

Fall 2016

# Square Peg: Why Wesleyans Aren't Fundamentalists

Al Truesdale (Editor)

*Olivet Nazarene University*

Craighton T. Hippenhammer

*Olivet Nazarene University*, [chhammer@olivet.edu](mailto:chhammer@olivet.edu)

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## Recommended Citation

Truesdale, Al (Editor) and Hippenhammer, Craighton T., "Square Peg: Why Wesleyans Aren't Fundamentalists" (2016). *Faculty Scholarship – Library Science*. 27.

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***Square Peg: Why Wesleyans Aren't Fundamentalists*, By Al Truesdale, Editor,**

**Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2012, 158 pp. \$15.99; ISBN 978-0-8341-2793-7**

Reviewed by Craighton Hippenhammer, Digital Initiatives Librarian, Olivet Nazarene University,  
Bourbonnais, IL

*Square Peg: Why Wesleyans Aren't Fundamentalists* is written by leading Nazarenes, mostly with doctorates, is published by a Nazarene Press, and provides further evidence that the Church of the Nazarene continues to struggle with fundamentalist beliefs and attitudes, especially with their average church members, despite claiming to be Wesleyan. This book continues the tracking of this issue begun by Paul Bassett in 1978 in an article titled, "The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement: 1914-1940: The Church of the Nazarene: A Case Study," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 13 (Spring 1978): 65-91, and later followed by Stan Ingersol's "Strange Bedfellows: Nazarenes and Fundamentalism," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 40, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 123-41.

There's no doubt that Nazarenes have often taken pride in being conservative in many ways, especially emphasizing holy living, often with an emphasis on what one shouldn't do, a tendency rife in fundamentalism. Christian historian George Marsden classified the holiness movement in the fundamentalist camp because there was so much evidence that that was the case (63). (George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 6, 71-101.)

That said, the well-known Nazarene authors of this volume argue persuasively that they are very different from fundamentalists and for very fundamental reasons. Floyd T. Cunningham, professor of history of Christianity and president of Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, quotes well-known and well-respected Nazarene theologian, H. Orton Wiley as rejecting "the fundamentalists' 'mechanical' view of Scripture because it excluded the role of human reason and any serious consideration of the

social and historical contexts of the authors” ( 25). Wesleyans have no problem with the Bible having minor errors of fact or agreement between its books since they believe the Bible is only ‘infallible’ in what it intends to convey, that is, truth about God and His way of salvation.

Cunningham further quotes theologian W. T. Purkiser as saying “the Nazarene Article of Faith on Scripture saved the denomination from bondage to a fundamentalist literalism which affirms the dictation of each word of the original autographs, and which sometimes seems to extend the same sanctity to a certain English version” (25). So inspiration is not an independent property of the Bible but resides only with the Holy Spirit who can make the Bible’s message of salvation come alive. Therefore, “Wesleyans cannot support the negative appraisal of modern biological and geological science that characterizes fundamentalism. H. Orton Wiley... said the poetic ‘creation hymn’ of Gen. 1-3 answers the question of who God is, not how or when God created the universe” (26).

Contributor H. Ray Dunning, professor emeritus of theology and philosophy at Trevecca Nazarene University, compares the control beliefs (unifying principles that lend consistency) of the two theologies. The control belief of fundamentalism is a correspondence theory of truth, otherwise known as common sense philosophy (Scottish realism) that “assumes that the human mind, through the various senses has a direct, immediate, and accurate apprehension of objects in the external world” (64). So “faith... is seen as belief in or assent to true statements or propositions about God” (65). The control belief of Wesleyanism, however, is salvation. While both fundamentalism and Wesleyanism are committed to the authority of scripture, “Wesleyan theology teaches that the Bible’s authority is validated by the internal witness of the Holy Spirit,” not by inerrancy (67). The infallibility of scripture, then, has to do with “infallibly revealing the will of God in all things necessary to our salvation” (68). Jesus critiqued the “Pharisees who searched the scriptures thinking that they could provide eternal life. Jesus corrected the Pharisees by saying, ‘The scriptures testify of me’ (John 5:39)” (66).

This edited volume contains contributions from 17 writers – seven main content chapters written mainly by academics and interspersed by response chapters titled, “Why It Matters,” written by those in ministry. It contains 14 pages of endnotes but no indexes. Written for an audience of college-educated Christians, there is no doubt that understanding of these clarifying principles will be helpful to not only Wesleyans, like Nazarenes, but also to those who casually adopt the prevailing assumptions of Evangelicals, many of whom believe in fundamentalist world views.

As Dr. Dunning points out, “Wesleyan theology and fundamentalism cannot be successfully mixed” (71). In the “Why It Matters” chapter responding to Dr. Dunning, Drs. Dwight and Nina Gunter say, “Although fundamentalism is seriously at odds with Wesleyan theology, it claims the high ground against those who disagree. A large part of the problem is that too many people who call themselves Wesleyan don’t really understand the Wesleyan perspective on Christian faith and practice. *It matters*” (73). One does wonder, though, why the subtitle of the book wasn’t “Why Nazarenes Aren’t Fundamentalists” since they are the ones struggling with defining themselves.