Church of God (Holiness) and edited several of its official publications.

In 1891 Brooks published a full statement of his ecclesiology, *The Divine Church: A Treatise on the Origin, Constitution, Order, and Ordinances of the Church; Being a Vindication of the New Testament Ecclesia, and An Exposure of the Anti-Scriptural Character of the Modern Church of Sect*.²² In this book he set out in detail the “One New Testament Church Idea” that had inspired the earliest independent holiness groups to “come out” from the established denominations.

²¹ On Brooks see J. Prescott Johnson, *John Petit Brooks* (Unpublished manuscript, 2001) and “John Petit Brooks,” in William C. Kostlevy, editor, *Historical Dictionary of the Holiness Movement* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 32-33.

²² John Petit Brooks, *The Divine Church: A Treatise on the Origin, Constitution, Order, and Ordinances of the Church; Being a Vindication of the New Testament Ecclesia, and An Exposure of the Anti-Scriptural Character of the Modern Church of Sect* (Columbia, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1891).

Just how Brooks had come to this position is not clear. His thirty years of Methodist ministry were all in central and southern Illinois, which was fertile ground for the Restorationist Disciples of Christ and “Christian” movements. And of course, Daniel Warner was preaching “Restorationist” ideas among holiness people in nearby Indiana.²³ Also, it is possible that Brooks may have been influenced by the founder of the British Plymouth Brethren movement, John Nelson Darby (1800-1802). Darby toured the United States with considerable fanfare on seven occasions between 1859 and 1874, denouncing the corruption of the “organized” churches (or “sects” as he called them) and calling for true Christians to separate from them.²⁴ Then, too, one cannot discount the latent “Primitivist” impulse that lurks in many American denominations, including Methodist bodies, and which can and does surface from time to time.²⁵

However Brooks came to his understanding of the Church, one can discern the direction of his thought quite clearly by 1877 in an address that he gave in the first national holiness conventions held that year. The address was entitled, “What Are the Chief Hindrances to the Progress of the Work of Sanctification Among Believers?”²⁶ In answering his question, Brooks identified “hindrances”

²³ Warner had embraced “Primitivist” ideas of the Church while a minister of the General Eldership of the Churches of God of North America (Winebrennerian), a Restorationist body formed by a group of German Reformed ministers in 1830.

²⁴ See Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Most American Protestants dismissed Darby’s ecclesiology (although it does influence the “separatist” Fundamentalist movement in the early 20th century). However, many embraced his distinctive “dispensationalist” eschatology, which became a central theme in Fundamentalist and “Evangelical” Protestant circles.

²⁵ Hughes, editor, *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* and Hughes and Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America* document and analyze this in some detail.

²⁶ In *Proceedings of Holiness Conferences Held at Cincinnati, November 26th, 1877 and at New York, December 17th, 1877* (New York, NY: National Publishing Association for the Promotion of Holiness,

both internal to the holiness movement itself as well as external to the movement. He thought that fundamental to the “external” hindrances to the progress of the work of sanctification among believers was “a weakened and deteriorated Christianity” in the United States.²⁷ The main reason holiness teaching was failing to make significant headway in the major denominations is that, “Carnal preachers stand in carnal pulpits, and preach carnal sermons to carnal hearers, who sit with carnal ease to hear, and then go out with carnal desires and carnal purposes to live a carnal life.”²⁸ Brooks charged that “This carnal spirit *controls* in the churches” of America.²⁹

One of the main sources of the “carnal spirit” of the American denominations, Brooks charged, is a “rigid and extreme denominationalism” that promotes rivalry among the denominations, and a competitiveness that kills authentic spirituality.

The sect, to survive, must not only live, but *grow*. And if it rise to a controlling rank and prestige, it must in its competitive relation to other living and growing sects, not only grow, but *outgrow*. With the spirit of rivalry that competitive struggle begets, there comes the danger of a lessened devotion, and in the end, a compromised spirituality.³⁰

1878), reprinted in Donald W. Dayton, editor, “*The Higher Christian Life: Sources for the Study of the Holiness, Pentecostal, and Keswick Movements* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1985), 85-102. It is worth noting that Brooks begins his address by contrasting urban and rural, western and eastern responses to the preaching of holiness. He believes that western and rural people are more “pious” and more receptive to the doctrine of holiness than eastern and urban people – pp. 85-86.

²⁷ *Proceedings*, 86.

²⁸ *Proceedings*, 99.

²⁹ *Proceedings*, 99.

³⁰ *Proceedings*, 92.

Brooks went on to declare that "In its very nature the spirit of sectarianism is selfish. It lives for itself; it provides for itself; it prays for itself; it works for itself."³¹ In this self-absorption, "sectarianism" is opposed to the very spirit of Christian holiness. Still, in 1877 Brooks was not yet ready to call the supporters of "organized holiness" to leave the major denominations, even though the denominations were deeply infected with "carnality" and "sectarianism" and generally opposed to holiness. Instead, he counseled "holiness people" to remain in the existing denominations. "Holiness people need the Church," he insisted, "and even if they did not, *the Church* needs the holiness people."³² At this point Brooks apparently still believed that the major denominations might yet be rescued from their "weakened and deteriorated" state by the holiness revival, even though his portrayal of those denominations is consistently bleak.

