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Truesday's "Square peg: Why Wesleyans aren’t fundamentalists" (Book Review)

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John’s Gospel. “The Prologue is widely recognized by scholars as a thematic and theological preview to the Johannine narrative” (p. 146). Akala then unpacks the whole Gospel using this framework in “seventeen sequences, following the plot of the Johannine narrative; each sequence consists of a synopsis and symbograph” (193). Akala’s work reveals the Son-Father relationship as the “common denominator” (p. 212) for the theological and symbolic understanding of John’s Gospel. “In the Gospel of John, theology is symbolical and symbolism is theological” and they work in “reciprocal relationship” in “revelation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God the Father” (p. 216).

Recommended for libraries needing new scholarship in the Gospel of John or more on the Son-Father Relationship (SFR).

Reviewer
John E. Palmer, Southwestern Assemblies of God University


There is 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 should not 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 (p. 63).

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” (p. 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” (p. 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” (p. 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” (p. 64). So “faith… is seen as belief in or assent to true statements or propositions about God” (p. 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 (p. 67). The infallibility of scripture, then, has to do with “infallibly revealing the will of God in all things necessary to our salvation” (p. 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)” (p. 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” (p. 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” (p. 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.

Reviewer
Craighton Hippenhammer, Olivet Nazarene University


In the fiction work, *Till father’s found* by Jackson Adams, principle character James Warren, son of a single mother, born and raised in Indiana, decides to study theology at St. Anselm’s College, Oxford University in England. Besides his interest in theology he hopes to find information about a former student Thomas Millhouse, the father James never knew. In a parallel story Theobald Millhouse journeys to Oxford to continue his theology studies in the time of the evangelist John Wycliffe (1379–1381).

Both engage in their studies with their stories including theological discussions between the student and faculty. James’s inquiries into the purpose and the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church lead him to convert to Catholicism. He also connects to a family member and learns of his English heritage. His ancestor Theobald wrestles with the problems of the corrupt medieval church. He becomes a follower of John Wycliffe’s teachings and assists with Wycliffe’s work translating the New Testament into English language. Piers Plowman contributes to the stories.

*Till father’s found* cannot be labeled as Christian fiction in the evangelical tradition. The two intertwining storylines should keep adult readers engaged. Theological discussions are sophisticated and may not be understood by the non-theological reader who should be able to follow the gist of the discussions.

Reviewer
Paul B. Drake, Pacific Islands University