THE NORTH IN THE SOUTH: THE HOLINESS METHODISM OF
JOHN LAKIN BRASHER 1868-1971

J. LAWRENCE BRASHER

In the summer of 1897, the Rev. B. F. Haynes, a southern Methodist from Tennessee, attended the holiness camp meeting at Waco, Texas, where an estimated 7,000 people camped in tents and covered wagons. Haynes closed his colorful report of the meeting with this observation: "Very few people have even a remote idea of the magnitude of this holiness movement. In one issue of a single paper in the South, I counted announcements of twenty-nine camp meetings to be held in the South this summer, and this is only a part of the long and growing list."

In 1900, John Lakin Brasher, thirty-two-year-old pastor of a small Methodist Episcopal Church in Birmingham, joined this burgeoning holiness movement, a revival which appeared to some to be "sweeping the South" at the turn of the century. Soon exchanging his city parish for traveling evangelism, Brasher four years later preached at Waco Camp Meeting and gave his own account of the keen southern appetite for holiness: "They came up in those old prairie schooners," he said, "and they sat down on the front rows and said, 'Feed us, we're hungry.' And we poured it into them three hours a day, and they said to come back next day—gluttons for more."

As part of this holiness revival, Brasher and his religion are a window on important aspects of the early southern holiness phenomenon and its relationship to emerging pentecostalism. Why did Brasher embrace the holiness message at the turn of the century? What complex of factors lay behind his conversion to it? What place did his religion occupy in the broad spectrum of holiness fervor and pentecostalism?

Pervasive stereotypes burden perceptions of holiness religion, often depicting holiness and pentecostal groups as one undifferentiated homegrown southern fanaticism. The familiar epithet "holy roller" evokes a cluster of images—poverty, social alienation, ignorance, emotional frenzy, psychological imbalance, perverse doctrines, sectarian asceticism, and southern isolation. Liston Pope's *Millhands and Preachers*, the classic

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3Transcript of sound-recording of Sermon, "Dispensational Truth," Hartselle Camp Meeting, Hartselle, Alabama, 1950, John Lakin Brasher Papers, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. All transcripts hereafter cited are in the Brasher Papers. Brasher Papers hereafter will be cited as BP.

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study of religion in a southern mill town, accurately portrayed the perennial poverty, limited education, and marginal status of holiness groups there. Readers, however, often have taken such studies of particular holiness groups as universally applicable. Wilbur J. Cash furthered stereotypes when he styled southern holiness “orgiastic religion” and “general hysteria.” In the popular arena, Erskine Caldwell’s recently reprinted autobiography, Deep South reinvigorates common notions of holiness as “uninhibited religious exhibitionism” of “impoverished and unenlightened Southerners ... imprisoned there.”

Brasher’s life and religion, however, confuse these stereotypes and point instead to the diversity and contradictions within southern religion and culture. His personal story reveals that holiness, although in harmony with traditional southern religion, was promoted in the South for the last three decades of the nineteenth century by northern emissaries. The holiness which Brasher embraced came south with Reconstruction and remained intimately tied to institutions and political loyalties which were dominant in the North. In the early years of the present century, Brasher and many other moderate southern holiness partisans vehemently rejected the more radical doctrines and practices of the emerging independent southern holiness and pentecostal churches.

Brasher was born in the hill country of north Alabama in 1868 in a seventy-six-foot-long log house ten miles west of Gadsden in Greasy Cove. His plain-folk family was Unionist and Republican, active in politics and in the recently reorganized (northern) Methodist Episcopal Church in Alabama. Son and grandson of preachers, Brasher served several Methodist Episcopal Churches in north Alabama before graduating in 1899 as valedictorian of Ulysses S. Grant University in Chattanooga, now a branch of the University of Tennessee. He was later president of two schools, a Methodist Episcopal secondary school in Alabama and a holiness college in Iowa. In 1900 in Birmingham, Brasher identified with the holiness movement and chose the road of traveling evangelism. His varied itinerancy took him to rustic southern brush-arbor meetings and to middle-class resorts such as Ocean Grove, New Jersey, where he shared the platform with William Jennings Bryan. In all, Brasher traveled over 70,000 miles throughout the United States to preach in holiness camp meetings where he was known as “the great Southern orator.” He preached vigorous, hour-long sermons through his one-hundred-first year.