Before long, however, Brooks had given up all hope of revitalizing the denominations, and was teaching that the denominational system itself was *inherently* sinful. The American denominations could not be redeemed because they were false churches in open rebellion against Christ, the head of the true Church, whose body is one, not many. The one true Church of Christ, according to Brooks, is characterized by visible corporate unity, by the personal sanctity of all its members, by its visible order and polity, and ordinances (which follow clear

³¹ *Proceedings*, 95.

³² *Proceedings*, 102.

New Testament patterns) and by its catholicity.³³ “Where any of these are wanting, the true Church does not and cannot exist.”³⁴

According to these criteria, the so-called “churches of sect,” or “nominal churches” – the modern denominations – reveal their true character: They are no churches at all. For one thing they are not in visible unity – rather, the very opposite is true. They flourish in and are the product of a humanly-devised system that rewards multiplicity and encourages competition. The modern denominations are nothing more than “sects” – i.e., “a separated part, or a part cut off from a body.” Their very “nature is schism.”³⁵

As for the personal sanctity of their members, the “nominal churches” clearly reveal here too that they simply masquerade as Christ’s Church. The false “sects” are filled with unregenerate, unsaved people. “Possibly one-half, possibly more, of the membership of the sects is totally without any satisfying fruits of Christian experience or life. This one characteristic condemns their claims to any rightful ecclesiastical character.” In contrast, “the Church of Jesus Christ – the Divine Church – is composed only of saved persons; each and every one possesses a present vital Christian experience; every one sustains a saving union with the Lord Jesus Christ.”³⁶ The true Church is a community of saints. According to Brooks, this means that the “sanctity of the Church consists in the *personal* sanctity of its members.” The term “community of saints” expresses

³³Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 58-102.

³⁴Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 58.

³⁵Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 268.

³⁶Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 73.

“the spiritual character of believers considered personally, and the consequent spiritual character of the body.”³⁷ In the true Church “personal salvation is the prerequisite to Church fellowship,” Brooks insists.³⁸ “This truth must be unqualifiedly accepted, that the Church of Christ possesses spirituality unmixed.” The true Church is “an unmixed company of saved believers.”³⁹

Brooks concludes his examination of the “Divine Church” by declaring that “there can be no agreement between the spirit of holiness and the spirit of sect. They are as opposite in character as unity and disunity, concord and discord, or the pure spirituality of grace and the self-seeking carnality of nature.”

Furthermore,

If anything has been demonstrated in the course of the holiness movement, it is that there can be no real adjustment of the interests of holiness with the interests of sectarianism; there can be no righteous affiliation between holiness and the sects . . . Whatever their profession may be, the nominal Churches are not in accord with true holiness, and *there is no possibility that they can ever be brought into any real sympathy with it.*⁴⁰

Given this fact, “come-outism” is the *only* option for holiness people.

According to Brooks, “the persistent desire and purpose on the part of holiness leaders to keep holiness in subjection to the sects can but have the appearance

³⁷ Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 71.

³⁸ Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 72.

³⁹ Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 79.

⁴⁰ Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 268. Emphasis added.

of willing compromise” with the anti-holiness “pride, and fashion, and carnal pleasure-seeking, and worldliness” that saturates the denominational bodies.⁴¹ For John P. Brooks, the holiness movement was a divine summons to true believers to abandon the hopelessly apostate “sects” of the day and to gather together in congregations of regenerate and sanctified Christians, organized according the New Testament pattern of “congregational” independence, and together constituting the One (true) New Testament Church.

“THE RELUCTANT PIONEERS”

Many supporters of “organized holiness” were distressed by the growing “come-outer” movement in the final decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. They believed that “come-outers” were betraying the interdenominational spirit and reach of the holiness movement that went back to its earliest beginnings in the 1830s and 1840s. They saw “independence” as a retreat from the challenge of witnessing to Christian Perfection “in the churches of which we are members.”⁴² And they saw the trend to “come-outism” not as a divine “restoration” of the “One New Testament Church,” but rather as its very antithesis – a sectarian march toward further division within the Body of Christ.

These holiness people decided to stay where they were – the “stay-putters” we can call them. We might also call them the “reluctant pioneers” among

⁴¹ Brooks, *The Divine Church*, 272, 277.

⁴² See the call for a “General Camp Meeting” cited above on p. 3.

holiness people. In Sidney Mead's terms again, America's "reluctant pioneers" were those "swept on with the stream" but with "dragging feet and eyes turned back toward home." Of course, the image doesn't work perfectly for holiness "stay-putters." After all, they didn't "go" – they didn't leave home with the "come-outers;" they stayed. But, they were "pioneers" in the sense that they went into "new territory," and distinguished themselves from other Christians by their open support of and identification with "organized holiness" after the Civil War. They were definitely numbered among the "holiness people" who by the end of the nineteenth century made up a conspicuous minority in several American Protestant denominations. Yet, at the same time they were also loyal to the denominations to which they belonged.

A fascinating representative of the "stay-putters," or "reluctant pioneers," among holiness people is Henry Clay Morrison (1857-1942).⁴³ Morrison carried on ministry within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for over sixty years. During that time he pastored, served as an itinerant evangelist, was president of Asbury College (a "holiness" institution) on two different occasions, founded Asbury Theological Seminary, and edited *The Pentecostal Herald* (founded as *The Old Methodist* in 1888), a holiness periodical, for over a half century. During these years Morrison was one of the best known leaders of the holiness movement in the United States, and associated freely with various "come-outer" leaders. And yet he remained a part of Episcopal Methodism. His popularity in

⁴³ For Morrison's life see H.C. Morrison, *Some Chapters of My Life Story* (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing Company, 1941) and Percival A. Wesche, *Henry Clay Morrison "Crusader Saint"* (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1963).

the MEC, South was so great, in fact, that he was elected a delegate to five General Conferences of the church.

