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**"LET THE LOWER LIGHTS BE BURNING" – AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE 1905
MERIDIAN HOLINESS UNION**

by
Katharine Elizabeth Smith

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial
fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
May 2012

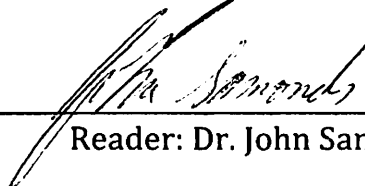
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*Brightly beams our Father's mercy
From His lighthouse evermore
But to us He gives the keeping
Of the lights along the shore.*

*Let the lower lights be burning!
Send a gleam across the wave!
Some poor struggling, fainting seaman
You may rescue, you may save.*

*Dark the night of sin has settled,
Loud the angry billows roar;
Eager eyes are watching, longing,
For the lights along the shore.*

*Let the lower lights be burning!
Send a gleam across the wave!
Some poor struggling, fainting seaman
You may rescue, you may save.*

*Trim your feeble lamp, my brother;
Some poor sailor, tempest-tossed,
Trying now to make the harbor,
In the darkness may be lost.*

*Let the lower lights be burning!
Send a gleam across the wave!
Some poor struggling, fainting seaman
You may rescue, you may save.*

Philip P. Bliss, "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning," pub. 1871, Public Domain.

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INTRODUCTION

“Holiness Unto the Lord!” This was the cry of many American evangelicals throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, as a religious movement grounded in the idea of a “second blessing” religious experience of sanctification and holiness swept through much of the United States. Specifically, this was the cry of a group of several hundred holiness proponents who gathered in Meridian, Mississippi in the fall of 1905, determined to encourage the spread of their sacred doctrine and to preserve it in the face of opposition both from secular America and from evangelical religious leaders who were agitated with the growing movement. The Meridian Holiness Union saw holiness proponents from across the southern United States come together for several days of revival services, mutual encouragement, and mission work in November of 1905. Though its story has remained largely untold, the Meridian Convention was a landmark gathering for the holiness movement, providing both a means of unity among holiness proponents and a way for those involved with the movement to leave a lasting legacy in the world.

As an increasing number of people began to take hold of the holiness message throughout the nineteenth century, leaders of the movement such as Doctor Henry Clay Morrison sought ways to unite those who embraced Methodism’s “peculiar doctrine” but who were scattered across the United States without a

formal way to coalesce. Morrison's roles as prominent holiness evangelist and editor of the widespread holiness periodical *The Pentecostal Herald* put him in a position to persuasively lead the call for unity among holiness proponents, and the Meridian Holiness Union was the actualization of this call. At the Meridian Convention, holiness people like Morrison sought to encourage one another with the ultimate purpose of going out into their towns, country, and the world more fully equipped to share both the Gospel and the doctrine of holiness. These people were deeply passionate about their message and were determined that, if God was guiding from above, they would be the "lower lights" – living their lives in such a way as to rescue those around them from the ever increasing dangers of society as America entered the Modern Period. This work will present the story of the 1905 Meridian Holiness Union Convention as it fits within the context of the nineteenth century holiness movement and American society at the turn of the twentieth century, showing how these holiness proponents sought to be the "lower lights" of rescue for their fellow countrymen and how they did so in such a way as to impact the global religious landscape.

The first chapter of this work will outline what the nineteenth century holiness movement was, explaining basic theological ideas such as the second blessing and entire sanctification; these notions came out of John Wesley's Methodism, but they took on a distinctly American character upon arrival to the States. Chapter one will examine the religious, economic, and social currents of the age in the United States, as the holiness movement sought to take a stand against Modern Period trends such as Darwinism, an increase in wealth and therefore a

perceived increase in worldliness, and new educational principles such as “higher criticism” that were infiltrating American schools. Methods used to promulgate the nineteenth century holiness movement – namely camp meetings and revivals, holiness associations, religious publications, and holiness schools – will also be considered. The Meridian Holiness Union clearly fits within its social and historical context, and understanding this context sets the stage for a fuller appreciation of the rest of the story.

