"Biblical Scholarship in a Wesleyan Mode: 
Retrospect and Prospect"

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I have two goals today. First, I want to offer an explanation for why biblical scholars at Seattle Pacific University espouse views about the nature and function of the Bible which are substantially different from those of their counterparts at many other Evangelical institutions. Second, I want to urge Seattle Pacific generally and the School of Religion particularly to become more self-conscious and even aggressive about its theological heritage. Goal #2 follows from goal #1 in that I shall argue that the Wesleyan tradition broadly conceived undergirds biblical scholarship here. Consider yourself forewarned that I have a theological and institutional agenda that transcends giving an interesting academic talk on a fine summer day.

Indeed, I selected this topic in the first place because of my conviction that Seattle Pacific's School of Religion, and most especially its biblical faculty, has been misinterpreted because it has been judged by the standard of a faulty paradigm. I illustrate my point by calling attention to the way Seattle
To illustrate, I call attention to the way constituents tend to type the biblical faculty: We are either praised or damned for being "liberal." This label is probably most often meant to be taken relatively, since only a minority would characterize us as proponents of classical liberalism. Still, for good or ill the biblical faculty, and for all practical purposes the rest of the School of Religion, are considered part of Evangelicalism's "liberal" or "left wing." Supporters implore us to maintain this position; detractors insist that at least we become more balanced by adding faculty who represent the "center" or "right wing."

The paradigm behind this appraisal has as its main feature that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is quintessential for Evangelicalism.1 The very definition of an Evangelical is one who accepts the inerrancy of Scripture as a bedrock principle. Inerrancy is logically prior to all other doctrinal formulations.

Of course, inerrancy is the claim that the Bible, "in the whole and in the part," is without error on any matter on which it touches. And because inerrancy is seen as the sole guarantor of orthodoxy, any deviation therefrom substantially compromises the Evangelical position. Once inerrancy goes, so the argument runs, there is no way to prevent any other biblical doctrine from being jettisoned.

This "inerrancy paradigm" conduces to the following historical

reconstruction. Orthodox Christianity has always held, at least implicitly, to an inerrant and completely authoritative Bible. This is the very essence of historical orthodoxy, which modern Evangelicals are committed to preserve. Christians who have abandoned inerrancy, on the other hand, have consequently abandoned other essentials of orthodoxy as well, if not precipitously, then incrementally. This slippage attenuated Evangelical Christianity and eventuated in Liberalism. The upshot of this historical development is that Evangelicalism is at one end of the theological spectrum (the "Right"), Liberalism is on the other (the "Left"). One is left to opt for Orthodoxy or Modernism; any gradation in between—"moderate," "ultra," "extreme"—will depend on how close or far one is to the left or right end of the spectrum.

(I should add parenthetically that Fundamentalism and not Evangelicalism is typically placed at the extreme right. But this may have to do with factors that are not ultimately theological. It has more to do with issues of ecumenicity, with distinguishing between absolute and debateable positions, with being pro- or anti-education, with attitudes of tolerance or intolerance, the social gospel and so forth. In my view, the difference between "inerrancy Evangelicals" and Fundamentalists has much more to do with "culture," "civility" and "attitude" than theology per se).

Back to the main point. Because biblical scholars at Seattle Pacific reject inerrancy, they cannot be included with those on the right. But given their orthodox positions on virtually
all other issues, they hardly seem to belong to Liberalism. Being positioned to the left of the far right pole, but considerably to the right of the far left pole, they have to be designated by a modified term: "liberal Evangelical." Granted, conservative Evangelicals believe this is an inconsistent and naive position, in that it fails to retain the one thing crucial to the maintenance of orthodoxy: an inerrant Bible. Giving up inerrancy may not make one Liberal, but it makes Liberalism possible, predictable and even inevitable. Notwithstanding this "inconsistency," Seattle Pacific is blessed or cursed, depending on your outlook, with such "liberal Evangelicals." That's the basic paradigm.2

Now, I must confess that only a few years ago I understood my own and Seattle Pacific's theological placement more or less in these terms. Allow me to rehearse how I came to see myself as a "liberal Evangelical," thereby accepting the very paradigm which I now seek to discard.

