

# Free Methodist Trajectories

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The Free Methodist Church has a soul. The question we need to consider is: what is its character? Does the Free Methodist soul today reflect the deep impress of the church's founders? Or has the church, over time, developed a very different kind of soul than that of the founders?

Have Free Methodists, for instance, developed a *Baptist* soul over the years? Or perhaps an *American* soul? Has the church developed a *Republican* soul? Could the soul of Free Methodism today be described as the soul of "generic evangelicalism"? These are the kinds of questions that need to be addressed.

## Free Methodism's Original Trajectory

Every denomination originates with a unique trajectory. At the beginning, that trajectory is determined by the larger purpose and the aims that give rise to the denomination.

For early Free Methodism, the larger purpose was to create a reformed Methodism. The specific aims can be identified as . . .

- A concern to preserve a form of Methodism that was centered, still, in the religion of the warmed heart.
- The desire for a more democratic Methodism.
- The conviction that the African slave deserved freedom, and after emancipation that newly freed men and women should be educated.
- The conviction that faithfulness to the gospel called Free Methodists to establish urban churches, especially churches that would be welcoming to the poor and would not entertain class distinctions based on wealth or literacy.
- A desire to participate in a true "believer's church" in the Wesleyan tradition.

Let's look at each trait briefly.

*The religion of the warmed heart.* The "religion of the warmed heart" stood at the center of early Methodist experience. Two things, particularly, marked the rise of Wesleyan Methodism in England. The first was the concern for a vital Christian experience. This was evident in

- the Wesleys' emphasis on a Christian faith that was personal,
- the importance they attached to the quest for Christian perfection or holiness,
- their commitment to the class meeting as the place where saints were held accountable for their progress in the faith;

The Methodists had become America's largest denomination by the mid-19th century. It was also on pace to become the nation's most geographically diffused denomination, which, in fact, it became. But rising middle-class prosperity among Methodists in the Eastern states facilitated change within their churches. Church choirs and professional singers began slowly replacing congregational song, making worship less participatory and more of a spectacle. The class meeting, once the basic unit of Methodism, was on the verge of no longer being mandatory and was about to experience a sharp decline. Congregations in larger cities became absorbed with building neo-Gothic edifices and fitting them with expensive church organs. And concern for the rising tide of urban poor was not nearly as evident in 19th century American Methodism as it had been in British Methodism during Wesley's day. So it was over against these changes that the Free Methodist dissent was raised. Strong evidence of the priority that B. T. Roberts gave to the warmed heart and the disciplined life was evident in the title of his paper, *The Earnest Christian*.

*Toward a more democratic Methodism.* When it began, the Free Methodist Church adopted a structure that enshrined a democratic form of Methodism. It was not alone. A small series of new denominations were formed between 1830 and 1910, each as a different expression of democratic Methodism. Each one had its own reasons for not uniting with earlier ones, and this was largely because their points of dissent were not identical. But all developed partly in relation to ongoing tensions over the nature and scope of episcopal authority in the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Methodist Protestant Church (1830), the Wesleyan Methodist Connection (1843), and the Church of the Nazarene (1908) were among the others. Though each framed had a different vision of democratic Methodism, they shared the conviction that democratic processes and limits had to moderate episcopal authority. Methodist Protestants and Wesleyan Methodists did away with episcopacy altogether. Free Methodists and Nazarenes renamed the office (general superintendent), revised its powers, and located it within a democratic system of governance far in advance of their common mother church.

The Free Methodist Church, like these others, retained the root conviction that guides all Methodist polity. This is the conviction that no specific design for church government is revealed in Holy Writ; therefore, the appropriate forms of church governance can be shaped by "common consent" as long as nothing agreed on violates the word of God. Wesley himself came to this conviction late in life. In this equation, *mission* can shape *structure*. These assumptions gave British Methodism a structure *without* bishops and American Methodism (laboring in a different social and religious context) a structure *with* bishops. The essence of Methodist governance is not a particular type of episcopacy, nor episcopacy itself, but this assumption regarding church governance. The Free Methodist founders felt free to fashion a system of governance that reflected their ideals and fit their mission.