Morrison did not manage to “stay put” without difficulty. On at least one occasion in the mid-1890s Morrison was charged with insubordination to ecclesiastical authority and expelled both from ministry and from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. However, the case was eventually overturned and Morrison was reinstated. On other occasions he was threatened with charges that were never actually brought. Twice Morrison actually *withdrew* from the church, only to return a short time later.⁴⁴

Morrison in fact carried on a sort of “love/hate relationship” with Methodism throughout his years of ministry. On many occasions he expressed his love and appreciation for Methodism and its spiritual heritage. He declared that,

Methodism in her origin, with her history, her doctrines, so broad, so ample, so full, reaching out to all men, and promising salvation from all sin, was ingrained into my very being. It was through the instruction, and in answer to the prayers of Methodist preachers, that I had been taught the doctrine of sanctification subsequent to regeneration . . . There was in me a love for Methodism in its original purity and power, the significance and meaning of its methods which so pleased, satisfied and thrilled me, that while I never was a narrow sectarian, I did love and rejoice in Methodism⁴⁵

⁴⁴ On these incidents see Morrison, *Some Chapters of My Life Story*, 170-182 and Wesche, *Henry Clay Morrison*, 82-92.

⁴⁵ Morrison, *Some Chapters of My Life Story*, 185.

Morrison also stated that while “I was in fullest sympathy with what was known as ‘The Holiness Movement’ . . . this in no way interfered with my desire to loyal to the [Methodist] Church”⁴⁶

Morrison’s professed love for and loyalty to Methodism did not, however, prevent him from seeing what he considered to be serious defects in her. In fact, he was quite capable of launching blistering attacks on her perceived shortcomings. His most sustained critique of Southern Methodism came in a 1910 book, *Open Letters to the Bishops, Ministers and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*.⁴⁷

In this book Morrison levels numerous charges against the Church, but they all tend to come back to one main problem – an alarming, and growing spiritual indifference. For example, he charges that “Higher Criticism” of the bible is making dangerous inroads among preachers. Morrison warns that the effect of the ministry of preachers tainted with Higher Criticism will be “to lessen reverence for the Bible, and to loosen the restraints and reins of wicked propensities and degrading appetites” among their parishioners. The preaching of such men does not “result in revival awakenings,” nor does it “fruit into devotion of heart and righteous living.”⁴⁸ However, Morrison also contends that it is in fact spiritual decline in the church that has created a hospitable climate for such “skepticism” in the first place. “The degenerate state of the church, and

⁴⁶ Morrison, *Some Chapters of My Life Story*, 186.

⁴⁷ H.C. Morrison, *Open Letters to the Bishops, Ministers and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing Company, 1910).

⁴⁸ Morrison, *Open Letters*, 23.

the consequent rampant and bold wickedness of the times, has made this determined and insidious advance of skepticism in pulpits and schools possible," he writes.⁴⁹ Thus, the appropriate response to Higher Criticism is not an intellectual one. The real need is for "a deep, wide-spread revival of Holy Ghost religion" that will produce genuine conversions, clear sanctifications, and which "would at once restore the Bible to its proper place in the faith and love of the people."⁵⁰

However, it is not only "destructive higher criticism" that is gaining in the MEC, South. There is a general shift in the theological climate: a whole group of "new notions and theories" are being introduced into the church, which Morrison labels "experimental" thinking in contrast to the tried and true "bible doctrines" rooted in the Methodist, and Christian past. These "experimental" doctrines have, according to Morrison, "brought no fire out of the skies, and produced no revivals. They have not produced a high state of grace in those who preach them, and under such preaching the church is perishing." In fact, Morrison predicts that if things are not turned around, the MEC, South is headed for "a great apostasy" and "deep moral degradation."⁵¹

Not surprisingly, Morrison believes that one of the greatest casualties of this shift away from "bible doctrines" to experimental "new notions" in the MEC, South is the doctrine of Christian perfection. Morrison believes that Christian

⁴⁹ Morrison, *Open Letters*, 29.

⁵⁰ Morrison, *Open Letters*, 28-29.

⁵¹ Morrison, *Open Letters*, 35-37. Morrison refers specifically to disturbing "new theories" involving man's origin, the inspiration of the scriptures, the nature of sin, and the future state of the impenitent. He also complains that the "new theories" are often accompanied by the endorsement of tobacco smoking, card playing, dancing, and theater attendance – see pp. 39-40.

perfection does not accord well with the new spirit of the church. Consequently it is beginning to be actively opposed by those with influence. "Some of our bishops are not in harmony with the teaching of the Wesleys, Fletchers, Clarke, and Watson on this *distinctive* doctrine of original Methodism," Morrison claims. Further, "Many of our church editors oppose it, the pastors of our leading churches ignore or ridicule it, and our theological school at Vanderbilt University is set for its overthrow."⁵²

Morrison even goes so far as to suggest that should Christian perfection and other "old Methodist" doctrines fall by the wayside and the MEC, South indeed fall into a great "apostasy," that God might raise up a replacement for a failed Methodism. "When a church or other agency fails to do that for which God raised it up, He will cut it down as a cucumber of the ground and plant something better in its place."⁵³ This of course brings Morrison to within a hair's breadth of "come-outism"!