I well remember with considerable pride when I first thought of myself as an Evangelical. This took place when I was an undergraduate at Greenville College, one of Seattle Pacific's sister institutions. My religion professors there were anxious to distance themselves from Fundamentalism, something they typed as provincial, schismatic, anti-intellectual, polemical, self-righteous, and utterly preoccupied with a single doctrine: biblical

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2I have constructed this "faulty paradigm" by extrapolating from the logic of Don Dayton's article, "The Use of Scripture in the Wesleyan Tradition," in The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options (R. K. Johnston, ed.; Atlanta: John Knox, 1985): 121-136.
inerrancy. The last thing my professors wanted to be called was a Fundamentalist.

Yet, these same folk forthrightly declared their unwavering commitment to Christ, to sacrificial involvement in the church, to evangelistic outreach, to prayerful spirituality, and, being Wesleyan to the core, to the sanctified life. I was not aware of a single major theological or ethical issue in which they were obviously "liberal." In fact, these professors of mine were all ordained Free Methodists, not one of the first denominations to come to mind as a bastion of liberalism. Moreover, while my teachers surely considered inerrancy an inadequate basis for articulating a sound doctrine of Scripture or accounting for biblical phenomena, their advocacy of the authority of the Bible could not have been more pronounced. The Lord led me to my vocation in large part through their inspiring example.

If these devout Free Methodists were not Fundamentalists, what were they? "Evangelicals," they said. Sometimes they called themselves simply "conservatives," but "Evangelical" was more common. These "Evangelicals" did not think there was any ultimate conflict between orthodoxy and rigorous academic study, between faith and reason, between their Wesleyan outlook and unrelenting intellectual curiosity and openness, or between their deep-rooted theological commitments and an inductive and even critical study of Scripture.

I found this most compelling and concluded that it was possible to be fully Evangelical without holding to the inerrancy
of Scripture. This was a relief, since every day that I studied
the biblical text, not only in college but in seminary and then
in graduate school, I became more convinced that a critical
study of Scripture was legitimate and necessary. Nor could
I see what essential Christian doctrines were undercut by critical
methods, or even most of their conclusions. Only an a priori
anti-supernaturalism was inimical to Christian faith, I believed;
and I did not think that such a bias was intrinsic to critical
methods. I was therefore content to be known as an Evangelical
who believed that a critical approach to Scripture was not only
permissible, but demanded by a fair examination of biblical
and extra-biblical data.

But it would be disingenuous for me to pretend that the
Evangelicalism I was in the process of adopting was completely
untainted by liberalism. Another of my Free Methodist professors
advocated inerrancy. Since I had professors on both sides of
this theological fence, I could hardly claim that inerrancy
was foreign to Wesleyanism. It manifestly was a contested point.
Were there any doubt about this, the negative reaction of many
Free Methodists, including a Bishop, to Free Methodist Dewey
Beegle's highly controversial book on the inspiration of Scripture
clearly demonstrated that the matter was far from settled.3

3Dewey M. Beegle, The Inspiration of Scripture (Philadelphia:
Westminster, 1963). See the editorial by Bishop J. Paul Taylor,
"The Inspiration of Scripture, Part I," The Free Methodist
(July 23, 1963): 4-6; "The Inspiration of Scripture, Part II,"
The Free Methodist (August 6, 1963): 4-5. Also, see the review
However, since I no longer saw any honest way to ignore the critical issues I simply accepted the fact that those Free Methodists who combined Wesleyan theology and a view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture which allowed for a critical approach made the better case. If that meant we were "Liberal Evangelicals," then that is the way it would have to be.

The substance if not the nomenclature of this mediating position was confirmed when I joined this faculty in 1979. The religion faculty who interviewed me let it be known immediately that my views on Scripture accorded with theirs. They even warned me to be on my guard for fundamentalist students who would give me grief for not advocating inerrancy. I felt at home theologically.

As the years went by other biblical scholars who were "Liberal Evangelicals" joined the faculty. Yet, in spite of our concord on Scripture, the newer faculty were constantly accused of having departed from the theological norm. To be sure, our more senior colleagues had scarcely been immune to criticism, but apparently the number and quality of complaints that surfaced after the hiring of faculty in the 70′s and 80′s was virtually unprecedented.