In a sermon delivered in the open air before an immense crowd on his hundredth birthday, Brasher claimed the privilege of having preached John Wesley's doctrine of holiness longer and later in life than anyone in history. Very simply put, Wesley's doctrine posited two decisive experiences of God's grace—first, justification or the new birth which pardons the sinner for sins committed; second, entire sanctification which actually cleanses away the sinful nature and fills the former sinner with pure love for God and neighbor. Entire sanctification, variously styled "holiness," "Christian perfection," "perfect love," or "the second blessing," was the original distinctive of Methodism, its promulgation adopted as the church's central purpose at the founding of American Methodism in 1784. After the Civil War, revival of the doctrine gained momentum when leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the north founded the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness at Vineland, New Jersey, in 1867. Camp meetings sponsored by the church and preaching the second blessing quickly spread across the northeast and midwest.

At the same time, the northern branch of Methodism was engaged in an expansionist venture attempting to re-establish herself in southern territory which had been the exclusive domain of the southern Methodists since the division of Methodism in 1844. Even the most objective accounts of the return of the northern church after the war refer to the re-entry as a "Southern occupation" or a "denominational invasion." In fact, religious and political motives of the return were often indistinguishable. Northern bishop Davis Clark, who baptized Brasher and orchestrated the post-war return of the northern church to Georgia and Alabama, avowed that "the best Reconstruction was the extension of the Methodist Episcopal

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The North in the South

Church. Wherever it was planted,” he said, “there the cause of good government was planted also.”

Northern church leaders openly expressed hope of displacing the white Methodism of the South and further pledged themselves to the tasks of converting and educating the freedmen and of inculcating loyalty among all southerners to the Federal government. These northern missionaries achieved considerable success among the freedmen. Approximately four-fifths of the membership which the Methodist Episcopal Church eventually gleaned from the former Confederate States was black. Little wonder, however, that these emissaries of the northern church, often called “Republican Methodists,” won only suspicion and contempt from most white southerners.

One of the most notorious of these missionaries was the Rev. Arad S. Lakin, close friend of the Brashers and, significantly, the one for whom John Lakin Brasher was named. Lakin, a missionary from Ohio, earlier had marched as chaplain with Sherman through Georgia. In 1865, he was sent by Bishop Clark to rebuild a constituency for the northern church in Alabama. In 1871, Lakin testified before the Congressional committee investigating conditions in the South and related lurid accounts of post-war outrages committed against Blacks and former Unionists. One Alabama politician who testified in response at the same session, in less than a page of withering stenographic testimony, branded Lakin “a humbug,” “a liar,” “a slanderer,” “a hell of an old rascal,” “an old heathen Chinee,” and “an old ruffian.”

Lakin himself had been the object of persecution. A staunch Republican, in 1868 he had sought and received appointment as Reconstruction president of the University of Alabama, but was frightened away by the intervention of the Ku Klux Klan. Just a month before John Lakin Brasher’s baptism, the Tuscaloosa Independent Monitor reported the mob which had intimidated Lakin. An accompanying woodcut became

13Christian Advocate, 14 Sept. 1865, quoted in Morrow, Northern Methodism, 21-22. The Alabama Conference, organized October 1867, was the eighth and final Conference established in the South.
14Morrow, Northern Methodism, 21.
15Ibid., 245.
16Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States (Washington, 1872), vol. I, 125 (hereafter cited as Testimony). Walter Fleming stated, “Every Northern Methodist was a Republican; and to-day in some sections of the State, the Northern Methodists are known as ‘Republican Methodists,’ as distinguished from ‘Democratic’ or Southern Methodists.” Walter L. Fleming, Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1905), 639 (hereafter cited as Fleming, Civil War).
perhaps the most famous political cartoon of the Reconstruction era. Lakin
and an associate were depicted as hanging by ropes from a tree. A mule
with the initials "K.K.K." on its side was pictured as walking out from
under Lakin who held a carpetbag marked "Ohio."\textsuperscript{18} At the Congressional
investigation of 1871, Lakin helped fuel the Republican campaign by
describing North Alabama as in "a perfect reign of terror."\textsuperscript{19} In some places
it was.