B. T. Roberts' objection to lodge membership is appropriately viewed as part of his commitment to a democratic style of governance. He opposed the secret societies (especially the Masons and Odd Fellows) because they bred a "brotherhood" mentality that was restrictive—a "brotherhood" that was not open to all, but only to "the right kind" of people. Moreover, fraternal ties seemed to compete with the Christian ministry's own brotherhood ideal, dividing the ministers who should be united by their ordination vows into "insider" and "outsider" groups. Roberts also had evidence that certain ministers were stationed according to lodge ties, not a congregation's needs and a given minister's ability to meet them. Therefore an ideal at the heart of Methodism's appointive system of ministry was being defeated by an elitism based on an alternative brotherhood. He opposed it.

*The slave's freedom.* The slavery issue troubled the Methodist Episcopal Church from its beginning. An early stricture on slavery adopted by the Christmas Conference in 1784 was laid aside the following year by the church's southern conferences. In 1843, Wesleyan Methodists left because the M. E. Church had not condemned slavery and did not appear likely to do so. In 1844, the M. E. Church itself divided--one church for the North, another for the South. Still the northern church's General Conference refused to condemn slavery, fearing that annual conferences in the border states would unite with "the Church South" if they did so. Opposition to slavery was critical in Free Methodism's rise. Abolitionist sentiments, heightened by perfectionist tendencies, fired the hearts of Free Methodists in 1860.

*A heart for the poor.* I mentioned a few minutes ago that two things distinguished the rise of Wesleyan Methodism in England. The second was early Methodism's identification with the poor. Had the Wesleys not taken their ministry to the condemned prisoners awaiting execution, to London's poor, to the dockhands in Bristol, and to the miners at Kingswood, and to many other similar places, the Methodist chapter in Christian history would have been reduced to a few sentences, and perhaps to a mere footnote about English religious societies of the 18th century. Instead it can truly be said that wherever the poor gathered, so did the early Methodists. And it was this that caused Methodism to burn with a strong, bright flame during the lifetime of the Wesleys.

A century later, that was no longer true.

Fashionable Methodist churches in the East rented pews to its wealthier members to help retire church debts. Those who could not afford a rented pew sat in less desirable parts of the sanctuary. Roberts objected that rich and poor were treated differently, and that this was neither true Christianity nor true Methodism. By contrast, the Free Methodist *Discipline* required that all pews be free, and early Free Methodists deliberately planted churches among the poor.

*A believers' church.* This feature of early Free Methodism was implicit, rather than explicit, but nevertheless quite real. Believers churches are generated when a body of Christians believe that their mother church has become lax in its disciplinary standards. This laxity, in their view, threatens the church's integrity. They want a

church that is holy, that seeks to maintain ecclesiastical holiness by applying discipline where severe offense occurs. Believers churches are marked by zeal, which they view as a contrast to the easy and comfortable Christianity of the larger churches and less disciplined churches. There is little doubt that Free Methodism functioned as a believers' church over against a much larger Methodist mother church that the founders believed was compromised.

We who belong to believers' churches in the Wesleyan tradition have given very little thought, however, to our underlying ecclesiology. Yet this omission is critical, because without attention we can drift to places where we would not choose to go if we were conscious of it.

I believe that there is a high road and a low road within the believers' church tradition.

The low road is illustrated, I believe, by the Baptist churches, where "soul liberty" is highly prized. This type of believers' church is rooted in radical individualism. Here the church functions largely as an association of individuals.

The high road in the believers' church tradition places far more importance on the corporate nature of the church. It sees the church as the place where a holy people is made. Mennonites and Church of the Brethren are good examples of believers' churches that have taken the high road.

Believers' churches on the low road tend to more clearly reflect American democratic assumptions, such as making decisions by majority vote. Those that take the high road are more inclined to work on an issue until they find consensus, for they take the fellowship quite seriously.

Which road have Free Methodists taken? And what difference could it make if more careful reflection was encouraged here?

## Radical Wesleyanism in Context

We have looked at five specific aims of the first Free Methodists. The first aim can be assessed as a desire to preserve the spiritual traditions of Methodism. In this respect it is conservative in its thrust and implications. The four other aims, however, were all radical in their basic impulse, and so they justify our speaking of Free Methodism as an expression of radical Wesleyanism. In certain respects, early Free Methodism had strong affinities with the radical holiness of other contemporary movements, including Charles G. Finney and the Oberlin tradition, and the Wesleyan Methodist Connection that preceded Free Methodism by nearly two decades.