The second chapter offers still more contextual information about the nineteenth century holiness movement, this time emphasizing the conflict and controversy surrounding the holiness movement’s clash with Methodism. As the holiness movement became increasingly independent, its Methodist forebears became increasingly uneasy, distrusting certain organizational and doctrinal differences. Tensions between holiness proponents and leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South came to a head in high profile conflicts such as that of Henry Clay Morrison’s Dublin, Texas trial. This conflict will be investigated as a means of explaining the problem between the two groups on the whole. Finally, the second chapter will relate the situation of holiness people during the period of continually growing conflict with the Methodist church at the turn of the century, when holiness proponents found themselves forced to relocate membership from the Southern Methodist Church to that of the North, to “come out” and leave Methodism altogether, or to stay loyal to Methodism and weather the storm, seeking to be “lower lights” in the midst of an often unfriendly environment.

The third chapter of this work presents the story of the Meridian Holiness Union itself. It will investigate why such a pivotal conference may have been held in Meridian, Mississippi, and how this gathering can be considered representative of the greater holiness movement on the whole. In addition to an explanation of Henry Clay Morrison's heart behind the Holiness Union, specific activity of the Convention such as who attended, what the attendees did while in Meridian, and how those present emphasized mission work will be detailed. Further, the story of the Beeson brothers and their roles as leaders of the Meridian Male and Female Colleges comes into play, as the holiness schools served as hosts for the Convention. As a result of newspaper records from *The Pentecostal Herald* and Henry Clay Morrison's personal memoirs, much information exists about the specifics of the Convention. This work seeks to collect this information to share the story of an interesting and important several days of history in a new way that, before now, has yet to be recorded.

In the fourth and last chapter of this work, the ongoing impact of the Meridian Holiness Union will be investigated. The Convention had an effect on both those who attended and those who observed from the outside, in the town of Meridian and, later, in the towns and cities of those who came to the Convention and returned home rejuvenated and ready to promote the message of holiness like never before. Chapter four will consider the result of the Meridian Holiness Union's emphasis on mission work as it resulted in Henry Clay Morrison's world tour of evangelism, which furthered the impact of the Holiness Union from a national to a global one, and will also consider how the history of the Holiness Union coincides specifically with the history of Asbury Theological Seminary. Because of Dr.

Morrison's involvement in both Meridian holiness work and the establishment of Asbury Theological Seminary, the foundation was laid for relationships formed and fostered among Meridian, Mississippi and Wilmore, Kentucky holiness people to culminate in a multi-million dollar endowment for the theological school.

The story of the Meridian Holiness Union serves as a continual reminder of the power of the individual. As one of Henry Clay Morrison's obituary writers wisely points out, "The history of nations is the history of individuals."¹ The Meridian Holiness Union was simply that – a gathering of individuals who were passionate about the message they had to share with the world, who did not back down in the face of opposition and who were unafraid to live counter-culturally, who were in the end able to shape the history of the holiness movement and the world around them in a far greater way than one might originally expect. A group of individual people joined together for a common cause can be a powerful thing, and here we witness a poignant example of that from southern religious history.

Brightly beams our Father's mercy
From His lighthouse evermore
But to us He gives the keeping
Of the lights along the shore.

Let the lower lights be burning!
Send a gleam across the wave!
Some poor struggling, fainting seaman
You may rescue, you may save...²

Holiness proponents involved in the 1905 Meridian Holiness Union chose to be these "lower lights," seeking to save those around them by promulgating the

¹ W.L. Clark, "Henry Clay Morrison, D.D.," *Journal of the Kentucky Annual Conference*, (1942), 102.

² Philip P. Bliss, "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning," pub. 1871, Public Domain.

message they believed that God had specifically entrusted unto them. The following chapters tell the story of how they did so, explaining the Meridian Holiness Union and the context from which it came forth and tracing the impact that the Holiness Union had on the world at the time and that it still continues to have today.