This was perplexing and discouraging. If we were all "liberal Evangelicals," and if that had been the case for a long time, in fact if not in name, why was not the SPU constituency accepting? What accounts for the intense reaction we younger professors engendered? Doubtless a variety of things, some of which cannot be confidently known. Nevertheless, I offer the following as
possible explanations, not necessarily in the order of importance:

(1) Pedagogy and Style. Quite simply, we were young, inexperienced, theological neophytes, pedagogical rookies, and at the same time enthusiastic, enamored with our disciplines and positions as professors, idealistically committed to academic rigor, and single-minded crusaders for the causes in which we ardently believed. That was without question a volatile combination.

(2) Content. Though our views about the Bible were not remarkably different, we newer faculty were perhaps more dogged about exposing our students to biblical criticism. This is not to say that our senior colleagues did none of this, or that that was all we did. But relative to each other the younger faculty I think did more. Certainly, it seemed as though we had introduced a brand new element to the study of the Bible at Seattle Pacific, which is precisely what many folk charged. From their perspective, that new "element" was nothing short of "liberalism"; from our perspective, what we were teaching was fully consistent with what our senior colleagues believed, including their commitment to the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

Another facet of the content issue was (and is) this: No matter how much we might improve our pedagogy, reflect a pastoral demeanor, or cultivate our "professorial bedside manner," there were (and remain) substantive differences between what we taught (and teach) and what was (is) acceptable to inerrancy Evangelicals. On that score there was no accommodation on our part, or give
on theirs. This situation still obtains.

(3) Context. It is important to keep in mind what was going on in Evangelicalism generally during the 1970's and 1980's. The "Battle for the Bible" had begun. Inerrantists were fighting among themselves on issues of definition, hermeneutics, critical methods and biblical ethics and theology. When not squabbling among themselves, these "inerrancy Evangelicals" were accusing "liberal Evangelicals," now ridiculed as believing in "limited" or "partial" inerrancy, of not being Evangelical at all. Institutions were called to account, professors were excoriated, names were mentioned. Adding to the confusion, one book after another was written to provide a taxonomy for identifying the dizzying variety of the Evangelical species. Richard Quebedeaux, for example, spoke of (a) Separatist Fundamentalism; (b) Open Fundamentalism; (c) Establishment Evangelicalism; (d) New Evangelicalism. Emotions ran high, nerves were frayed, faculty were unnerved, people felt maligned, administrators were pressured, churches made inquiries, pastors got concerned, students were confused, constituents became restive. In short, it was hardly a time for measured, tempered, rational discussion on a host of important issues. A war was being waged. This state of affairs made SPU's biblical faculty appear all the more contro-

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4 This designation of course is borrowed from the inflammatory book by Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

versial.

(4) Cultural Transition. While this item is more slippery, I think it is worth mentioning. Seattle Pacific underwent enormous change during the 70's and 80's. Whether this is indicative of laudable innovation, progress and achievement, or a sign of the diminution of religious fervor, the rise of intellectual elitism, and a conscious abandonment of the school's original genius and mission, can be debated. That unprecedented change took place however cannot be gainsaid.

Though perhaps a little simplistic, I think it is noteworthy that during the 70's and 80's the vast majority of faculty who comprised Seattle Pacific in the immediate post-World War II era began to retire and be replaced by faculty who had attained adulthood in the turbulent 60's. Curiously, nowhere was this transition more extreme than the School of Religion. I came in 1973 at the age of 29; my next youngest colleague was 58! When he retired I became the senior member of the School! Similar transitions, only somewhat less drastic, were taking place elsewhere in the university. In spite of many continuities between the two faculty generations, there were visible differences in political outlook, church membership (Free Methodists were in steady decline), academic philosophy, cultural expression, social attitudes, views of authority, participation in wider academic cultures, and even academic training (the Ph.D. had become requisite). A veritable metamorphosis was in process.