It is a spot, however, in which Morrison seems not to be uncomfortable. In fact, he presses the issue even further. Recounting the various "independent" activities of the "organized holiness movement," which he claims have simply been efforts to conserve the faith and to "keep spiritual fires burning" in the face of growing spiritual laxity in the Church, he asks:

Shall we go further? The [holiness] movement is moving. What shall the next step be? Is not God interested in these meetings? Does He not

⁵² Morrison, *Open Letters*, 53.

⁵³ Morrison, *Open Letters*, 34.

desire wholly sanctified and Spirit-filled ministers, faithful and fearless in the proclamation of His word? You may be sure such a ministry will preach a whole Bible and a full salvation. It appears to me that we are very rapidly approaching a crisis . . . Shall we build up the spiritual life of this and that congregation and community, to have it torn down by some higher critic, who has no well defined faith or deep conviction about anything, only that he has a contempt for the doctrine and experience of sanctification? Shall we pour our money into the hands of ecclesiastics who will use it to defeat the great revival for which we work and pray? These vital questions are up for serious consideration. They must have satisfactory answers.⁵⁴

Taken together with Morrison' suggestion that God may well cast aside a failed Methodism and replace it with something new, these questions are clearly intended as a threat to the leadership of the MEC, South. They were well aware that some ministers and lay people had already left the Church by 1910 for new homes in the growing number of "come-outer" holiness groups. How long could the tide be stemmed? *Could* it be stemmed?

To make matters worse, Morrison accepted the presidency of Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky the same year *Open Letters* appeared. Asbury was an independent school that had been founded and was supported by Southern Methodists sympathetic to "organized holiness." It was becoming a rallying point for holiness partisans in the MEC, South. What if Morrison decided to lead the

⁵⁴ Morrison, *Open Letters*, 50-52.

school and its constituency out of the church?⁵⁵ Perhaps at this point in his career Morrison himself was not certain whether his love for and loyalty to Methodism could hold him steady in a Church that seemed to him to be increasingly hostile to his passionate commitment to Christian holiness.

Ultimately Morrison decided against “come-outism” and instead organized interdenominational (but largely Methodist) “Holiness Unions” to help keep “holiness people” in their denominations where, “remaining in the church where they received the blessing and so living the life of purity of heart and unselfishness of love,” they might still “win their brethren in the Church to the doctrine of full salvation.” He wrote near the end of his life that “We regretted to see disruption and come-outism of any sort,” and so increasingly “emphasized the importance of those who were sanctified remaining within their Church and displaying a life in harmony with the experience they claimed.”⁵⁶ Morrison also founded Asbury Theological Seminary in 1926 to “send forth a well-trained, sanctified, Spirit-filled, Evangelistic Ministry” to serve Methodist churches.⁵⁷

“THE SETTLERS”

Although he ultimately “stayed put” in the MEC, South, Henry Clay Morrison fraternized regularly with holiness “come-outers.” While professing distaste for “come-outism,” he still found much about it to admire. In 1899 he held an

⁵⁵ Morrison actually served as president of Asbury College on two different occasions, 1910-1925 and 1933-1940. During his first term he began to lay foundations through the Department of Theology of the college for what would eventually become Asbury Theological Seminary. See Morrison, *Some Chapters of My Life Story*, 231-263 and Wesche, *Henry Clay Morrison*, 93-152.

⁵⁶ Morrison, *Some Chapters of My Life Story*, 195-196.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Wesche, *Henry Clay Morrison*, 144.

eleven-day revival campaign for the Los Angeles, California holiness “come-outer,” Phineas F. Bresee (1838-1915). Bresee, prior to founding the independent holiness “Church of the Nazarene,” had been a pastor and presiding elder in the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁵⁸ Morrison was quite impressed with what he saw in Los Angeles. He recounted for the readers of his *Pentecostal Herald* some of the details:

For about fifteen years, Rev. P.F. Bresee, D.D., had preached in and around Los Angeles, serving two of the largest churches in the city. A few years ago, a combination of circumstances led to the doctor’s withdrawal from the membership of the M.E. Church, and his entering upon an independent work in the city for the salvation of souls. About a year later he organized “the Church of the Nazarene” with sixty members and began a marvelous career of soul winning for Christ . . .⁵⁹

Morrison exulted in the fact that Bresee’s was a church “at whose altars sinners were being constantly converted, and believers sanctified.” He also endorsed Bresee’s belief that “a church ought to be able to have a revival the year around,” and applauded the fact that the come-outer Bresee was now free to work for the salvation of sinners and the sanctification of believers completely free from denominational constraint. The time with Bresee and the Nazarenes,

⁵⁸ There are three major biographies of Bresee’s life and work: E.A. Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: A Prince in Israel* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1916); Donald P. Brickley, *Man of the Morning: the Life and Work of Phineas F. Bresee* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1960); Carl Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee: His Life in Methodism, the Holiness Movement, and the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1995).

⁵⁹ Henry Clay Morrison, “The Church of the Nazarene,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, 11 (Jan. 25, 1899), 8.

Morrison declared, "will ever be remembered as one of the green spots in my life."⁶⁰

Phineas Bresee was one of the "settlers" in the holiness movement. Settlers, according to Sidney Mead again, are those pioneers who "followed on the heels of the eager beavers and their ever-reluctant companions" and who "rebuilt what they could of the old and remembered in the new place." According to Mead, "The new structure never looked quite like the old, but it was their own, and it was continuous with the past" and it was "the surest hope for the future."⁶¹ This quite aptly describes Phineas Bresee's understanding of what the mission and purpose of the early Church of the Nazarene was, and was to be.

