As he surveyed the world around him in 1901, Methodist bishop Willard F. Mallalieu said, "The present hour is a time of bewilderment. The world is full of unrest ... we are living in a transitional age." Later, historians would agree with the Bishop's evaluation. In the closing decades of the 19th century, old patterns of life were being rearranged and established precepts were being overturned as scientific theories, technological advances, mass immigration, industrialization, and urbanization combined to challenge the prevailing lifestyle of many Americans. The "flood of new factors" was "sweeping away many of the spiritual premises and religious foundations which seemed so substantial and secure to most persons in the nineteenth century."

For a culture largely rooted in the evangelical Protestant worldview, these developments could be disturbing. Many felt that the revolution in ideas inaugurated by Darwin, Marx, and others called for a new theology to "keep pace with a volatile people." New theories in the fields of biology, geology, and sociology, as well as anthropology and biblical studies seemed to demand a fresh appraisal of the traditional Christian understanding of the world and humanity. Some scholars felt the Christian faith needed to be recast in a more rational, humanistic light without all the trappings of a pre-scientific biblical world-view. The result was an innovative theology called "liberalism," based upon rationalism, philosophical idealism, and the findings of higher criticism.

5Marsden, 32, 33.
While some scholars in the American Protestant churches were quick to embrace this new theology, Methodist theologians initially remained loyal to the doctrines handed down to them by John Wesley. Into the 1880s the main sources of Methodist theology continued to be the Bible, Wesley’s writings, and Richard Watson’s *Theological Institutes*, first published in America in 1829. Nevertheless, even within Methodism the surge of theological liberalism was not to be denied. “When men who had received their training on the European continent began to teach in the Methodist theological seminaries and universities, the influence of [liberalism] was soon apparent in Methodist ministerial and higher education.” The earlier ubiquitous appeal to the works of John Wesley became “almost as conspicuous by its absence after 1890 in Methodism’s major systematic theologians.” The retirement of many older evangelical professors at the seminaries in the 1880s and 1890s brought into Methodist theological education a whole new generation of scholars, a shift that “signaled the end of one theological era and the beginning of another.”

In an attempt to account for this rapid change in theological orientation, some have posited within Methodism the absence of a “secure theological identity.” This theory holds that if Methodism church had been more creedally oriented, it would have been less vulnerable to theological innovation. As a corollary to this theory, others have pointed out that Methodists have always been more interested in the pragmatic benefits of doctrine than in its esoteric quality. Such a practical approach to theology encouraged Methodism to be open to new ideas, to “adapt [its] teaching to the age” and to embrace “newer views of the Bible” as soon as their positive practical “tendency [became] clear.”

Along with this supposed theological weakness, a particular historical phenomenon has been suggested to help explain Methodism’s turn to liber-
alism. In the post-Civil War era many Methodists became involved in the "holiness movement." At first, bishops and other church leaders welcomed the renewal of spiritual fervor in the churches and publicly supported the holiness movement. However, by the early 1890s dissatisfaction with the holiness movement had developed, and some bishops and pastors became harshly critical of the movement on the grounds of its perceived inclination towards independent associations and programs. This dispute revolved around matters of polity and practice, but an element of theological disagreement was also present, and the rancor of public theological argument tried the patience of many in the church. When thousands of holiness proponents departed Methodism to establish their own new denominations, and as unpleasantness over the holiness controversy subsided, a pronounced desire to avoid all doctrinal disputation prevailed.

Another factor in the rapid spread of theological liberalism, at least within northern Methodism, was the dominance of Boston University School of Theology in the training of young ministers for the denomination. As the "old guard" at Boston retired in the 1880s and early 1890s, a "growing spirit of revolt against tradition" became "perceptible." Younger men like Henry C. Sheldon and Hinckley G. Mitchell were introducing into Methodist theology "an abrupt change." But, it was Borden Parker Bowne more than any other who "led the movement in American Methodism toward a liberal theology." Bowne, professor of philosophy at Boston from 1876 to 1910, has been called the "most influential Methodist Episcopal theologian at the beginning of the twentieth century," one who "reinterpreted Methodist theology and set it upon a new course of development." With Bowne in the vanguard, the faculty of Boston placed a decidedly liberal stamp on the training of a whole generation of Methodist ministers.


17Chiles, 64.

18Langford, 151.