To appreciate the uniqueness of radical Wesleyanism, it may be helpful to compare it to a more socially conservative expression of the Wesleyan-holiness vision.

I assume your general knowledge of the basic outline of B. T. Roberts' life and work. As a pastor in New York State, he engaged in a controversy with what he called "New School Methodism." He supported the abolition of slavery and regarded the General Conference as morally tepid for its equivocation on the practice, especially after the Southern conferences created a separate denomination. He opposed the elitism of

secret societies. And he wanted churches that treated the poor with respect, rather than churches that reinforced distinctions based on wealth or class.

There is another area where his views did not represent Free Methodists as a whole, but which he cared deeply about. He firmly supported women's right to preach, to be ordained to the ministry, and to exercise pastoral authority within the church. He tried more than once to convince the Free Methodist General Conference to see the issue his way but failed. His church moved toward his position only well after his death. His advocacy on this issue places him in the select company of Jarena Lee (A.M.E.), Catherine Booth (Salvation Army), Luther Lee (Wesleyan Methodist), Lee Anna Starr (Methodist Protestant), Fannie McDowell Hunter (Nazarene) and one of his own successors, Bishop Walter Sellew.

I want to turn to a contemporary of Roberts who agreed with him on many things but devoted his life to constructing a very different type of Methodist church. His name is Lovick Pierce. Like Roberts, Pierce believed that primitive Methodism's rich patrimony was being squandered by sophisticated but theologically careless churchmen. He embraced the *Way of Holiness*, the first holiness journal published in the South. In it he described his attempts over a lifetime to promote entire sanctification at Methodist camp meetings. The failure of the doctrine to impress the church, he wrote, was because the church contained

thousands of denominational but unconverted Methodists. . . whenever we appoint a sanctification prayer meeting, or seek to form an association for the promotion of holiness and appeal to this class, it is shocking to see the prevarications of these unspiritually minded professors when we feel moved to call on the church to move in these lines of consecration to God, and of a wider, deeper work of grace in the heart . . . it is useless to preach sanctification to a church membership living so far below this plane of religion as not to feel its necessity.<sup>1</sup>

Some twenty years later, Pierce's *Miscellaneous Essay on Entire Sanctification* reiterated these themes of spiritual laxity, the lowering of membership standards, and the decline of interest in godliness and the sanctified life among Methodists.<sup>2</sup>

Such words and sentiments could have been written by B. T. Roberts or John Wesley Redfield. Instead they were written instead by a Wesleyan-holiness preacher who helped construct a Methodist denomination around the proposition that slavery should be defended by law and argument, and maintained by force of arms if necessary. Pierce entered the ministry of the Georgia Conference in 1804 and was a delegate to every General Conference between 1824 and 1844. When Methodism divided over slavery, he helped organize the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. He was sent north to the northern body's General Conference in 1848, but once there the northern Methodists refused to recognize the fraternal delegates from the South—a public repudiation that came to symbolize the deep alienation between the northern and southern branches of Episcopal Methodism. Pierce became an elder statesman and held “a unique position of

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<sup>1</sup> *Way of Holiness* (May 1876): 18-21; quote from p. 20; also see the article by Pierce entitled “The experience and observations of Rev. L. Pierce on sanctification for seventy one years,” *ibid.*, (April 1876): 13-16.

<sup>2</sup> Lovick Pierce, *A Miscellaneous Essay on Entire Sanctification: showing How it was Lost from the Church, and How it May and Must be Regained* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1897).

leadership in the Church, South" as "a guiding influence in its affairs."<sup>3</sup> He preached at the consecration services of various bishops and in 1854 witnessed his son's election as bishop. In his last years, he was the "grand old man" of Southern Methodism.

Pierce became very unlike Madison, Jefferson, Washington, and other Southern founders of the American Republic, who affirmed their belief in human equality despite the contradictions between that conviction and their own practice. Instead, Pierce eventually bought into a doctrine of human inequality propagated by states' rights theorists and pro-slavery ideologues such as John C. Calhoun. And that belief in human inequality, designed to bolster the ideological defense of slavery, reinforced the conviction that a hierarchically-structured society was God-ordained and sustained by divine will. In such a social order, the rights of women and African Americans were held hostage.