In some ways Bresee's history made him an unlikely candidate to be a major figure among "come-outers" in the holiness movement. During his ministerial career in the MEC (which lasted for thirty-seven years) he was often on the "fast track." He received frequent "promotions," pastored many large and influential churches, and associated with powerful people both inside and outside the church. He was appointed a presiding elder at the age of twenty-five, was elected to the boards of several colleges and theological schools, and was a delegate to General Conference. Bresee also used his positions to advantage to

⁶⁰ Morrison, *The Pentecostal Herald*, 11 (Jan. 25, 1899), 8. For a brief comparison of the careers of H.C. Morrison and P.F. Bresee see Charles Edwin Jones, "The Holiness Complaint With Late-Victorian Methodism," in Russell E. Richey and Kenneth E. Rowe, editors, *Rethinking Methodist History: A Bicentennial Historical Consultation* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1985), 59-64.

⁶¹ Mead, *The Lively Experiment*, 9.

become involved in some business ventures on the side, which brought him a modicum of wealth.⁶²

Yet, in other ways Bresee's history perfectly prepared him to head up the "settler" party among holiness come-outers. Bresee was steeped in "frontier Methodism" and revivalism. He had been literally born in a log cabin in western New York State and raised in a Methodist Church that had been planted in his community barely fifteen years before his birth. His earliest experience of Methodism involved itinerant preachers, numerous "preaching points" rather than fully established congregations, outdoor meetings, fervent preaching, and informal, revivalistic worship. In 1856, when Bresee's family moved from New York to Iowa, they were part of a huge migration of settlers to the new state that would more than triple the state's population between 1850 and 1860. In Iowa Bresee once again found a frontier form of Methodism, but it was in a "building" mode – eagerly consolidating the gains that had made it the largest denomination in the state already by the time the Bresee family arrived. Church buildings needed to be built, Methodist schools needed to be founded, and Methodist publications were required to promote the church and to rally and encourage the Methodist faithful. For twenty-six years Phineas F. Bresee would be a dominant figure in this building and "settling" of Iowa Methodism, helping Methodists there to rebuild "what they could of the old and remembered in the

⁶² Bresee's business interests also eventually brought him to ruin, and helped to hasten his departure from Iowa to California in 1883. For (somewhat contradictory) accounts of this crisis in Bresee's life see Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: a Prince in Israel*, 72-76; Brickley, *Man of the Morning*, 82-84; Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee*, 97-104.

new place.” And throughout it all Bresee’s guiding ideal was the Methodism of his childhood, and the Methodism of his earliest days in Iowa – itinerant preaching, frequent revivals, personal religious experience, fervent worship, and a disciplined and simple manner of life.⁶³

Always an advocate of “old time Methodism,” it was not until quite late in his life that Bresee became involved with “organized holiness.” He had already been an MEC minister for almost thirty years and was a widely known and respected leader in the church by the time he first encountered “organized holiness” people soon after moving from Iowa to Southern California in 1883. In Los Angeles he actually became acquainted with two different kinds of “holiness people.” The first group made up a sizeable portion of the congregation of his first pastoral charge in Los Angeles, Fort Street ME Church, also known as “First Church” (where Bresee was pastor from 1883-1886). The second was a group of holiness “come outers” that had founded “the Holiness Church of California” along Restorationist lines in 1882.

The group at Fort Street Church made a great impression on their pastor, Phineas Bresee. These were loyal Methodists who gave clear and definite testimony to the blessing of entire sanctification, and who ardently promoted the doctrine of Christian perfection – mainly through supporting special “holiness associations” (including the National Holiness Association, as the National Camp

⁶³ It is of course interesting to note that this list does not include any special emphasis on the doctrine of Christian perfection, entire sanctification, or “full salvation.” Bresee seems not to have given a particularly prominent place to sanctification in his preaching and teaching until much later – sometime after 1886 (see below). It is also well to note that Bresee began in Methodist ministry in Iowa as a “circuit evangelist” whose primary responsibility was conducting protracted meetings. He thus became convinced at the very outset of his ministry that frequent revivals are necessary for the health of the Church.

Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness was by then known) and holiness meetings. Bresee was impressed with the spiritual vitality of these “holiness folks” in his congregation and embraced them, even though he did not at first share all their views. They in turn embraced and supported Bresee, although they recognized that he was, at this point, not in full sympathy with them. Bresee later recalled that, “they seemed to appreciate whatever efforts I could and did make in assisting them in the work of holiness,” while “they doubtless prayed much for me,” noting that, “they did not pray at me, and they stood close by me, and sustained me in every way throughout my ministry.”⁶⁴

With the encouragement of this group of parishioners, Bresee invited two prominent evangelists active in the National Holiness Association to conduct a protracted meeting at Fort Street ME Church in 1885. While Bresee did not recall that this meeting produced any exceptional results in the church, it did mark an important turning point in Bresee’s personal spiritual pilgrimage and for the holiness movement in Southern California (and eventually throughout the country).

The second group of holiness people that Bresee came to know in Southern California was connected with the “Holiness Church of California.” This was a “come-outer” organization that had developed from the evangelistic efforts of Rev. Hardin Wallace, an MEC minister from Illinois. Wallace organized the interdenominational Southern California and Arizona Holiness Association in

⁶⁴ Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: a Prince in Israel*, 81.