CHAPTER I: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY HOLINESS MOVEMENT

In order for the significance of the Meridian Holiness Union to be more fully understood, the Union must be examined from a contextual standpoint. Before a proper understanding of all that took place and resulted from the Meridian Convention of 1905 is possible, several questions about the context of this gathering must be answered. The Convention saw a group of holiness movement advocates from various Southern states join together in Meridian, Mississippi during a time when doing so meant acting in opposition to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. What was taking place in United States history that led holiness people to that moment, and from what religious and societal currents did such a convention spring? A look into the nineteenth century American holiness movement is useful for answering questions such as these; understanding the culture and the context of the holiness movement provides insight into what the participants of the Meridian Holiness Union believed and why they chose to spread their message in the way that they did. This work does not seek to provide a complete history of the nineteenth century holiness movement but rather endeavors to provide a basic historical and cultural lens through which to view the Meridian Holiness Union. First, examining what the American holiness movement was is crucial; a brief history of the movement itself and explanations of the key holiness doctrines of entire sanctification and perfectionism lay a proper foundation from which to approach

the rest of this work. Second, an inquiry into why the holiness movement might have developed during this time is beneficial; exploring the currents flowing through American society during this point of time gives insight as to why the meeting of the Union came to pass when it did. Third, a look into the means used by holiness proponents to promulgate their beliefs contributes to an enhanced understanding of the Holiness Union, allowing for an increased knowledge of why the Union formed in the way that it did.

The nineteenth century American holiness movement found its roots in the doctrines espoused by John Wesley, the great eighteenth century English theologian and founder of Methodism.¹ In his Protestant Christian theology, Wesley advocated holiness of heart and life; for Wesley, this holiness took form in one's life through the religious experience of sanctification.² Known as the doctrine of "Christian perfection," "entire sanctification," or "perfect love," this idea involves a spiritual freedom and cleansing from self-interest and intentional sin.³ The experience of sanctification, or Christian perfection, was different from that of justification; in justification, God forgave a person the sinful actions he had committed, but in sanctification he could be cleansed from his inward sin as well. Wesley did not claim that a complete perfection from all sin was possible; such a state would not be attainable until after death. However, he advocated "a perfection of motives and desires" on earth that would allow a person to "live a life of victory over sin." He

¹ Harold Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 13.

² See John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.

³ Donald Dayton, "The Holiness Churches: A Significant Ethical Tradition," *The Christian Century*, February 26, 1975, 198.

referred to this earthly perfection as a the “second work of grace” or the “second blessing.”⁴ Believers considered the doctrine of Christian perfection to be the “peculiar doctrine” of Methodism, and it was foundational for the nineteenth century American holiness movement.⁵

When the Methodist denomination came to America, the doctrine of Christian perfection came with it.⁶ Not long after the doctrine arrived to the emerging nation, it began to take on a distinctly American character. In his benchmark historical work *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, Melvin Dieter notes that the nineteenth century American holiness revival was both a religious movement and an American movement; holiness beliefs stemming from John Wesley and English Methodism were shaped by American religious greats such as Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney, as well as American religious ideas such as the importance of revivalism in the Christian experience.⁷ The doctrine of entire sanctification itself saw Americanization as a result of the influence of Phoebe Palmer, a Methodist laywoman from New York who authored *The Way of Holiness*.⁸ As a result of her own experience of sanctification, Palmer maintained that entire sanctification was possible for every believer through entire consecration, faith, and confession; if a person wanted to be sanctified, he or she must simply claim it in faith. An urgency came along with Mrs. Palmer’s “altar theology” that had not

⁴ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 18-19.

⁵ Charles Edwin Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion: The Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1963* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1974), 1.

⁶ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 19.

⁷ Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1980), 18-23.

⁸ J. Lawrence Brasher, *The Sanctified South: John Lakin Brasher and the Holiness Movement* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 27-28.

existed with Wesley's prior theology; according to Palmer, believers did not begin truly living until they were sanctified, so Christian perfection was an immediate essential. Dieter recognized this urgency as a specifically American trait; this was the doctrine of sanctification "combined with an impatient, American pragmatism that always seeks to make a reality at the moment whatever is considered at all possible in the future."⁹ Palmer's influence on Wesley's perfectionism brought a "newness" to holiness doctrine that would become the basis for the holiness revival of the nineteenth century: "Edwards' 'immediateness' and Finney's 'directness' joined with Wesley's claim to full release from sin to create a powerful logic for the new perfectionist movement's challenge to Methodism and the whole Christian church."¹⁰