Brasher’s father, John Jackson Brasher, had represented the sizeable
Unionist element of Blount County at the Alabama Secession Conven­
tion of 1861. He voted against secession.\textsuperscript{20} After the war, however, Blount
County lynched its Federally appointed sheriff.\textsuperscript{21} Brasher’s outspoken
Republican sentiments led to threats against his life and rowdiness among
the congregation while he was preaching. He began to carry his pistol when
in the pulpit. According to legend, his patience failed him during one
meeting and he shot the back of a bench between two young toughs who
deliberately sang off-key and continually shouted “amen” at the most in­
appropriate points of his sermon. Shortly afterward, Brasher’s gristmill
was burned.\textsuperscript{22} Undaunted, John Jackson Brasher joined the northern
Methodist Episcopal Church as a charter member when it returned to
Alabama in 1867.\textsuperscript{23}

His son John Lakin’s earliest memories were of the antipathies occa­
sioned by his father’s political and institutional loyalties. The disturbing
sound of Ku-Klux whistles in the night outside the log house kept him
from sleeping. “Mother never could be certain Pa would come home alive,”

\textsuperscript{18}Tuscaloosa Independent Monitor, 1 Sept. 1868, 1. Among several Northern papers which
reprinted the cartoon, the Cincinnati Commercial published 500,000 copies for distribution
\textsuperscript{19}Testimony, vol. I, 1207. The 1871 Alabama Conference of the Northern church lamented
“outrages resulting in the death, torture, and intimidation of ministers and members,” by
disguised bands of desperadoes called ‘Ku-Klux-Klan’. The murder of the Rev. Americus
Trammel and the “brutal beating” of the Rev. Isaac Dorman were reported. Minutes, Alabama
Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, 1871, 2-3 (hereafter cited as Minutes).
\textsuperscript{20}John L. Brasher to Delbert Rose, 13 Oct. 1964, BP; Milo B. Howard, Director, State of
Alabama Department of Archives and History, to Ruth Corr, Georgia Department of Ar­
chives and History, 29 Dec. 1977, BP.
\textsuperscript{21}Sheriff Lee Murphree, from Tennessee, was lynched in 1867. Interview, Captain Eugene
A. Maynor, Oneonta, Alabama, 5 Jan. 1980; Blount County Historical Society, The Heritage
of Blount County (n.p., 1977), 99 (hereafter cited as Blount County).
\textsuperscript{22}Interview, Captain Eugene A. Maynor, Oneonta, Alabama, 5 Jan. 1980; Blount County
p. 99. Lakin reported a Methodist Episcopal local preacher of Fayetteville, Alabama, “shot
dead in the pulpit while preaching in 1869.” Testimony, vol. I, p. 128. In reference to persecu­
tion, Morrow states, “Methodism’s existence seemed most hazardous in rural districts away
from federal military posts. Most victims of persecution were natives of the South who had
sworn fidelity to the Northern church,” and “were almost invariably clergymen with established
political reputations.” Northern Methodism, 239-240.
\textsuperscript{23}Minutes, 1867, 5.
he recalled. “I don’t remember Mother ever getting a letter from him. We just knew that sometime he’d come back, if he didn’t get killed.”24 “They called us N-O-R-T-H-E-R-N Methodists.”25 “My father organized a church which was as welcome in the South as a wet dog in a lady’s dressing room.”26 John Lakin never abandoned the loyalties stamped on him as a child. In his ninety-fifth year, while preaching on the Crucifixion to an Alabama audience, he used his imagery: “The Cross was HELL’S GETTYSBURG, and the first line of the devil’s last, awful charge BROKE at the foot of the Cross like those pale legions broke at the top of Roundtop.”27

The hill country of Alabama, where Unionist sentiment had flamed brightest among the plain folk, was the strength of the reorganized Methodist Episcopal Church. But her white congregations remained throughout their existence only scattered islands in the wide sea of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. By 1900, the reorganized church could still claim only 9,000 white members in Alabama—a figure ten times outnumbered by the southern Methodists in the state.28 Loyalty to this minority Methodism of the hill country played a leading role in Brasher’s identification with the holiness movement, a revival which began and possessed greatest influence in the northern segment of the church.