1880. In short order this association became a hub for holiness “come-outism,” and several of its influential leaders began to advocate “Restorationist” ideas of the church similar to those held by J.P. Brooks, D.S. Warner, and others. They taught that the one “pure New Testament Church” would be a church made up of only regenerated and “entirely sanctified” Christians and that the multiple, often worldly, “sectarian” churches of America were false churches. Thus, they called true believers to come out of their apostate “sects” and join the one true “Holiness Church.”⁶⁵

It is interesting to note that during Phineas Bresee’s very first Annual Conference in Southern California, the conference stripped Hardin Wallace and B.A. Washburn, another MEC minister active in the Holiness Church, of their Methodist ministerial credentials, and adopted a resolution requiring evangelists appearing in ME Churches to have “written certification” from the Presiding Elder.⁶⁶ Then, just a few months later Bresee was invited by his ministerial colleagues to preach at the district convention (a sort of “mini conference” held at the end of the year). Bresee preached on Christian perfection, but condemned perverting the doctrine into an instrument of schism – obviously aimed at Wallace, Washburn, and other holiness “come-outers.” In condemning the perversion of holiness by “come-outers” Bresee declared that when,

The name and profession of holiness have been made the scape-goat for

⁶⁵ For accounts of this group see L.A. Clark, editor, *Truths of Interest: Origin and Distinctive Teachings of the “Holiness Church”* (El Monte, CA: Standard Bearer Publishing House, 1939); Dennis Rogers, *Holiness Pioneering in the Southland* (Hemet, CA: n.p., 1944); B.A. Washburn, *Holiness Links* (Los Angeles, CA: Pentecostal Office, 1887); Josephine F. Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona* (South Pasadena, CA: Record Press, 1912).

⁶⁶ Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee*, 130.

attempts to create schism in the Church of God – when it has been made a pretense for slandering the ministers of religion, and slighting the means of grace – when in the name of holiness men are urged to forsake the mother that bore them and turn their back on the churches that have carried them in their arms – when this is done until the community is almost sickened at the very name [of holiness] itself, good men bow their heads in sorrow.⁶⁷

The convention responded to Bresee's sermon by adopting a resolution affirming that, "It is the duty of all Christians to be holy in heart and life," and "it has been and is the especial mission of our church to spread 'scriptural holiness' over all lands." The convention also formed a committee (that included Bresee) to correspond with the National Holiness Association "with a view to the establishment of a branch association" in Southern California.⁶⁸ This was obviously an attempt to stifle holiness "come-outism" by endorsing and supporting a more moderate (and denominationally loyal) form of the holiness movement.

At this point Phineas Bresee still looked like anything but a leader of holiness "come-outers." Here he was serving as a spokesman in Southern California Methodism *against* "come-outism" – and, according to his own testimony, he was not yet even clearly preaching "second blessing holiness." Referring to his entire tenure at Fort Street Church (1883-1886) Bresee stated: "At that time I did not preach the second work of grace very definitely. I preached it, but did not give it

⁶⁷ An edited manuscript of the sermon is in *The Southern California Methodist Quarterly*, 1, no. 1 (January 1884), 5-9.

⁶⁸ *California Christian Advocate*, 33, no. 8 (December 26, 1883), 3.

such emphasis as called out opposition, or as led so many people into the experience as otherwise would probably have been the case."⁶⁹

Within eight short years, however, all that had changed. The story of Bresee's "conversion" to outspoken support of "organized holiness" and his journey from loyalty to the MEC into holiness independence and "come-outism" is too lengthy to recount here. Suffice it to say that Bresee did become an outspoken exponent of "second blessing holiness" and was increasingly supportive of the "organized holiness movement." In time he became alienated from MEC leadership and found himself being pushed to the margins of Southern California Methodism. In 1894 Bresee accepted "location" by the Annual Conference, and in late 1895 (Bresee was 58 years old by this time) he organized a group of about a hundred holiness people in Los Angeles into the first congregation of "The Church of the Nazarene."⁷⁰

In founding the Church of the Nazarene Phineas Bresee was acting as a holiness "settler." He was definitely not an "eager beaver." He came late to "organized holiness," not embracing the holiness movement until some time after 1886. By then Bresee was nearly fifty years old, and holiness come-outism was well underway. His initial reaction to come-outism when he did encounter it (in its most radical "Restorationist," "eager-beaver" form) was condemnation and opposition. Neither was Bresee finally a "reluctant pioneer" like Henry Clay

⁶⁹ Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: a Prince in Israel*, 84-85.

⁷⁰ This part of the story is told in Girvin, *Phineas F. Bresee: a Prince in Israel*, 97-116; Brickley, *Man of the Morning*, 115-168; Carl Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee*, 183-215; Smith, *Called Unto Holiness*, 96-121. The number of "charter members" given in the various sources differs – see Bangs, *Phineas F. Bresee*, 198.

Morrison and others like him. He did not “stay put” in Episcopal Methodism. He made a clean break in 1894 and seems not to have looked back.

By 1895 Bresee clearly had come to believe that an organization like the Church of the Nazarene was necessary. This placed him between the “eager beavers” in the holiness movement and the “reluctant pioneers.” It positioned him between the Restorationist “come-outers” and their claim that their fellowships of believers constituted the one “true church” and that all denominations were false “sects” (a claim that Bresee considered to be ironically “sectarian”) and the “stay putters” like H.C. Morrison who believed that the existing denominations, energized by non-denominational organizations like his “Holiness Unions,” were adequate voices for holiness. Phineas Bresee neither believed that the Church of the Nazarene was the one “true church,” nor did he believe that the existing denominations, with or without non-denominational holiness unions, associations, or missions were sufficient for the work of faithfully preaching and cultivating Christian perfection.