To the extent that religion faculty in Christian schools
have been counted on to insure continuity with the past, the new religion faculty were abject failures. For not only in the area of theology, but in many of the other areas as well—an unyielding intellectualism, a publishing agenda, political activism in the university—the School of Religion seemed to lead the charge. For those who coveted the "old" Seattle Pacific the religion faculty was not an ally but a foe. We were complicitous not only in changing theology and Bible studies at Seattle Pacific, we were systematically undermining its coveted cultural heritage.

Doubtless other factors should be included to explain the criticism we have evoked in recent years, but these are it seems to me the main ones. Still, returning to the original thesis, my contention remains that if there is a single most important reason behind this unprecedented criticism, it has to do with the faulty paradigm mentioned at the outset.

It remains for me to say why I think this paradigm is inappropriate. I want to emphasize that for me this is not a minor or esoteric academic point. Regarding Seattle Pacific's version of Evangelicalism as just a tad to the left of Fundamentalism or Inerrancy Evangelicalism is not only a misreading of history and a misconstrual of theology, but a serious and actual threat to the Wesleyanism inherent in this institution and the Church which sponsors it. I once opined (in Winona Lake, Indiana no less!) that it would be a cruel irony were we to lose our theological distinctives not to Liberalism, which we have vigorously resisted, but to Fundamentalism, which we have naively courted. I am
chagrined to admit that there is some evidence that my prophecy cannot simply be dismissed as rhetorical flourish.

Perhaps the place to begin is to suggest that it is arguable whether Wesleyanism should even be viewed under the rubric "conservative." "Conservatism" involves preservation of something which is felt to be in peril of slipping away or being cast purposefully aside. But considering the three principle components of modern American Wesleyanism, one has to wonder whether a primarily preservative impulse is endemic to it. The three components to which I refer are Pietism, the 18th Century Evangelical Revival under John Wesley, and the 19th Century Holiness Movement in America. Interestingly, all three were radical reform movements; none of them were attempts to conserve the status quo.

Pietism, born and developed in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, was a reaction to and, according to its proponents, a necessary fulfillment of the Lutheran Reformation. While fully orthodox, it set out to infuse a moribund orthodoxy with spiritual vitality, to transform a deadening ecclesiastical institutionalism with a profoundly personal appropriation of

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the gospel, to emphasize regeneration over forensic justification, to effect a devotional reading of the Bible which would eventuate in an engaging Christian lifestyle, and to transform the world with works of mercy and kindness, which was a function of its eschatological hope. Lutheran "conservatives" did not see these Pietists as fellow conservatives, but as radicals who were moving the church in a substantially different direction. To regard Pietism from our modern vantage point as a conservative movement is historically anachronistic and theologically uninformed.

The Evangelical Awakening spawned by John Wesley in the 18th century was likewise not a conservative movement. Wesley's ministry had little to do with urging the Anglican communion to remain orthodox. On the contrary, Wesley saw the problem of Anglicanism as having to do not with creeping heterodoxy but with spiritual nominalism. Christian life, not Christian theology was the problem. Profoundly influenced by the Pietists,8 Wesley's preaching and ecclesiastical programme was calculated to translate Christian orthodoxy into a radical orthopraxy which was characterized by nothing short of perfect love for God and neighbor. No "conservative" Anglican in the 18th century would have seen Wesley as an ally. Wesley stood four-square for change, radical change. No wonder some Anglicans denied him the pulpit!

Nor was the 19th century Holiness Movement in the United

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8Spener's thought was mediated to Wesley through Horneck, Francke and Bengel. See Gerdes, "Theological Tenets," 29.
States at base conservative. At least it was not an unadulterated conservative movement. Perhaps it is fair to say that it expressed a conservative impulse in its attempt to get the Methodist church to conserve the doctrine of "scriptural holiness." But its understanding of the implications of that important doctrine could hardly have been more politically and socially radical. For example, whereas the culture at large supported slavery and restrictive roles for women, folk in the holiness movement were abolitionists and supportive of universal suffrage.

The Holiness Movement saw itself as "over against mainstream culture," not a preserver of it. We should be careful not to suppress this significant feature of a movement which is so closely related to Seattle Pacific.