19As late as the 1920s, half of those in training for the ministry in the northern church still did not attend seminary. But, the "Course of Study," which was the alternate route to ordination, was heavily influenced by Bowne's thought. William Henry Bernhardt, "The Influence of Borden Parker Bowne Upon Theological Thought in the Methodist Episcopal Church," diss., University of Chicago, 1928, 254.
Many of those educated at Boston became leaders in the church in the first decades of the 20th century. As the largest and most prestigious Methodist theological school, Boston’s constituency was not limited to the New England area. In 1907 it had “1,222 living alumni scattered in 79 Conferences and 21 states in the Union.”21 In those crucial years of theological development in the church “a large part of the leadership of The Methodist Church had been trained” at Boston.22 In the early 20th century more and more Methodist congregations, especially in the growing cities, were demanding professionally trained ministers.23 Consequently, those receiving their training at Boston could often look forward to the “top echelon pulpits and leadership posts” in the denomination.24 Other seminaries in northern Methodism followed Boston’s lead and began to provide a distinctly liberal training for their students.25

The situation in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was somewhat different. At the turn of the century the southern branch of Methodism boasted of its resolute commitment to conservative Christianity, and as late as 1918 the denomination was still considered “conservative,” basing its theology on “biblical literalism” and “objectifiable tenets of doctrine.”26 Nevertheless, the so-called “doctrinal flexibility” of Methodism left the southern church open to a liberal point of view.27 Until 1914 the church’s center of theological education was its one seminary at Vanderbilt

21T. J. Scott, “Another Worthy Record,” NYCA 82.14 (April 4, 1907): 542. That same year twenty-four states and seven foreign countries were represented in its student body. “Report of Conference Visitors to Boston University School of Theology,” NYCA 82.30 (July 25, 1907): 1194.


24William John McCutcheon, “Theology of the Methodist Episcopal Church During the Interwar Period (1919-1939),” diss., Yale University, 1960, 395. In the 1920s, “nine of the most significant bishops of the church” had been “students of Professor Browne” and reflected “more or less clearly his point of view.” Bernhardt, 254.


University. Although Vanderbilt had sustained a strong conservative identity through the 1880s, a "gradual evolution from orthodoxy to a cautious and constructive liberalism began in the 1890s."\(^{28}\) In some ways Vanderbilt's influence in the southern church was analogous to Boston's position in the north.\(^{29}\) After the denomination lost control of Vanderbilt in 1914, two new schools of theology were established at Emory University in Atlanta and Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Although conservatism was represented in the faculties of these schools, so was liberalism.\(^{30}\)

This trend also reached beyond the seminaries into other institutions in southern Methodism. Many of the "summer schools," which provided theological training for ministers who did not attend seminary, were led by liberal professors from schools in the North. In addition, the "extensive changes in the Course of Study ... in 1918 show that the liberal influence was not to be uprooted."\(^{31}\) The seeds of liberalism quietly planted began to bear fruit in the 1920s as the church publications shifted their editorial policies to a more liberal perspective. A collection of sermons published by the denomination in 1927 and promoted as a sampling "from some of our representative preachers" revealed that while some of the southern preachers still clearly emphasized evangelical themes, others were sounding a decidedly more liberal note.\(^{32}\) By 1930 theological liberalism was well established in southern Methodism.\(^{33}\)

Thus, most observers have concluded that the process of theological transformation that began within American Methodism in the last fifteen years of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century was largely completed by the 1930s at the latest. When considering the content of theological education alone, most agree the date of liberalism's takeover must be moved back to somewhere before the First World War.\(^{34}\) Standard interpretations of Methodist history often treat the northern church's adoption of the "Social Creed" in 1908 as the defining moment in this theological transition in American Methodism. This act indicated "Methodism [had] forthrightly embarked upon a career of social witness."\(^{35}\) Liberal theology and the changing social context persuaded Methodists to abandon their emotional, revivalistic approach, which had been well suited to Methodist work on the volatile western frontier, in favor


\(^{29}\) Mims, 164. For instance, by 1938 at least five of the bishops in the Southern church were Vanderbilt alumni, all of whom stood "out as liberal leaders from the standpoint of both organization and doctrine." Mims, writing in 1946, named six bishops, but one of these was not elected until 1944.


\(^{31}\) McCulloh, 598.


\(^{33}\) Sledge, 242.