The holiness movement as early as the 1870s claimed adherents below the Mason-Dixon line, but initial holiness interest in the South in almost all cases came through northern individuals, periodicals, or institutions.29

28 In 1900 in Alabama, the Methodist Episcopal Church claimed 9,000 white members, while the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, boasted 100,000. Minutes, 1900; Minutes of the Alabama Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1900.
29 For example, the influential Georgia Holiness Association was organized in 1887 at the home of its first president, A. J. Jarrell, who had been sanctified in 1876 at the holiness camp meeting at Ocean Grove, New Jersey. The opening session at Flovilla, Georgia, of Indian Springs Camp Meeting, later the grandest in the South, met in tents donated by the Illinois Holiness Association. The Texas holiness movement was sparked in 1877 by the sermons of Hardin Wallace, a Methodist Episcopal preacher from Illinois, and the following year by W. B. Colt, a Free Methodist from Illinois. The first holiness periodical in the South, The Way of Holiness, Spartanburg, South Carolina, was edited by a Northern Methodist and depended heavily on excerpts from Northern holiness journals and authors. See Mrs. J. W. Garbutt, Rev. W. A. Dodge as We Knew Him (Atlanta: The Franking Printing Co., 1906), pp. 48, 100; C. B. Jernigan, Pioneer Days of the Holiness Movement in the Southwest (Kansas City, Missouri: Pentecostal Nazarene Publishing House, 1919), pp. 18-19 (hereafter cited as Jernigan, Pioneer Days); The Way of Holiness. A Journal of the Higher Life Experience 54 (Feb. 1876): 7.
In the immediate post-war years some Methodists envisioned the doctrine of perfect love as panacea for the wounds of Methodist division. Northern exponents of holiness in the South saw themselves primarily as promoters of a doctrine originally common to both Methodisms rather than as lobbyists for their own branch of the church. The holiness impulse crossed sectional bounds more easily than denominations and played a part in the early reintegration of the South into the national culture. Fervid revivalistic preaching of northern holiness emissaries, which emphasized individual salvation, supernatural second blessing, and obedience to a strict moral code, struck a harmonious chord with traditional southern evangelicalism.

In 1880, John Inskip, pre-eminent northern Methodist holiness evangelist, held a revival in Charleston, South Carolina, and reported: "We so far nowhere have known anything of the cold and repulsive feeling alleged to prevail toward Northern men. It is the perfectly natural result of the character of our work and mission. We are invited by our Southern brethren to come among them and aid them in awakening an interest in the great work of holiness."30 Aged southern Methodist Bishop William Wightman responded: "In the memory of no living man was there ever witnessed in the Methodist Churches of Charleston a religious movement comparable to this."31

But the harmony was short-lived. Other southern Methodist leaders already viewed holiness fervor as an unwelcome northern import. The Texas Christian Advocate complained: "Nearly everyone of the holiness people profess to have never heard the truth preached until an angel of peace flew down from the regions of snow to Texas' sunny land and preached the 'know-now-full-salvation'."32 Southern Methodist bishops saw their authority jeopardized by the multiplying autonomous holiness associations among their membership and by the growing number of "unauthorized and unregulated" holiness evangelists.33 Radical innovations in the doctrine of sanctification, such as sinless perfection and a "third blessing of the fire," and popular holiness belief in an imminent Second Coming threatened southern Methodist orthodoxy.34