Bresee considered the founding of the Church of the Nazarene a “practical necessity,” and preferable to the alternatives. The one alternative was holiness come-outism of the “Independent Holiness People” variety – congregational in polity and without central organization. Not only did Bresee believe that this form was “inefficient” in its organization, but he also thought that it was liable to dogmatism and “narrowness” in its pursuit of “primitive purity.” Bresee, the former Presiding Elder, denominational college trustee, and part-time

businessman, greatly valued "organization." "Order and method are a necessity," he insisted. "The conquering work of Jesus Christ is not to be done in a haphazard, slipshod way."⁷¹

The other alternative, of course, was "staying put" in the existing denominations. But this was becoming increasingly problematic. Bresee was convinced by 1895, along with many other holiness people, that the major American denominations were often spiritually "cold" and antagonistic to Christian holiness. In his opinion, "Organization [of a denomination] to push holiness is a necessity made more and more imperative by the opposition of the churches."⁷² To send "newly-born and Holy Ghost-baptized souls to the enemies of the work [i.e., the major denominations], is not unlike turning over 'the innocents to the sword of Herod."⁷³ And to the question, "Why have a Church of the Nazarene?" Bresee replied: "The answer is plain. Simply because it is needed." Holiness folks should not be "expected to stand around in cold, formal churches and run the risk of freezing to death."⁷⁴

Ultimately, however, Phineas Bresee fervently believed that the Church of the Nazarene was divinely ordained, and that he was specially called to the work of organizing it. This more than anything else seems to have enabled him to walk away from Methodism and to invest the last twenty years of his life in building up a new denomination. "God led us forth or we would never have dared to

⁷¹ *Herald of Holiness*, 2, (November 12, 1913), 13.

⁷² *Nazarene Messenger*, 11 (September 20, 1906), 6.

⁷³ *Nazarene Messenger*, 9 (September 8, 1904), 6.

⁷⁴ *Nazarene Messenger*, 9 (August 18, 1904), 6.

undertake a work so colossal," Bresee told the readers of the *Nazarene Messenger* in 1903.⁷⁵ Bresee believed that God had called him to "settle" the holiness movement – to rebuild what he could of the old and remembered in the new place. For Bresee, this meant to rebuild the "frontier Methodism" of his youth and early ministry as a Methodist itinerant in Iowa, at least in doctrine and spirit: "We would be glad to have it known that this church is no new or vague line . . . We feel ourselves to be part of that body of believers raised up to spread sanctified holiness over these lands, and thus that we are part of that company who are the *real successors* of John Wesley and the early Methodists."⁷⁶ "We are to be a band like Gideon's," Bresee told early Nazarenes:

If old associates or tastes or ease or respectability are likely to affect you, you are not really of this company. If you do not so hear the call of God that you cannot well be anywhere else you have not fully the spirit of this work. It is not simply a call by a preference for a church. It is the call of God to proclaim holiness, without compromise or . . . hindrance.⁷⁷

To Bresee, this was the spirit of primitive Methodism (and beyond that, the spirit of the primitive Christian Church).⁷⁸ This spirit, which in Bresee's view, was fast fading in the Methodism of his day, would be kept alive and nurtured in

⁷⁵ *Nazarene Messenger*, 8, (July 30, 1903), 6.

⁷⁶ *Nazarene Messenger*, 14 (July 15, 1909), 6. Emphasis added. For a careful examination of Methodism's influence in shaping the early Church of the Nazarene see Stan Ingersol, "Methodism and the Theological Identity of the Church of the Nazarene," *Methodist History* 43:1 (October, 2004), 17-32.

⁷⁷ *Nazarene Messenger*, 6 (October 17, 1901), 1.

⁷⁸ It should be noted that Bresee quite often connected the early Nazarenes with the "primitive church," in spirit and methods. By this he seems to have meant a spirit of single-minded devotion to God and true holiness, and simple methods of worship and outreach not complicated by "ecclesiastical machinery," elaborate form and ceremony, and the like. He did *not*, however, believe that the primitive church provided a "blueprint" for worship or organization for the church for all time, in contrast to holiness "Restorationists."

the Church of the Nazarene. And if it were, Bresee was convinced that this new “old Methodism” would contribute significantly to “Christianizing Christianity” (or perhaps better “re-Christianizing Christianity) in the United States, and thus help to save the country from “paganism” just as Wesley’s movement had helped to revitalize Christianity in England and to save that country from “infidelity.”⁷⁹ So, Phineas Bresee, the holiness “settler,” believed that a stabilized, well-organized and “efficient” Church of the Nazarene, not quite like the old Methodism perhaps, but “continuous with the past,” was “the surest hope for the future” of second-blessing holiness, a vital Christianity in America, and a Christian, rather than pagan America.

A FEW CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Holiness “come-outism” in post-Civil War America was never a fully coherent, coordinated movement. It drew in its wake a variety of individuals and groups with varying ideas and agendas. Among others, one can identify what I’ve chosen to call “the eager beavers,” “the reluctant pioneers,” and the “settlers.” What do their stories reveal about the late nineteenth-century holiness movement?