\(^{34}\) Langford, *Wesleyan*, 137.

of a more institutionalized system of ministry focused on the social ills of the industrialized urban East. 36 Most histories of the 20th-century church hardly mention any remaining evangelical sentiment, either in theology or ministry, in Methodism after 1930.

The Methodists were not alone in this transition. Other American Protestant denominations experienced similar theological changes. However, the process for these churches, most notably the northern Presbyterians and Baptists, was fraught with struggle and schism that seemed singularly absent from Methodism. The membership of Methodism was drawn largely from the same social classes as that of the Baptists and Presbyterians and they shared a common commitment in the 19th century to the evangelical consensus. Yet, somehow, the Methodists seemed to have accepted liberalism without the fratricidal strife that afflicted other church families. 37 While the other denominations had large and vocal fundamentalist contingents within their memberships, a number of historians have commented on the minor place of organized fundamentalism within 20th-century American Methodism. 38

At least eight different factors have been suggested to explain the absence of a strong fundamentalist movement within American Methodism during the years 1900-1930. Methodism’s supposed lack of emphasis upon theological exactitude, which made it vulnerable to liberalism, made it difficult for fundamentalists to establish a theological rallying point. “Methodism was too little oriented toward strict doctrinal definitions for its fundamentalists to grow to large numbers or to have much impact.” 39 A leading Methodist bishop in the 1920s, Francis J. McConnell, insisted that the issues then being debated by fundamentalists in other denominations would not “disturb Methodism overmuch” as long as they remained “in the realm of theoretical discussion.” 40

A second reason Methodism seemed to avoid the fundamentalist controversy was the effective leadership of liberal bishops such as Francis McConnell. During those years some of the most powerful bishops in the church were men of a “progressive” spirit. In the northern branch of Methodism liberal bishops “used a combination of wisdom and authority to counteract the agitations of the ultraconservatives,” while in the south,

37 Hutchison, 114.
39 Marsden, Fundamentalism 178; also, Ellingsen, 85-86.
40 McConnell, 94.
Bishops Edwin D. Mouzon and John M. Moore denounced fundamentalism as "obscurantist and un-Methodistic." In 1923 Mouzon published a book titled, *Fundamentals of Methodism*, which "served as a kind of definitive statement around which progressives could rally" against fundamentalism in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Capable men like Mouzon, Moore, McConnell, and others held the fundamentalists at bay within Methodism during the 1910s and 1920s.

However, it was not just the bishops who worked to keep Methodism free from fundamentalist agitation; other important positions also came to be filled by men of a liberal persuasion. The periodicals, both the popular weekly newspapers and the more scholarly theological journals, in both the North and South were bastions of traditional orthodoxy into the opening years of the new century. However, by the 1920s new editors had shifted the doctrinal orientation of the church press. In addition, the national Sunday School leadership of both churches fell into liberal hands before 1920. David G. Downey, editor of the widely used Sunday School publications in the northern church, "exerted tremendous influence over some 4,000,000 youth." In 1896 James Atkins was elected Sunday School editor for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. His election inaugurated an era of transformation and development in religious education along liberal lines within Southern Methodism. Atkins' book, *The Kingdom in the Cradle*, published in 1905, "was a strong antidote for the overdose of fundamentalist teaching which had been spread abroad" in the southern church up to that time.

These editors and denominational agency executives were joined by a host of other men who pre-empted the fundamentalist movement in Methodism by already occupying places of leadership before the 1920s. William McCutcheon has commented on the "overwhelmingly successful maneuver of securing in positions of national church leadership men who were admittedly liberal in thought." Once again the importance of Boston-trained men in the northern church is noteworthy: "In one generation virtually every Methodist college and university had for a president a Boston-trained liberal." With the formal and informal education arms of the church firmly in liberal hands, Methodism was spared the "Modernism-
Fundamentalism controversy that wrought such great damage in other denominations.48 In addition to the national leadership, many of the local clergy, especially those in the larger churches, were in the modernist camp.49

A fourth reason for the supposed weakness of Methodist conservatism was its apparent inability to produce an effective corps of leaders to counter the liberal offensive.50 The organizational structure of Methodism partly explains this absence of strong conservative leadership. In contrast to those denominations where ecclesiastical authority is decentralized in local congregations and regional presbyteries, Methodism’s “connectional polit... made it impossible for local congregations to isolate themselves.”51 Also, the annual episcopal appointment of ministers to local churches made it more difficult for individual ministers to establish congregational power bases that were out of step with denominational leadership. If a minister’s fundamentalism began to cause problems, he could expect “the officials of the church . . . to take a hand.”52