My point is that to think of Wesleyanism first off as a variety of Protestant conservatism is a category mistake. The issue is not that Wesleyanism was or is casual about orthodoxy, or that it should not be thought of as properly Evangelical. It is rather that it needs to be approached from the perspective of a different historical and theological model than that which is usually used. Seen on its own terms, it may legitimately be presented as the epitome of Evangelicalism in the way it combined the spiritual and social elements of the Gospel of


10See the book by the founder of the Free Methodist Church, Benjamin Titus Roberts, Ordaining Women (Rochester, N. Y.: Earnest Christian Publishing House, 1891).
Christ. But as long as Wesleyanism is seen as part of another historical movement's "right wing," or only a little to the left of that right wing, the battle for explanation is lost before it is begun.\footnote{An example of such a category mistake may be found in the work of James Davidson Hunter, who argues that several Evangelical schools have lost their moorings and are drifting away from their original social and theological vision. He fails to realize that in the case of schools rooted in the Wesleyan tradition what he perceives to be a "drifting" may be no such thing; for example, ordaining women is appropriate to a Wesleyan paradigm, but represents "liberalization" among Fundamentalists or Inerrancy Evangelicals. See Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1987). See also the excellent review by Robert Wall in Seattle Pacific University Review 6/1 (1987): 44-55. Similarly, Clark Pinnock is in my view prevented from making a more perceptive analysis of the present theological scene since he relies on a model which moves back and forth between a "liberal/progressive" left pole and a "conservative" right pole, with moderate liberals and moderate conservatives in between. The "poles" are completely a function of whether a theologian accommodates to modernity at the expense of traditional orthodoxy or justifies traditional orthodoxy at the expense of modernity. Liberal or conservative "moderates" are viewed as somewhat more "dialectical." See Pinnock, Tracking the Maze (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990): 11-76. Yet another example of this liberal-conservative paradigm may be found in Peter Berger, The Heretical Imperative (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979.)}
focus on their integral logic and structure.

Dayton begins with the Reformation paradigm. The Reformers defined themselves over against the Roman Church; in that context evangelische meant primarily "Protestant." The "protest" may be seen in the famous solas of the Reformation: (1) *Sola Scriptura*; (2) *Sola Christi*; (3) *Sola Gratia*; (4) *Sola Fide*. These direct attention to issues of authority and soteriology. Regarding authority, Scripture is set over against Church tradition and the collective wisdom of personal experience. Relative to soteriology, the personal appropriation of grace is understood Christologically and the theme of "justification by faith alone" underscores the forensic impact of grace. In the Reformation, faith and reason, faith and works, etc., tended to be seen as stark contrasts. In this paradigm, Evangelicalism trades on questions of anthropology where the starting point is Augustinian human inability, which in turn leads necessarily to the classic formulations of election and predestination.12

Next is the Wesleyan contribution, which was anticipated in the Puritan transformation of the Calvinist tradition and the Pietist reaction against post-Reformation orthodoxy. In this movement the soteriological slant was more toward regeneration and sanctification than forensic justification. It centered on "actual righteousness," not simply "imputed righteousness." For Wesleyans, the main enemy was nominal Christianity and self-satisfaction with a smug orthodoxy. The stress on personal

12Dayton, "The Use of Scripture," 122-123.
piety had its corollary in the transformation of society. Wesleyans attacked the classical Protestant doctrines of limited atonement and predestination, advocating instead a synergistic cooperation between the human and divine wills. This movement was considered so distinct from classical Protestantism that the Germans did not refer to it as evangelisch but spoke of the Pietismus of the Erweckungsbewegung (=the Awakening Movement).13

After conceding that the above two outlooks have been altered almost beyond recognition in America, Dayton turns to the Fundamentalist approach. This movement has actually had a hand in the modification of the previous two, in that contemporary American Evangelicalism has been largely shaped by the spill-over of this century's notorious Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy.14 As the rubrics of "conservative" and "liberal" came more and more to be used to characterize this acrimonious ecclesiastical and theological debate, many in the Reformed and Wesleyan camps tended to play down their own distinctives and align themselves with the "conservatives," that is, the Fundamentalists. Before long, Evangelicals, regardless of prior history and theological or ecclesiastical nuance, were lumped with a Fundamentalism which was on its way to becoming the mainstream Evangelicalism of the post-World-War II period. The only effort made to maintain one's distinctives in this theological marriage was to insist on varying degrees of "moderation" from strict Fundamentalism.