In addition to an emphasis on the "second blessing" experience of entire sanctification, holiness proponents worried about how that experience affected a person's day-to-day actions. Theologian and American religious historian Donald Dayton refers to the holiness movement as "a significant ethical tradition," in which holiness people took considerable interest in issues such as abolition, women's rights, poverty, and peace. Their efforts, particularly to help the poor and the oppressed, were "much more than just 'relief' efforts;" rather, they were very active with such causes and would physically go to minister to the people who they felt were most in need of aid.¹¹ In addition to these social issues, holiness proponents tried to combat sin and worldliness among individual persons. An experience of

⁹ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 25-31.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 31.

¹¹ Dayton, "The Holiness Churches: A Significant Ethical Tradition," 197-199.

entire sanctification should bring about behavior marked by a heart and life full of the Holy Spirit and not be motivated, for example, by desires to take part in the consumerism and overindulgence that characterized United States society during the Modern Period.¹² The point of a sanctification experience, above all else, was to practically live out the sanctified life.¹³ As one holiness advocate reminded fellow believers, “the internal rightness and fullness of the blessing must project itself upon the world in the form of right living and practical, whole-souled effort to help and save others.”¹⁴

This ethical, sanctification-based theology was what characterized American holiness religion by the mid-nineteenth century, and in due time holiness proponents began to spread these beliefs throughout the developing nation. Holiness ideas were promoted through small group gatherings known as “Tuesday Meetings” that traced back to Phoebe Palmer and her sister Sarah Lankford, as well as through the dissemination of Reverend Timothy Merritt’s *Guide to Christian Perfection*, an 1839 publication that made known the existence of the growing holiness force within the American religious and social landscape.¹⁵ Further, the holiness message and revivalism were becoming indisputably intertwined. Dieter offers an explanation of this definite relationship with the following words:

Given the American voluntaristic church system, which encouraged revivalism, and given pietistic revivalism’s inherent tendencies towards

¹² Douglas M. Strong, “Fighting Against Worldliness and Unbelief: Henry Clay Morrison and the Transformation of the Holiness Movement Within Methodism” (presentation, Wesleyan/Holiness Studies Center at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY, September 1995), 1-2.

¹³ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 227.

¹⁴ V.L. Williams, Untitled Article, *The Pentecostal Herald*, January 25, 1899, 1.

¹⁵ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 1, 47-48.

perfectionism, the continuum was a very natural one. The call of the revivalist to the sinner, for an immediate faith decision for his evangelical conversion, was paralleled by the holiness evangelist's call to the Christian for an immediate faith decision for his entire sanctification. Out of this new urgency in perfectionist revivalism, reinforced as it was, by the transcendentalism, the progressivism, and the optimism which were seething in the national mind at the time, a new holiness movement arose in the American churches.¹⁶

With a powerful revival in the northeast United States in 1858, the holiness movement reached its pre-Civil War climax, but the outbreak of war in 1861 soon saw the end of the early movement in America. However, revivals such as the 1858 one and the increased spread of and awareness surrounding holiness doctrine combined to lay a groundwork that would be built upon with even greater force after the war's end.¹⁷

Post-Civil War America saw "fertile soil for holiness revivalism."¹⁸ Americans faced the poignant question of how to pick up the pieces of their broken nation and their war-torn lives, of how to once again begin a quest for political and social perfection. Holiness provided a means to that end. A special camp meeting was held in Vineland, New Jersey in 1867 devoted distinctively to the preaching of the holiness message.¹⁹ Shortly thereafter, organizers formed the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness with the purpose of intentionally spreading holiness doctrine through revivalism.²⁰ Proponents published holiness literature and held camp meetings. By the year 1870, a renewed holiness movement

¹⁶ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 61.

¹⁷ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 30-32.

¹⁸ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 97.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 96-106.