Another factor was the concern for unity, which was amplified in the wake of the holiness controversy of the later years of the 19th century and grew even stronger as the two branches of Methodism moved ever closer to unification, a process finally concluded in 1939. At the 1928 General Conference in the northern church, the bishops were in no mood for “polemical haranguing which would prove divisive,” and in their Episcopal Address they cautioned the church against “heresy hunting.”53 In the South, the Methodists’ “traditional fascination with polity overshadowed their interest in theology. The storm over unification stirred Methodist interest far more than theological intricacies.”54

A sixth reason for the weak showing of fundamentalism within the Methodist church concerned the issue of premillennialism. As the fundamentalist movement developed its theological program, premillennialism became one of the central tenets of fundamentalist orthodoxy. However, this fascination with premillennialism “found little response among the Methodists.”55 Even many of those Methodists who tended to be conservative did not rush to embrace premillennial views. Harold Paul Sloan, the leader of Methodist conservatives in the 1920s, was invited to address the World Conference of the Christian Fundamentals Association, but turned down the invitation when it became evident he could not support the funda-

48 Marsh, “Methodism” 12.
49 McCutcheon, 289-390; Sledge, 143; McConnell, “The Methodist Church and Fundamentalism” 95.
50 Furniss, 150; see also McCutcheon, 121.
51 Schilling, 86.
52 Calderwood, 47.
53 McCutcheon, 131.
54 Sledge, 144.
mentalist position regarding premillennialism. Traditional Methodism, with its focus on revivalism, conversion, holy Christian living, and those doctrines that undergirded this program, had never responded to the esoterica of premillennial teaching. Some Methodists were also wary of the “suggestion of old-time Calvinism that clings to fundamentalist teaching as to premillennialism.” This antipathy to premillennialism impeded the progress of fundamentalism within Methodist ranks.

Another reason the Methodists escaped the fundamentalist conflagration was that their denominational ruling body met only once every four years. With annual meetings of the highest legislative agencies in their denominations, fundamentalists in other churches were able to keep the flames of theological debate at a white-hot fever. However, the four-year interval between Methodist General Conferences made it more difficult for the “fundamentalist leaders to keep their societies together and their followers emotionally aroused.” Furthermore, the fundamentalist movement climaxed in 1925, the year of the Scopes trial. By the time the southern church met in General Conference the following year and the northern church met in 1928, the organized fundamentalist movement was already beginning to wane in America.

Finally, one additional factor may help explain why fundamentalism never flourished within the southern branch of the church. Although Methodists in the South had their liberals, many of these men were “really moderate.” Bishop Mouzon, for example, while a resolute opponent of fundamentalism, was “outspoken” in his “adherence” to such orthodox doctrines as the incarnation and virgin birth of Christ. This helped to “placate churchmen who might have been offended by his other statements.” Also, the drift toward liberalism was more gradual within southern Methodism. As late as the 1920s evangelicals still occupied positions of power, and the liberals within the denomination “tended to work quietly” so that most conservative church members did not become overly alarmed.

Such an interpretation of pre-1930 Methodism is standard fare in most Methodist historiography. Scholars cite one or more of these factors to explain why theological liberalism supposedly swept to victory in the northern church during the 1920s, why at the same time it was well on its way to triumph in the South, and why, unlike other denominations, liberalism’s march was relatively unopposed by fundamentalism in the church. This analysis may be supportable for the theologians, seminary professors, and

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56 William B. Lewis, 96-97; see also 83-84. A great premillennial conference in Chicago in 1914 attracted only eight Methodists among the 269 delegates. Furniss, 149.
57 McConnell, 93.
58 Furniss, 150.
59 Sledge, 143.
60 Furniss, 156. Mouzon insisted he was neither a “Fundamentalist” nor a “Liberal,” but simply “a Methodist.” Mouzon, 8-9.
other leaders whose high visibility within the church may leave the mistaken impression that the entire denomination followed their lead. Such was certainly not the case.

One of the common errors in the study of American religious conservatism is the equation of evangelicalism, or theological orthodoxy, with fundamentalism. George M. Marsden, in his study, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, has provided an interpretation of classical fundamentalism that helps to correct this misconception. Marsden points out that the distinguishing characteristic of fundamentalism was its “militant opposition to modernism,” a “militancy” that “most clearly set off fundamentalism from a number of closely related traditions, such as evangelicalism, revivalism, pietism, the holiness movements . . . and other denominational orthodoxies.”