The propositions to which Lovick Pierce dedicated his life could not provide a more striking contrast to the radical Wesleyanism of B. T. Roberts.

A half-century ago, Timothy Smith argued that revivalism releases creative new energies that can alter society. In *Revivalism and Social Reform*, Smith built his case from abundant evidence, appraising revivalism as a positive social force. Smith's intent was to counter the persistent stereotype of his day that revivalism functions in socially conservative ways and helps maintain the status quo. Some of Smith's readers—primarily those who personally embrace the radical holiness tradition—tend to forget revivalism's socially conservative side. But revivalism in the ante-bellum South played a remarkably different social role in that context than it did in the examples that Smith used. This is illustrated by Lovick Pierce's story, documented thoroughly by historian Donald Matthews' book *Religion in the Old South*, and by the growing literature on Southern religion that has appeared in the past quarter-century.

Abolitionism is part of the heritage of the Wesleyan-holiness tradition, but so, too, is racism, slavery, segregation, and white flight to the suburbs. By the same token, concern for the poor is a part of our heritage, but so, too, is middle-class comfort and neglect of the poor.

We should be clear-eyed about our history and equally clear-eyed about what parts of it we intend to affirm and what parts we intend to overcome. And if we can no longer assert confidently that the holiness movement is a reliable friend of social progress, then what are we to make of Roberts' alliance of sanctification and social change? Should we not value it that much more highly?

## The Trajectory Altered

What forces exert change on the trajectory of a church in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition? Or to put it differently, what muddies our birthright?

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<sup>3</sup> James P. Pilkington, "Lovick Pierce," in *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism* (Nashville: Parthenon Press for the United Methodist Publishing House, 1974) 2: 1909.

*Heritage and Tradition.* A good thesaurus will give a number of synonyms for the word “heritage,” including: inheritance, legacy, birthright, and custom. The word “tradition” generates the following: ritual, practice, and habit. The relationship between heritage and tradition is assessed variously. Today I will use the words in specific ways.

A heritage is essentially a legacy; it is what we inherit from the past. And what we inherit is often a mixture of both good and bad. This is easily illustrated. If you inherit property or a business, you will also inherit any debt attached to it. A heritage can easily become muddied.

The tradition, though, is what we make of the heritage. The tradition is that part of the heritage where we choose to find our vision—the part that we consciously choose to hold onto and live out of.

Here is an example. The Southern Baptist Convention was created solely to be a Baptist denomination in the South in which no one’s honor would be impugned for owning and selling slaves. It came into existence for no other reason than the slavery issue. After the Civil War, the Southern Baptists lent their support to the Jim Crow laws that disenfranchised and socially segregated hundreds of thousands of Freedmen. Collusion with slavery and segregation was both the Southern Baptist heritage and tradition and remained so over 150 years.

Several years ago, however, the Southern Baptists began publicly repenting for their past behavior. They made acts of contrition in special ceremonies of confession and repentance, and did so in the presence of Black Baptists. Denominations can rarely escape the thrust of their father’s founding vision, but the Southern Baptists have taken steps to change, to start new tradition, and replace bad tradition with good tradition.

Every denomination accumulates accretions that become part of the heritage. Whether or not these accretions remain part of the tradition, however, can be a matter of conscious choice. What accretions has Free Methodism accumulated?

*The Distortions of Fundamentalism.* The conflict between fundamentalists and modernists developed in the early 20th century and sharpened in the 1920s. Free Methodist sympathies were clearly on fundamentalism’s side and against religious skepticism, the higher critics of the Bible, the Darwinists, and the liberal Protestant theologies. And in its opposition to theological modernism, the Free Methodist Church underwent a fundamentalist phase, as did other evangelical and Wesleyan churches.

Every evangelical denomination faced a critical question as the conflict between fundamentalism and modernism grew sharper. How extensively would fundamentalism alter its self-understanding? Free Methodism originated with a distinct identity. Would that identity persist as the fundamentalist crusade developed, or would it be lost, swallowed up by a growing affinity with a newer and broader 20th century movement whose spirit and purposes were quite different from those of the radical Wesleyans who birthed it?

The issue is drawn even more clearly when we consider the nature of movements.