14This point has been recently made by Collins, "Children of Neglect," passim.
But Dayton is relentless in arguing that this version of Evangelicalism is strikingly different from either of the first two. The main question it struggled with was the extent to which the Enlightenment, the rise of the scientific world-view, and the emergence of a heightened historical consciousness required a theological reformulation of classical Protestantism. The challenges of the 19th century were serious: secular rationalism; geology; Darwinism; biblical criticism. All these challenged ordinary ways of conceiving Christianity, notions of authority, and biblical interpretation. Those who tried to accommodate Christian faith to these developments became "Modernists." Those who refused to accommodate became "Fundamentalists," and later "Evangelicals." The driving force for this Evangelicalism was the preservation of orthodoxy and classic pre-critical views of the Bible against the new liberal reformulators.15 To accomplish this, the doctrine of inerrancy was conceived, and soon was put forth as the sine qua non for anyone who was to be called an Evangelical.

Sharpening our focus to an even greater degree, Dayton notes that consistent advocates of the Reformed paradigm tend to dismiss Roman Catholics, Liberals and Wesleyans as equally unevangelical because all three are predicated on a defective

15 Ibid, 124-126.
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Consistent advocates of the Wesleyan paradigm find equally unevangelical all forms of nominal Christianity. The regenerate from any theological or ecclesiastical tradition are welcome in Wesleyan circles. And consistent advocates of the Fundamentalist paradigm see all who do not adopt inerrancy as either unevangelical or at least inconsistently evangelical.

Dayton has performed a great service by drawing the outline of these discrete traditions with such bold strokes. His efforts are even more needed since Fundamentalism or Inerrancy Evangelicalism has so successfully and detrimentally in my view influenced the Reformed and Wesleyan evangelical traditions. This has eventuated in "yes, but"-Evangelicalism; for all but the Fundamentalists and Inerrancy Evangelicals have been forced to answer the question of their their theological identity by saying "Yes, I am an Evangelical, but . . ." What Dayton has legitimately called for is attending to the "deep structures" of our respective

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17I find it "providentially ironical" that this characterizes Seattle Pacific's hiring policies where being evangelical means primarily being "born again." This largely accounts for the ecclesiastical diversity on our Faculty, which is virtually unprecedented among Evangelical colleges and Universities. Long considered the least Free Methodist or Wesleyan of Free Methodist's institutions of higher education, in this way at least it may be the most representative of that tradition!

18Dayton, "The Use of Scripture," 126.

theological traditions to see what does and what does not logically and coherently belong. Only by doing this can we judge our own theological and ecclesiastical activity with a valid standard. At Seattle Pacific, biblical scholars, and members of the School of Religion generally, should be accountable to the canons of Wesleyanism, not to some other alien canon.

To be sure, I've already admitted that the inerrancy formulation has been adopted by many who are self-consciously Wesleyan. Whether that is a "foreign leaven" or intrinsic to the "lump" is of course what the debate is all about. Obviously, I believe it is a foreign leaven. That Wesleyans have adopted and strenuously argued for this position is less important than whether it can finally be made to cohere in the overall Wesleyan structure. Nor will it do to contend that only Wesleyans who are "liberal Evangelicals" have set inerrancy aside. Not quite a year ago the Free Methodist Church refused to include an "inerrancy clause" when it revised its doctrinal statement on Scripture. The Church had every opportunity to do that, especially since the Committee which was to present the statement to the general governing body had previously added an unambiguous commitment to biblical inerrancy to the language. But it was finally expunged, with the support of every single Bishop, none of whom to my knowledge could be fairly characterized as "liberal" in any meaningful sense of that term. In my view, there is still sufficient implicit

Wesleyanism in the Free Methodist Church that the press for inerrancy from some quarters can effectively be resisted.

There is a fundamentalism which is inherent to Wesleyanism, but it has nothing to do with inerrancy. Wesleyan fundamentalism tends to manifest itself in legalism, self-righteous perfectionism, individualistic subjectivism, emotionalism, provincialism, anti-intellectualism and preoccupation with the doctrine of sanctification. Those areas are problematic because they are a natural product of valid Wesleyan impulses taken to excess.