Many Methodist evangelicals, revivalists, and holiness advocates did not qualify as fundamentalists because they did not share the militant fundamentalist spirit, even though they would have affirmed many of the same doctrines. In fact, in the early decades of the century Methodist traditionalists often took great care to distinguish themselves from their fellow conservatives in the organized fundamentalist movement. Bishop Horace M. DuBose of the southern church was an outspoken evangelical, but insisted, “I am not a fundamentalist, as the term is strictly defined.” Evangelicals like bishop DuBose were not strident members of the militant Fundamentalist movement of the first third of the century and thus are often overlooked in studies of theological conservatism.

Other Methodist evangelicals, who did display a certain amount of pugnacity, did not accept some of the doctrinal accents of Fundamentalist interpretation. Harold Paul Sloan, leader of the Methodist evangelical movement in the 1920s, admitted he was “doubtless a Fundamentalist.” But, he went on to point out that he did not agree with fundamentalism in every respect. Unlike many of those in the movement, he was “not . . . a believer in verbal inspiration” of the Bible nor was he hostile to biblical criticism if it was “free from naturalistic bias.” But, Sloan affirmed the “historic gospel that has borne the Christian name, confessing the Trinity, the incarnation by the Virgin Mary, the atoning death, the almighty resurrection, justification by faith, regeneration, [and] the full authority of the Bible in the pragmatic sense defined at the Reformation.” As he upheld these “fundamental” doctrines, Sloan also stated that “the verbalism, literalism, and premillennialism of the organized fundamentalist movement” had no part in his reform efforts.

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4Sledge, 43; also, Ellingsen, 85-86.
Another misconception concerning this period is the idea that Methodists acceded to liberalism because they were relatively uninterested in theology. Instead, the “sweeping changes in Methodist theology” brought about by liberalism “were not achieved without criticism and controversy.” Gerald McCulloh has argued that, “contrary to wide popular opinion, Methodists have taken their theology seriously enough to struggle for its understanding and expression,” even if these struggles did not appear as intense as those within other theological traditions. Liberals often argued that the true essence of Christianity was its ethical mandate while doctrine was inconsequential. Thus, some liberals did indeed discount the primacy of doctrine, but many Methodist conservatives took exception to this doctrinal de-emphasis.

As early as 1878 Bishop Enoch M. Marvin flatly stated, “everything depends on doctrine. . . . The very substance of all religion is contained in doctrine.” A number of Marvin’s successors on the episcopal bench echoed his sentiments. Horace M. DuBose declared that, “the church’s doctrines are as important as its ethics,” while Bishop Mallalieu called for ministers who would be “men with creeds.” In the 1904 Episcopal Address the northern bishops reminded the General Conference that Methodism had “always been strenuously insistent as to doctrines essential to Christianity” while being “exceedingly tolerant as to non-essentials.”

It was around the point of essentials versus non-essentials that much of the theological discussion in Methodism revolved. John Wesley, when describing the “character of a Methodist,” said: “The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort. . . . as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think.” Liberals believed that Wesley’s “love for liberty of opinion” made him refrain from exacting a theological pledge of allegiance from Methodists. However, in rebutting this position, conservatives also appealed to Wesley. They
acknowledged Wesley’s broad-mindedness, but insisted it applied only to “opinions” of a sort which divided “true Christians” into the separate denominations. Accordingly, they believed Wesley was not so tolerant of contradictions to the “main branches of Christian doctrine.”

Branding the liberals’ interpretation of Wesley as “entirely contrary to the practice of the Church,” evangelicals maintained that the Methodist Episcopal Church in America had always insisted on conformity to certain doctrines.

Bishop Thomas B. Neely published two books asserting the absolute necessity of doctrinal consistency within Methodism. In The Only Condition, Neely examined Wesley’s sole requirement for membership in the Methodist societies, a “desire to flee from the wrath to come.” Liberals, again, often cited Wesley at this point as further proof that he had never intended doctrinal tests to be used as a condition of church membership. However, Neely concluded that a “desire to flee” from divine judgment implied positive assent to a whole range of orthodox doctrines. Moreover, he argued that from its beginning Methodism had always required “doctrinal tests” for membership, had always examined the content of candidates’ faith, and once they were in the church had always held members to theological accountability.