All movements share certain features, whether they are religious or social in nature. Movements are not bred by consensus; they are born of dissent. Lawrence Goodwyn’s history of the populist movement of the late 19th century is a helpful place to

start for understanding their character. In *The Populist Moment*, Goodwyn argues that any new movement begins because people analyze a particular set of conditions. That analysis must seem cogent, at least to some of the people affected. Spokesmen who believe the analysis must be recruited, or else the analysis goes nowhere. The spokesmen spread the ideas of the movement and recruit new believers. Since the establishment controls the press, a movement must generate its own publishing enterprise. Tracts, booklets, broadsheets and periodicals produced by the movement press assist in recruitment and help the movement consolidate its gains. Meetings and conventions rally the faithful and energize them. Goodwyn stresses the vital significance of a movement maintaining its focus. His thesis, highly provocative, is that populism began as an agrarian revolt that achieved nearly all the basic steps but failed to mature as a political movement when populists began sharing their platforms with the advocates of the free silver campaign. This muddled the agrarian message, altered populism's objectives, and led to the movement's rapid demise.<sup>4</sup>

Free Methodism began with its own analysis of the state of American religion, particularly within the Methodist Episcopal Church. Free Methodist leaders diagnosed the problem within Methodism as declension, or decline, as they witnessed the erosion of loyalties to the class meeting and other mechanisms designed to foster Christian holiness. They viewed the problem of Methodism as a compromise with the spirit of this world, expressed in many different ways—uncritical acceptance of Freemasonry, temporizing on the issue of slavery, and a willingness to distinguish between different classes of people based on their income or lack of one.

They responded by creating a reform movement. They offered spiritual and practical solutions to the growing spiritual laxity and doctrinal confusion over the theology and social application of Christian holiness. Their critique of creeping formalism and a religious culture compromised by growing middle-class prosperity was developed long before Darwin and the higher critics of the Bible had any discernible impact on American Protestant churches at large. Free Methodism used evangelists as spokesmen, and developed a press that was independent of the Methodist bishops. As the movement separated, the new church that emerged viewed itself as faithful to the ideals of Wesley and historic Methodism.

Fundamentalists analyzed the religious problem much differently. For that very reason, they generated a different set of answers and developed a different agenda. The fundamentalists analyzed the problem at the heart of American religion as "liberalism," a theme underscored in J. Gresham Machen's classic battle text, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923). Machen represented the historic Princeton school of theology, a conservative strain of Presbyterian thought that regarded Wesleyan theology as a Pelagian highway, and therefore a conservative precursor of the liberal problem. The evangelists who served as fundamentalism's primary spokesmen, and the fundamentalist press at large, were indifferent to the primary concerns of radical Wesleyanism and antagonistic, for the most part, to Methodist theology.

To be sure, there are places where the complaints of Free Methodism's founders and the fundamentalists appeared to intersect. For instance, many fundamentalists,

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<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford, London, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). *The Populist Moment* is a 342-page abridgement of a more comprehensive work, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (1976).

committed to dispensational premillennialism, judged the large popular denominations to be apostate and fallen; such a charge could be linked to B. T. Roberts' complaint that the established churches were formal and cold. The complaints appear similar but are not the same.

The primary challenge that any denomination faces when intersected by another broad popular movement is this: the leaders of the new movement have their own agenda, rooted in their own dissent. And as they meet existing organizations, they seek implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) to supplant a Christian organization's founding vision with a different vision of their devising.

How deeply did fundamentalism threaten the unique identify of Free Methodists? And how did Free Methodists respond?

*The Magnetic Pull of the Evangelical Mainstream.* As the Free Methodist Church aged, it edged increasingly toward the mainstream of American evangelicalism. Fundamentalism provided one such push, but it was hardly the only force at work.

That evangelical mainstream is a work-in-progress. It is undergoing continual development. Never static, it always changes. Methodism played a key role in shaping the evangelical mainstream of the 19th century. Methodists possessed an exceedingly small share of the American religious franchise in 1775. By 1850, however, Methodism's two branches, north and south, constituted the largest religious block in the nation. Other American churches were strongly influenced by Methodist ways. This changed in the 20th century. By 1920, the Methodist Episcopal Church was developing a degree of theological pluralism and was no longer regarded as a reliable evangelical ally. Moreover, a sudden surge of Baptist energies lifted that tradition well above the Methodist tradition by mid-century. This was followed by the growth of Pentecostal and charismatic denominations later in the 20th century. With reason, we can think of the 19th century as the Methodist century, and the 20th century as the Baptist and Pentecostal century. We can only imagine what the 21st century will be.