31 Southern Christian Advocate, 13 March 1880, 1.
32 Texas Christian Advocate, 29 Nov. 1879, 1.
33 "Bishops' Address," Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1894 24 (hereafter cited as "Bishops' Address").
34 Evangelist B. H. Irwin promoted a third blessing of fire. Other radical ideas, especially in Texas, included salvation from death, interest in demonology, marital purity, abstinence from pork and coffee, denial of the need for doctors or medicine. See Jernigan, Pioneer Days, 151-157. By the 1890s, most holiness leaders in the South were premillennialists, while both Northern and Southern Methodism remained officially postmillennialist. The major Southern Methodist polemic against premillennialism, with an introduction by Bishop Warren A. Candler, cited the doctrine as "an important plank in the holiness platform." See Clement C. Cary, The Second Coming of Christ, Showing Pre-Millenarianism to Be Unscriptural and Unreasonable (Atlanta: Doctor Blosser Co., 1902), 3 and passim.
In 1894, southern Methodist bishops reacted in an address which reaffirmed the church's commitment to "holiness of heart and life" but condemned independent evangelists and devotees of "the holiness party" who appeared "to claim a monopoly on the experience of holiness." The statement shocked sanctified southern Methodists, many of whom began to "come out" of the southern church to form a score of independent holiness denominations in the ensuing decade. Northern Methodists in the South, struggling for survival in an inhospitable land, saw the "comeouters" as a field ripe for harvest. They began proclaiming holiness with new vigor and deliberately wooed disaffected southern Methodist holiness folk. In 1899, for example, former southern Methodist pastor J. W. Lively of Texas made a plea to southern Methodist holiness preachers on behalf of the norther church: "Come home boys, to your Mother. Methodism is the mother of holiness. Come home and we will given you a horse to ride, and a Bible, and a hymnbook, and some money in your pockets, and send you out to preach holiness."

In Alabama, the northern church had championed holiness from its beginning. But during the 1890s while the southern Methodist hierarchy was alienating its perfectionist partisans, the northern bishops of Brasher's church fairly bombarded him and his colleagues with pleas for holiness. The dispute over holiness was waged between seminaries as well. The northern church had established Ulysses S. Grant University in Chattanooga as an alternative to the southern Methodists' Vanderbilt. When in the 1880s Vanderbilt gained reputation as a center of anti-holiness propaganda, its rival theological school at U.S. Grant, where Brasher graduated, eagerly boosted the second blessing.

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35"Bishops' Address," 24-25. The Methodist Episcopal Church in 1896 also issued a statement which cautioned against exclusive emphasis upon sanctification as instantaneous. The statement also denied the necessity of testifying to such an experience, but its warnings were not as pointed as those of the Southern address. *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1896, Appendix III, 497-498.


37During the first forty years of the Conference (1867-1906), pro-holiness bishops chaired twenty-five of the annual sessions. See especially *Minutes*, 1871, 1883, 1884.

38During the first nine years of Brasher's attendance at Annual Conference, up to the year of his sanctification, every bishop who chaired the sessions actively promoted second-blessing holiness: Isaac W. Joyce (1892), Thomas Bowman (1893), William X. Ninde (1894), J. W. Vincent (1895), John F. Hurst (1896), Cyrus D. Foss (1897), C. C. McCabe (1897), Daniel A. Goodsell (1898), Willard F. Mallalieu (1899), J. N. Fitzgerald (1900). See *Minutes*, 1892-1900. By 1900, some southern Methodists were referring to the northern Methodist Church in their midst as "the holiness Church." *Nazarene Messenger*, 23 Aug. 1900, quoted in Timothy L. Smith, *Called unto Holiness, The Story of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, Missouri: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962), 146.

39Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingood, *The University of Chattanooga: Sixty Years* (Chattanooga, 1947), 10, 48, 69, 251. The same Methodist Episcopal bishops filled important offices at U.S. Grant.
This end-of-the-century holiness campaign failed to attract many southern Methodists to the Methodist Episcopal Church, but it laid the foundation for Brasher’s experience of the second blessing in 1900. His sanctification occurred during his initially discouraging pastorate at Simpson Methodist Church in Birmingham. There he ministered to a “scattered, comparatively poor” flock of about eighty members—not the disinherited, but rural newcomers to the city, who were middle-class either in performance or aspiration.40

In spite of the obvious dominance of the southern Methodists in the city, open rivalry prevailed between the two churches. “The pressure,” Brasher recalled, “not to say the prejudice of the Southern Methodist Church was hard to bear.”41 To his consternation, the *Birmingham News* persistently printed news of his Methodist Episcopal Church under the pejorative heading, “Northern Methodist.” Adding insult to injury, most Methodist newcomers from the North shunned Brasher’s small church and joined the most prominent southern Methodist Churches of the city.42