Neely was sure “the destruction of the doctrines would be the destruction of the very foundations of the Church, for religious beliefs are more vital than mere polity.”

Ordinary Methodists joined these conservative leaders in demanding doctrinal fidelity in the church. Writing in 1901, J. H. Creighton agreed that the early Methodists had “gloried in their doctrines, and their great preachers were doctrinal preachers.” Twenty-three years later another letter writer, noting the continued trend towards doctrinal de-emphasis, warned: “Let us beware how we give the impression, the wholly wrong and false impression . . . that the great facts and truth of the creed are unimportant, or that they are unworthy of belief.” To the oft-stated liberal contention that an ethical life should be the primary concern of a Christian, evangelicals replied that Christian ethics could only germinate in the soil of orthodox doctrines. Even as late as 1934, after the time when liberalism had supposedly captured the mind of Methodism, George W. Ridout still

NYCA 79.10 (March 10, 1904): 379.

13James M. Buckley, “Methodism and Doctrinal Tests,” editorial NYCA 79.10 (March 10, 1904): 368.

14James M. Buckley, “Close of Discussion on Doctrinal Terms of Membership” NYCA 79.14 (April 7, 1904): 537.

15James M. Buckley, Methodism and Doctrinal Tests” 368.

16Thomas Benjamin Neely, The Only Condition (Philadelphia: Methodist Episcopal Book Store, 1920), 34.


18J. H. Creighton, letter to the editor, NYCA 76.32 (August 8, 1901): 1259.

19Benjamin F. Edsall, letter to the editor, NYCA 99.7 (February 14, 1924): 208.

20Harold Paul Sloan, “The Editor’s Reaction to the New Jersey Episode: A Real Crisis of Faith
believed that Methodism was built upon its "distinctive doctrines." 81

Rather than being unconcerned about theology, many evangelical Methodists in the first decades of the century manifested an intense interest in doctrinal matters. They did not accept the "New Theology" and carefully critiqued its basic presuppositions. Much of the debate in these years centered on higher criticism of the Bible. Robert Chiles, in his excellent study of Methodist theological development, admitted there was "resistance" in some quarters to the "newer critical studies of the Bible." Chiles cited a number of articles opposed to higher criticism published in the 1890s by the conservative editor of the Methodist Review, J. W. Mendenhall. 82 However, resistance to higher criticism continued long after the turn of the century. Again, scholarly concentration on the theologians and professors in the seminaries has distorted the picture of this period. Langford has claimed that by the First World War, "episcopal Methodism, on the whole, [had] accepted higher critical methods as being necessary to legitimate interpretation of the Bible." 83 However, outside the rarefied air of the seminaries acceptance of higher criticism was not so complete.

O. J. Moore, a minister in Denver, was one of those who remained unconvinced of the utility of higher criticism. He called "modern destructive criticism" nothing more than "a gigantic form of infidelity," a "slimy serpent" which proposed to "make its home in the church." 84 Other Methodists, using less colorful language than Moore, were no less convinced of the errors of higher criticism. 85 Many clergy and laity lamented the decline of traditional Methodist patterns of piety such as the class-meeting, prayer meeting, home altar, and revival, and some felt higher criticism was directly responsible for this ebb in spiritual intensity. 86

The comment that the "intellectuals" in the church had accepted higher criticism while it was the "traditionally conservative and orthodox" laity in the pew who clung to evangelicalism leaves the impression that resistance to higher criticism came only from the poorly informed and theologically

81George W. Ridout, "Bible Notes and Illustrations," PH April 11, 1934: 2.
82Chiles, 70.
83Langford, Practical, 126; also Langford, Wesleyan, 137. Milton S. Terry, professor at Garrett Biblical Institute in Chicago and an outspoken advocate of higher criticism, informed the church in 1904 that "what is commonly known as higher criticism is unquestionably increasing its adherents in all Churches every year." Terry felt acceptance of higher criticism was necessary for the denomination's continued credibility in the modern world. Milton S. Terry, "Personal relations to Questions of Higher Criticism," NYCA 79.11 (March 17, 1904): 427.
85C. C. Carey, "A Whole Bible or Half Bible—Which?" Christian Witness and Advocate of Bible Holiness (hereinafter referred to as CWABH) August 23, 1906: 3.
86Carey, "A Whole Bible" 3; also, W. F. Junkin, "Critical Study of the Bible," NYCA 75.1 (January 4, 1900): 18; "The Seal of the Covenant," NYCA 75.9 (March 1, 1900): 331; J. W. F.
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uneducated. Again, the evidence does not support this impression. Many of those who argued against higher criticism were well read in scholarly fields and were theologically astute. In the mid-1890s Leander W. Munhall, a Methodist lay evangelist, published Anti-Higher Criticism and The Highest Critics vs. The Higher Critics. Munhall’s writings demonstrated a thorough understanding of the issues involved in the debate over higher criticism.