Although American evangelicalism is in motion, it is not a movement in the same sense that fundamentalism was, except in its desire to shed the narrow-mindedness and undesirable image of fundamentalism. Evangelicalism is not rooted in dissent, as genuine movements are, but reflects the more theologically conservative instincts of those churches and individuals who face modernity but are generally uncomfortable with hard-line fundamentalism on the right and the ecumenical movement on the left. Instead, evangelicals find a sense of connection with one another across theological boundaries based on their shared commitment to various forms of orthodox Protestantism.

Perhaps we can think of popular evangelicalism as the water in which we swim.

Churches gravitate toward the evangelical mainstream for various reasons. Often they want to conform. Their wild and woolly days are over and they want to be respectable. They also gravitate toward it because churches can fail at their catechetical tasks and the people—Wesleyan people—sometimes can no longer distinguish between the Wesleyan message and the message of radio and television preachers. There is tremendous pressure to polish away the rough edges of the Wesleyan vision and yield to a generic evangelicalism.

Several years ago, Martin Marty wrote a perceptive article on the corrosive influence of generic evangelicalism. It was titled "Baptistification Takes Over." He is a Lutheran, and his primary point was to lament the way in which very un-Lutheran ideas, drawn largely from popular evangelicalism, are reshaping liturgical churches.<sup>5</sup> But his concern should also resonate with us. Popular notions of baptism, popular eschatology, and the worship wars are only a few of the areas where the water in which we swim is affecting the life of Wesleyan churches and reshaping our theology and practice. This does not mean that we shouldn't learn from other traditions, for we should. But it means that we need to be deliberate, take steps, and undertake the serious work needed to understand what it means for Free Methodists and other Wesleyans to function as believers' churches in the Wesleyan tradition.

*The influence of American culture.* You do not really need a historian's perspective on this one, so I'll make two brief points.

First, if the evangelical subculture is the water in which we swim, American culture is the air that we breathe. We are constantly taking it in and out.

Second, being children of our culture is very much a mixed bag.

On one hand our culture bombards us with messages that clearly shape our identities as individuals and churches. Some messages tell us that we are primarily sexual beings who will find happiness dressing a certain way, applying certain brands of make-up, and frequenting certain entertainments. Other messages urge us to consume, convincing us that happiness comes through owning a certain type of house, living in a certain neighborhood, driving a certain car, having a computer or entertainment center with the latest gizmos, staying up with the Joneses. Other messages claim that a test of true faith comes through voting for the candidates of a certain political party, or in supporting certain social issues, or in exhibiting a certain type of patriotism.

On the other hand, not all assumptions drawn from our culture are bad. American political culture inspired Free Methodism's early commitment to a more democratic and participatory style of Methodism, and this was a good thing. Indeed, my conviction is that the Holy Spirit's voice is heard far more readily in churches where the Spirit is allowed to speak through the people of God, than in hierarchical churches where senior administrators try to discern God's will and interpret it for the people.

So we are called to sift the influence of our culture, just as we are called to sift our place in the evangelical world, and just as we are called to sift our own heritage.

Just over a decade ago, Martin Marty was the keynote speaker at a conference of Nazarene sociologists of religion. The theme of "the elusive Nazarene identity" ran like a thread through several presentations that year. At the end of the conference, Marty was asked to comment on what he had witnessed and heard over the previous two days. He responded, noting that he had listened to discussions about the Willow Creek church as a model for ministry, a perceived loss of Nazarene identity, and other subjects. His opinion, though, was that if Nazarenes wanted to learn from the Willow Creek model,

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<sup>5</sup> Martin E. Marty, "Baptistification Takes Over," *Christianity Today* (September 2, 1983): 33-36.

they should study Willow Creek theology, since theological assumptions always underlie a particular method. He warned, though, that this approach would facilitate, not deter, a sense of drift within the denomination. Rather than aping the models around us, he urged us to go back and study the lives and intentions of our founders, then undertake the difficult task of asking how those intentions can be applied in our day.

It was good advice, though the Nazarenes have rarely followed it since it was given. May you Free Methodists do better than us.