Brasher experienced the second blessing within days after reading an urgent appeal from all the Methodist Episcopal bishops—a jeremiad which expressed alarm over the first national net loss of members in the church’s history and which called for a deeper spiritual life among pastors as remedy. He sought entire sanctification not only to satisfy his own spiritual need, but also to gain power to prosper his particular denomination.43 Brasher earnestly believed that God could use his holiness evangelism to swell the ranks of his hard-pressed minority church in Alabama, that his vocation was a call to rescue his beloved institution—the church of his fathers. “I have a desire that I shall be of most service to God and the

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40John L. Brasher, “An Autobiography,” 19-20, BP. Brasher’s correspondence of the time and reminiscences mention occupations of church members such as tradesmen, artisans, boarding house keepers, nurses. See John L. Brasher, “An Autobiography,” 19-22, BP; John L. Brasher, “A Biography of Minnie Eunice Moore Brasher,” BP; Leona Copeland Brasher, “Mama,” BP. Charles Edwin Jones shows that typical turn-of-the-century urban holiness churches attracted rural newcomers who were middle-class or who aspired to it. See his “Disinherited or Rural? A Historical Case Study in Urban Holiness Religion,” *Missouri Historical Review* 66 (Apr. 1972): 395-412. There are over 20,000 letters in the Brasher Papers from Brasher’s colleagues and converts. Most exhibit writing ability and concerns indicative of the middle class. Many letters appear from holiness adherents who were shopkeepers and even owners of sizeable industries.

41Brasher, “An Autobiography,” 19, BP. As an example of the “pressure,” Brasher wrote, “Simpson Methodist Episcopal Church was [originally] called ‘First Methodist Church,’ but the southern Church later built a large church and called it ‘First Methodist Church.’ So the M.E. Church changed its name to honor the great Bishop Matthew Simpson.”


church,” he wrote. “I have listened to a real Macedonia cry coming to me from all over Alabama . . . while my heart was breaking for a revival of the church. This conference must have a revival or perish.”

Brasher’s tenacious loyalty to the church of his fathers also predisposed him to disapprove the new holiness and pentecostal bodies organized at the turn of the century by Methodist come-outers. “I was born into the Methodist Church,” he declared, “and I expect to die out of it or be translated out of it.” In fact, the great majority of holiness folk in the South in both Methodisms remained loyal to Methodism. Brasher was one of a sizeable group of the most popular southern holiness evangelists, most of whom were loyalists.

For Brasher, as for Wesley, holiness was the “grand depositum” of Methodism, and the holiness movement the leaven which could restore not only Methodism but also the church universal to their original unity and glory. As the new holiness churches multiplied, Brasher lamented that the movement was being “divided into coteries . . . and little insignificant churches, each one jealous of its prerogatives and its place, and antagonistic against the others.” But more tragic in Brasher’s eyes was what he saw as the trivialization in the new churches of Methodism’s historic quest for purity of heart. “It takes a great amount of frost and storm to make a great oak,” Brasher wrote. “Most of the men who have been transplanted out of the church into some little holiness church have been saplings and have largely developed knots and not branches.” Brasher often repeated the maxim, “It is easier to make a sectarian than a saint.”

As for pentecostalism, Brasher’s earliest recorded judgment was, “All the claims made by this movement have been duplicated by hypnotism, spiritism, and Mormonism.” In his better moments he could write: “I have nothing but love for all this people.” But in other moments, he complained, “Some people must be fanatics if they live long enough. Fanatics are not made they are born. And when they get inoculated with germs

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44John L. Brasher to R. J. Cooke, 4 Nov. 1902, BP.
45John L. Brasher to the Rev. G. R. Pease, 11 May 1922, BP.
46In the 1890s there were roughly four million Methodists in the United States, one-third to one-half of them committed to holiness. Approximately 100,000 or less than one tenth of the holiness folk left to form new churches. See Vinson Synan, The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1971), 54. Other prominent southern holiness evangelists who were loyalists were William B. Godby, Henry Clay Morrison, Beverly Carradine, L. L. Pickett, Charlie Tillman.
47John L. Brasher to Pentecostal Ministry League, 11 Feb. 1920, BP.
48John L. Brasher to the Rev. G. R. Pease, 11 May 1922, BP.
50John L. Brasher to A. H. Glascock, 3 Sept. 1909, BP.
they always take. Just like typhoid fever or small pox. If they are exposed to it, they'll take it.”