⁷⁹ “John Wesley was raised up when the desert drift of infidelity was burning and blasting every green thing. When Europe was swept by the storm and there were 40,000 infidel clubs in France, the preaching of righteousness and true holiness under Wesley saved England, and the world will never get over his influence” – Phineas F. Bresee, *Sermons on Isaiah* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1926), 115; “Perhaps no missionary work needs more to be done than the planting of centers of fire in this country to preach and lead people into holiness, and help Christianize Christianity, and save America from going utterly into worldliness and paganism” – *Nazarene Messenger*, 8 (November 12, 1903), 3; “The conditions – the great need – call for every effort to Christianize Christianity in America” – *Nazarene Messenger*, 11 (December 6, 1906), 6.

1. First, it is striking that few holiness partisans reflected very deeply on the nature of the Church, even as many were criticizing their churches for their failings and preparing to leave them in order to start new ones. The obvious exception is of course the holiness "Restorationists" like John P. Brooks, who developed (or adopted) a full-blown ecclesiology which directly informed everything that they did. Their ecclesiology enabled them to move quickly and assuredly out of the established denominations and into independency. Henry Clay Morrison and Phineas Bresee, while they criticized Methodism and the other major denominations of their day, do not appear to have held fully-developed theologies of the Church.
2. Second, it is obvious that by the last decades of the nineteenth century there was great dissatisfaction with the major denominations on the part of supporters of "organized holiness." The sense of "isolation" on the part of those testifying to "full sanctification" that had helped to inspire the first holiness camp meeting in 1867 did nothing but deepen during the rest of the century. Holiness people increasingly experienced their churches as alien places. This was general across the movement.
3. I would suggest that running through the numerous expressions of dissatisfaction with the denominations, as well as fueling the threats to "come-out" (Morrison) and the actual formation of independent holiness churches (Brooks and Bresee) were *assumptions* about the nature of the church consistent with a "believers' church" ecclesiology. As described by

Donald F. Durnbaugh, such a church “consists of the voluntary membership of those confessing Jesus Christ as Lord,” is marked by separation from the world and a covenant of the members to “live faithfully as disciples of Christ,” and rejects any idea of the church as a “mixed assembly” of the converted and unconverted. The “believers’ church” also expects each of its members to be actively engaged in works of service, and to submit to congregational discipline. In addition such a church cares for those in need, follows a simple pattern of worship, and centers “everything on the Word, prayer, and love.”⁸⁰ This definitely describes the ideal church implied in the holiness critique of late nineteenth-century Methodism, and under girds the picture of a “true” and vital church painted by “come-outers” from Brooks to Bresee.

4. Finally, we can discern competing interpretations of the meaning and purpose of the holiness movement. All supporters of “organized holiness” agreed that the holiness revival was meant to “Christianize Christianity.” However, they had different concepts of how that would be accomplished. Restorationists like J.P. Brooks saw the holiness revival of the nineteenth century as a “new Reformation” that was to refashion the Church of God. The Reformation of the sixteenth century had fallen short of God’s intention because it had spawned a host of rival Protestant “sects.” This fracturing of

⁸⁰ Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers’ Church: the History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1968), 32-33. For a discussion of the role of “believers’ church” ideology in the shaping of the Church of the Nazarene see Ingersol, “Methodism and the Theological Identity of the Church of the Nazarene,” 18-25.

the Church was displeasing to God, and the holiness movement was intended to bring healing to a broken Church. Christians were being called to unite around the biblical concept of entire devotion to God and self-giving love to neighbor. This simple distilled gospel would overwhelm sectarian divisions and bring Christians together in holy unity. For these "eager beavers" the holiness movement was essentially "**The** Church" in the making.

"Stay-putters" like H.C. Morrison saw the holiness revival as the divinely ordained means of renewing the churches of America. A "Holy Ghost Baptism" of perfect love would not abolish denominationalism -- nor would it (ideally) -- multiply the number of denominations. Rather, a revival of true holiness would enable the various denominations to be the soul-winning, revival-conducting, holy-living communities of believers they had once been, and might be again. For these "reluctant pioneers" the holiness movement was no church at all – nor was it intended to produce any new churches.

"Settlers" like Phineas Bresee actually differed only a little from the stay-putters like Morrison. Bresee, as we've seen, also believed that the holiness movement was the divinely appointed means of renewing the churches of America. However, Bresee became convinced that this might not happen directly. The Spirit's blessing might be resisted by the "old" churches. When this occurred, new channels must be dug through which the Spirit might flow. In Bresee's mind, the Church of the Nazarene was one of these new channels. Thus, for the "settlers," the holiness movement might be seen as "**a** church,"

or at least as the building material for a church.

The churches that emerged from the “come-outer” impulse in the nineteenth century holiness movement have a rich, but in some way problematic heritage. Their foundational ecclesiologies – whether explicit (as in the Restorationist wing of the movement) or implicit (as in most of holiness “come-outism”), were fashioned in a highly charged atmosphere of controversy and conflict. They reflect a host of practical and personal considerations. They were fashioned by rugged “pioneers.” Today, however, the “pioneering” phase of these churches is long past. Will the churches birthed by the holiness movement attempt to carry identities forged in the nineteenth century into the twenty-first? Do these identities truly reflect present realities? Are they sources of life and vitality for these churches – or are they albatrosses inhibiting movement into the future? These are vital – and difficult – questions for the great granddaughters and great grandsons of the holiness “come outers.”