²⁰ Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 47.

was taking place on a national scale.²¹ While the National Camp Meeting Association had begun in the northern United States, it soon spread to the South; in the lower United States, the Association's efforts were met with sufficient favor, and the holiness doctrine the Association promoted found increased support through rising holiness publications.²² As the end of the nineteenth century drew near, it was increasingly evident that the activity of holiness supporters was indeed becoming a "movement" in the full sense of the word – one that was significantly affecting the American religious landscape and one that would continue to gain momentum both within and outside of Methodism.

A closer look at postbellum society gives insight as to why the holiness movement may have gained such momentum during this particular period of United States history. The years following the Civil War were a time of rapid change for the recovering nation, and essentially all social and intellectual institutions throughout the country felt the effects of that change. American churches certainly did not escape the Gilded Age unaffected, nor did the postwar holiness movement.²³ Rather, various currents were at work throughout American society during the last decades of the nineteenth century that collectively influenced American churches and brought about an increasingly strong reaction from the growing holiness movement. These currents included a nationwide economic expansion, significant urban growth throughout the country, and the rise of Darwinism and the notion of evolutionary advancement.

²¹ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 37-39.

²² Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 123-124.

²³ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 55.

New business opportunities provided by the government, growing industrialism, and increased prospects of wealth throughout the country brought about a "shift in American society to avidly pursue the dollar as the first priority."²⁴ From 1875 through the end of the century the United States saw a rapid expansion of wealth, and so did its churches. The Methodist Church simultaneously underwent a growth in church membership and, like the United States on the whole, an increase in wealth.²⁵ Holiness proponents considered this newfound wealth to be the cause of a "tide of undisciplined worldliness which was sweeping the church."²⁶ According to an 1898 article from a leading holiness periodical *The Pentecostal Herald*, this worldliness was a dominant factor in church life and was a leading cause in the lack of vibrancy and the "low spiritual state" found in so many established churches.²⁷ Further, churches were catering to the growing bourgeoisie and were accommodating newcomers of wealth and position in various ways; the emotionalism that characterized earlier sermonizing was replaced with a more refined style of preaching, worship became more formal, and education became more important than dramatic conversion.²⁸ In the eyes of holiness advocates, wealth and worldliness were leading the church away from truth and authenticity,

²⁴ Ronald E. Smith, "'Old Path Methodism' in a Modern World: Henry Clay Morrison's Campaign for the Evangelical Option in the Modern Period" (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 2005), 152.

²⁵ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 204.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 209.

²⁷ M.J. Sniveley, "Things Old and New," *The Pentecostal Herald*, March 30, 1898, 2.

²⁸ Strong, "Fighting Against Worldliness," 2.

and they held tightly to the view that “a worldly church cannot bring a lost world to Christ.”²⁹

In addition to industrialization and economic expansion, the United States during the late nineteenth century saw a period of great urbanization. An influx of European immigrants as well as large numbers of American citizens relocating from rural areas to cities contributed to this urban development. The Methodist Church particularly felt this demographic shift, and disparities soon became evident between country and city churches. According to Dieter, “the gap between the city churches with their new-found wealth...and the atmosphere of the country family church was not effectively bridged.” Because people from rural backgrounds “formed the backbone” of the holiness movement, this urbanization was significant for holiness proponents. Holiness people of the American countryside would come to have increasingly less in common with the established Methodist Church, fueling eventual conflict between the two groups.³⁰

Further, the development and spread of the scientific viewpoints of Charles Darwin presented a significant challenge to religious ideology throughout the United States. The idea of evolutionary advancement brought into focus as a result of Darwin’s work presented a challenge to the traditional Christian idea of creation as explained in the book of Genesis. Notions of scientific empiricism first accepted in Europe made their way to the United States, and schools of thought such as “higher criticism” placed an emphasis on science rather than religion as the means

²⁹ Henry Clay Morrison, *Five Great Needs* (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing Company, n.d.), 19.