During the years 1905-1906 the Christian Advocate reviewed a number of scholarly works critical of higher criticism and recommended them enthusiastically. In December 1915 the Christian Witness and Advocate of Bible Holiness ran a series of well-reasoned articles on the subject of “destructive criticism.” In 1906, H. A. Boaz, President of Polytechnic College of Ft. Worth, spoke at the Southern Methodist Education Rally in Dallas. Boaz “spoke plainly against higher criticism,” a statement that drew so many “amens and cheers” that his voice was “completely drowned out . . . .”

James Buckley, the highly respected editor of the denominational newspaper, addressed the matter of higher criticism in his June 1, 1905, editorial in the Christian Advocate. He was not impressed by the “syndicate of self-appreciating, mutual-admiration experts” in the field of higher criticism. Their expertise in Hebrew, Greek, archaeology, or “any other form of knowledge involved in the study of the Sacred Writing” did not “guarantee the soundness of [their] judgment.” Buckley felt that even the “non-expert” could clearly perceive the truth of the scriptures.

America’s entry into World War I sharpened Methodist condemnation of German-inspired higher criticism. Conservative Methodists linked the evils of German militarism and alleged wartime atrocities to the destructive impact of higher criticism upon the faith of the German people in the previous century: “When Wellhausen denied that Moses received the Ten Commandments from God he weakened their hold upon the German mind and the German conscience and paved the way for the German psychology which applauds the bayoneting of innocent children and helpless women.” Some Methodists found in the war a blessing in disguise, for now that the ultimate end of higher criticism had been unmasked they felt sure American Methodism would reject it and remain true to orthodoxy.
This hoped-for wholesale repudiation of higher criticism and liberalism did not materialize, of course. Rather, the 1920s proved to be the decade when liberalism seemed to gain control in Methodism. Yet, Methodist evangelicals still upheld the traditional understanding of Christian doctrine and the Bible’s authority. Bishop Horace M. DuBose, for example, was a champion of biblical orthodoxy into the 1930s. Primarily a self-educated man in terms of biblical studies, the Bishop was highly conversant in a number of scholarly fields—his specialty was archaeology—and he was personally acquainted with several German theologians and was familiar with the latest scholarly trends in post-War Germany. In his autobiographical *Through Two Generations*, and the more scholarly, *The Bible and the Ages*, DuBose gave full expression to a thoroughly evangelical faith and theology. He testified: “I have never veered, I can never veer, from the steadfast position that, in the Bible, Jehovah has given an inspired revelation to men . . .”

DuBose, unlike many fundamentalists, was not strictly opposed to critical study of the Bible, but he cautioned it must be done with care since such study had too often been “reckless to the point of presumption.” Eschewing both these paths, he said, “Conservatism must seek the middle ground for the going of its feet.”

Staunch conservatives like Bishop DuBose and editor Buckley offered a vigorous and reasoned defense of evangelicalism within early 20th-century American Methodism. They were convinced that the faith of the church depended upon a sound theological foundation of biblical orthodoxy. Although it may be argued that liberally inclined Methodists felt theology was of secondary importance, this certainly was not true for evangelicals. While liberals sought to formulate a more rational, scientific faith that stressed ethics instead of doctrine, other Methodists continued to interpret their faith according to traditional orthodoxy which placed great emphasis upon the historic doctrines of Christianity. The persistence of these conservative Methodists in the 20th-century church would mean that a large number of John Wesley’s followers would respond to the challenges of social and intellectual change by finding continued meaning in traditional faith. While some of these may have become obscurantist in their faith, others would find ways to interact with new theologies and scientific discoveries while at the same time refusing to abandon their orthodoxy.

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11, 1918: 30, both cited in Sledge, 52.

64DuBose, 71.