Brasher faulted pentecostals on doctrine and decorum. He espoused the mainline holiness position that the gifts of tongues and healing claimed by pentecostals were spurious—that those gifts had ceased to operate after the apostolic age. He deplored the abandonment of the “great hymns of Watts and Wesley” in exchange for what he called the pentecostals’ “rag-time, half-jazz, ditty-like, doggerel songs calculated only to stir up momentary excitement.” In his preaching, Brasher drew not only upon scripture, but also upon history, philosophy, and logic to present a reasoned case for the doctrine for holiness. He thus criticized pentecostals for “preferring a wiggle to an idea, a spasm to sanity, and a jargon no one understands to plain wholesome teaching.”

Brasher loved decorum. He was not against emotion: “I was born on July twentieth in Alabama,” he wrote. “I have always had a non-frozen exposure of soul and heart.” In his preaching services, he countenanced shouting, weeping, holy laughing, even holy dancing. For Brasher, nothing equaled “the gladsome swing of a full-salvation service.” But he despised what he called the “extravagant manifestations” of pentecostalism—emotions and actions he believed were not of the Spirit. “If the cup runs over,” he said, “that is all right, but I never did like to see anyone tilt it.” He recognized true spiritual behavior both by its ability to edify and by its appropriateness for the particular moment. Thus tongues were merely nonsense language. Dancing in the Spirit was acceptable in testimony time or at the altar call, but not during preaching. Falling in the Spirit was never approved. Brasher’s renowned co-evangelist H. C. Morrison used to spank worshippers supposedly felled by the Spirit in order to bring them back to their senses. In sum, Brasher regarded pentecostalism as a “burlesque” of the holiness movement.

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51John L. Brasher to the Rev. Edwin Phillips, 19 May 1921, BP.
52Transcript of Sermon, “Pentecost,” Albertville Methodist Church, Albertville, Alabama, 10 June 1962.
53John L. Brasher, “Wanted, A New Enthusiasm,” 20 July 1921, BP.
54John L. Brasher, manuscript editorial for The Way of Faith (Columbia, South Carolina), ca. 1929, BP.
55John L. Brasher to Hollow Rock Camp Meeting, Toronto, Ohio, 1 Aug. 1955, BP.
56Transcript of Sermon, “Quench Not the Spirit,” Rock Methodist Church, Tarrant, Alabama, 28 March 1950, BP.
57John L. Brasher to Hollow Rock Camp Meeting, Toronto, Ohio, 6 July 1964, BP.
58John L. Brasher, “The Fruit of the Spirit,” lecture delivered at God’s Bible School, Cincinnati, Ohio, 29 March 1950, BP.
59John L. Brasher to A. H. Glascock, 3 Sept. 1909, BP.
60John L. Brasher, “The Moods of the Spirit,” lecture delivered at God’s Bible School, Cincinnati, Ohio, 28 March 1950, BP.
61John L. Brasher to A. H. Glascock, 3 Sept. 1909, BP.
Such a narrow glimpse of a man whose active ministry spanned eighty years easily runs the risk of being a caricature. The motivations behind Brasher's quest for entire sanctification were more complex than here described. His concept of holiness was more profound than this sketch presents, and his overall spirit more clement and catholic than these quotations reveal. The point has been to show that he confuses the stereotypes. And he was not unique, but in various ways represented many other holiness folk in the South. His holiness was conservative. His religion was not a southern exotic, but a mainline import from the North. His advocacy of holiness was at first inseparable from his devotion to the Methodist Episcopal Church and its Republican constituency. Although he was often underpaid and his means sometimes slender, he was essentially middle-class as were most of his colleagues and audiences. He was well-educated for his day. He viewed the doctrines and practices of some independent holiness groups and all pentecostals as heretical and irreverent. Calling for a spiritual revival within established denominations, he condemned "come-outism." Brasher never relinquished his vision of a Methodism some day renewed in holiness. But as the twentieth century unfolded and the holiness movement splintered into an evergrowing number of sects and factions, there was sometimes a wistful tone in Brasher's statements, as in a letter he wrote in 1922: "If nobody had left the church, we might after awhile have gotten hold of the pilot house."62

62John L. Brasher to the Rev. G. R. Pease, 11 May 1922, BP.