I close by citing a few broad emphases within the Wesleyan tradition which not only justify but require the approach to the Bible that has historically been taken at Seattle Pacific.

First, the theological and practical calculus of Pietism is most conducive to an inductive study of the Bible. Since scholastic orthodoxy had imprisoned the Bible by using it primarily to buttress the reigning dogmatic formulation, the Bible was effectively silenced. One only found in the Bible what one set out to find. Only an inductive approach could break that pattern. Ironically, Pietists had greater respect for Scripture than the scholastics in that the former were willing, theoretically at least, to follow the text wherever it went whereas the latter already knew where it would lead: to Lutheran orthodoxy. Though some of the Pietists may have been naive in warning against reading the Bible through the lens of commentaries, creedal formulae, or other theological "aids," it is difficult to fault them for their blithe confidence in an inductive treatment of
the Bible. Wesley, too, made much of induction in his theological method and approach to the Bible; Donald Thorsen has underscored this tendency in Wesley in his recent, helpful book *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral*.22

Given this, it is hardly accidental that many Wesleyan biblical scholars in this century took so readily to the inductive study of the Bible pioneered by Wilber White. Several Wesleyan institutions were greatly influenced by this method, including Asbury Theological Seminary, Greenville College and Seattle Pacific. Indeed, this approach, sometimes called simply English Bible, was popularized by a former Free Methodist and graduate of Seattle Pacific.23

Inductive Bible study should be seen over against an exegesis predetermined by dogmatic concerns on the one hand and a critical approach oriented to exclusively genetic and historical questions on the other. I’ll confess I was once somewhat negative about this method because I felt too many of its practitioners were in actuality attempting to bypass the very critical questions which an inductive study raised. While my criticism may not

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21Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 64-68.
22See Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Francis Asbury Press; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990): 102-108. See also the other references to "induction" on p. 324 of the subject index.
have been completely off base, I have largely revised my attitude. Its proponents are to be affirmed for their insistence on taking the biblical text seriously at a time when Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism found in the text exactly what they were looking for, no more and no less. I might just add here that one of the chief bones of contention some of my Fundamentalist students have with me is not my theology per se, which can easily be dismissed as the rantings of a madman. Rather, they are disturbed by a biblical text which does not seem to contain the theology which they have been promised resides there.24 Induction can be uncomfortable! It may not be too far-fetched either to see in inductive Bible study a precursor to some forms of contemporary canonical criticism and some of the newer literary approaches.25

Nor is it much of a leap from inductive Bible study to biblical criticism since close attention to the text gave rise to many higher critical theories. Dale Brown acknowledges without qualification, "Pietism abetted the rise of higher criticism."26 I admit that there are many areas in which higher criticism has hardly benefitted the Church. James Sanders expressed this

24See the excellent discussion on how Fundamentalists "read and write" the text simultaneously, something that others do as well but perhaps more self-consciously. Boone, The Bible Tells Them So. Pinnock also has an excellent discussion of the way Fundamentalists who allegedly believe in Sola Scriptura possess the same interpretive structures as the Roman Catholics. Pinnock, Tracking, 34-43.

25Note that Timothy Smith sees in Wesley's hermeneutic a foreshadowing of a kind of canonical criticism, "John Wesley and the Wholeness of Scripture, Interpretation XXXIX (1985): 262.

26Brown, Understanding Pietism, 64.
graphically when he noted that the biblical criticism implicit in the Reformation broke the chains which held the Bible to the pulpit, but then bound it just as fast to the scholar’s desk. This is why of late the most trenchant criticisms against biblical criticism have come from practiced biblical critics. Its deficiencies notwithstanding, and bereft of the philosophical presuppositions which are not inherent in the method anyway, there is nothing per se about "higher criticism" which is anathema to Wesleyanism.27

Second, there is deeply imbedded in Wesleyanism a strain of thought which compels radical engagement with the world. For Wesleyans, God could change people fundamentally and change the world fundamentally. Some of the most profound changes in Western culture have come about due to Wesleyan influence.28 This fostered in Wesleyanism not only an inductive approach to the Bible but an "inductive" approach to the world as well.29 For example, Dayton explicates the solas of the majesterial Reformation as fundamentally disjunctive: Scripture over against Tradition, Faith over against Reason, Grace over against any human effort or involvement and so forth. In contrast, he sees

28A classical statement of this thrust is found in J. Wesley Bready, This Freedom—Whence? (New York: American Tract Society, 1942).
29See the references in Thorson in fn. 22 above. The stock which Wesley put in Christian experience may be seen as a sub-set of his commitment to induction.
the solas in a Wesleyan context as conjunctive: Scripture and Tradition, Faith and Reason, Grace and Human Response and so forth. This eventuates in a different anthropology, and a different attitude toward the world. The sinfulness of the world is always a problem in Wesleyanism, no less before than after the advent of modernity. But the world as such is not a problem, not even in its modern forms. The world is capable of being transformed. Thus, a biblical hermeneutic which is informed by Wesleyanism will engage the world in a way other hermeneutical stances will not.

Often this posture is expressed in the form of the so-called Wesleyan quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Experience and Reason. The necessity of struggling with these "sources" fosters a creative theological imagination and a dynamic ethical posture. Much more is required than the citation of a biblical proof-text or so. This may be illustrated in the following manner: (1) Arguably, there are a few proof-texts which indicate that biblical authors neither condemned nor outlawed slavery. About all the biblical authors did was warn against treating slaves cruelly. Yet Wesleyans were well-known for their abolitionism, at the very time that "conservatives" were citing the common proof-texts supporting slavery. (2) Arguably, there are a few proof-texts which indicate that some biblical authors thought women were quite restricted in the roles they might play in the church. Yet, there is a tendency toward feminism early on in Wesleyanism, at the very time when mainline "conservatives" and the broader
culture steadfastly resisted moving in this direction. To be sure, Wesleyanism was not purely feminist in all its manifestations, but the topic was debated in those circles long before it was an issue of modern liberalism (which in turn may have received impetus from Wesleyans). I illustrate with these two issues only to call attention to the fact that a Wesleyan informed hermeneutic almost by definition will be more complex, more contextual, more willing to take into account all relevant data, more sensitive to the dynamic nature of the biblical text on all complicated human issues. Wesleyans went in these directions not because they were somehow liberal, but because of the nature of the theological paradigm with which they were working.

Finally, virtually every ounce of energy within Wesleyanism is directed toward the spiritual development of persons and the moral transformation of society. When Scripture is read with that agenda clearly in view it changes everything. Nothing in Scripture is "safe" anymore, for it all speaks in one way or another to what it means to be the people of God in a complex world. Seen in this light, Scripture can no longer be seen merely as a repository of orthodox doctrines, but as a record of revelation which features first and foremost a Story about God's intimate and eventful engagement with a broken humankind and a troubled world in desperate need of comprehensive redemption. Nothing could be more controversial than that! If Wesleyans

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will be true to their heritage, they will be willing to confront the biblical material from this perspective which is as frightening as it is enlivening.

That said, I submit that it is time to call for a moratorium on the theological wars that have alternately smoldered or raged for too long at Seattle Pacific. I emphasize that it is theological war which we should reject, not debate; for academic debate on the whole spectrum of theological issues is always appropriate in this setting. But no amount of legitimate debate can ever be allowed to obscure the fact that this institution is a function of Wesleyanism, regardless of how broadly that tradition is conceived or how hidden it has been. We simply cannot be true to our heritage while seeing ourselves as Fundamentalist, or Liberal Evangelicals, or Evangelical Liberals, or anything else which undercuts who we are as Wesleyans.

This should be a cause of celebration and not alarm. Students from any ecclesiastical background are utterly welcome here. Non-Christian students are no less welcome. That accords with the history of Free Methodist educational institutions. As a corollary, Christian faculty from virtually any communion are welcome here too. But Wesleyanism, broadly and corporately envisioned, still should be a first among equals at Seattle Pacific. It is finally the standard that should be used to determine whether we are consonant with our vocation and mission.