³⁰ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 205-206.

to discover ultimate truth.³¹ These ideas had an impact on American churches; theories such as “higher criticism” found their way into Methodist pulpits and brought about a serious departure from the fundamental doctrines that holiness people supported.³² For believers associated with the holiness movement, these increasingly popular scientific notions were highly dangerous, because, as many holiness people were sure to agree, “if the Bible is true, then this mental delusion called Christian Science cannot be true.”³³ Holiness advocates who vehemently disagreed with these new beliefs looked to revival as a means to stamp out such ideas that they believed were a serious threat to their traditional Christian position.³⁴

In the midst of these emergent currents of Modernism, the holiness movement sought to be a beacon of light to help the American people find their way and to steer them back onto the path of righteousness. Holiness advocates such as Henry Clay Morrison, editor of *The Pentecostal Herald* holiness periodical and eventual champion of the Meridian Holiness Union, called for a return to the “old paths” – the doctrine of Christian perfection as espoused by John Wesley and the experience of entire sanctification as a distinct work of grace.³⁵ Indeed, Morrison and other prominent holiness supporters considered this traditional holiness doctrine to be “the *grand depositum* of Methodism,” and they stood firm in their

³¹ Smith, “Old Path Methodism,” 153-154.

³² Henry Clay Morrison, “They are Unsound Through and Through,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, April 20, 1898, 5.

³³ J.M. Wilson, “Science Falsely So Called,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, March 23, 1899, 3.

³⁴ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 209.

³⁵ Strong, “Fighting Against Worldliness,” 1; Smith, “Old Path Methodism,” 145-146.

defense of it.³⁶ A revival of old path religion was necessary, they believed, to combat what Walter Lippmann would later term “the acids of modernity.”³⁷

Morrison writes:

The greatest need of the times is a deep, wide-spread revival of Holy Ghost religion. A revival that will produce deep conviction for sin, bright conversions, and clear sanctifications, would at once restore the Bible to its proper place in the faith and love of the people. The degenerate state of the church, and the consequent rampant and bold wickedness of the times, had made this determined and insidious advance of scepticism in pulpits and schools possible.³⁸

In addition to calling for a return to the Methodist theology of past years, people of the holiness movement responded to the Modern Period with a widespread attack on worldliness. A holy life was meant to be “a reaction against the standards of the present world,” and this standard often called the sanctified believer to live counter-culturally.³⁹ In response to this view, popular Christian practices such as “dances, drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking, card-playing” and more were fervently denounced, as such practices were thought to have no place among the sanctified who were truly committed to the will of God.⁴⁰ Alcohol and tobacco were particularly frowned upon, and a person was expected to give up the use of such deplorable products after becoming truly sanctified.⁴¹ Holiness advocates saw the saloon as “the most prolific source of murder, poverty, disease and death” in the

³⁶ Smith, “Old Path Methodism,” 146.

³⁷ Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1982), 51, 56.

³⁸ Henry Clay Morrison, *Open Letters to the Bishops, Ministers and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing Co., n.d.), 28-29.

³⁹ Strong, “Fighting Against Worldliness,” 11-12.

⁴⁰ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 209.

⁴¹ Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 83-84.

nation, and the use of alcohol and tobacco as an outpouring of sin in one's life correspondent with the sin of the Old Testament land of Sodom, a city destroyed by God because of its great wickedness.⁴² The holiness movement became linked with the temperance movement, with holiness advocates calling for political activism regarding this issue.⁴³ Between their call for a return to the old paths and this strong attack against what they considered to be worldly vices, holiness proponents deliberately worked to take a stand against modernity and saw revival as the way to combat the "religious crisis" of the Modern Period.⁴⁴ While the United States was attempting to reach a level of progress and perfection through scientific advancement, holiness people offered the same result through religious experience.⁴⁵

Holiness people employed a variety of means to bring about this desperately needed revival. Camp meetings, holiness associations, religious publications, and the establishment of schools dedicated to a teaching of holiness doctrine were among the important methods utilized throughout the movement to promote the holiness message. While many of these tools for advancement were already being used before the Civil War, they became increasingly important in post-war society and contributed significantly to both the growth of the holiness movement in general and also to the resistance that holiness people posed to the dangers of the Modern Period.

⁴² H. Watkins, "The Tobacco Habit," *The Pentecostal Herald*, January 13, 1904, 3.

⁴³ F.H. Kerfoot et al., "To All Lovers of Temperance of Every Name or Party in Kentucky," *The Pentecostal Herald*, February 1, 1899, 8-9.

⁴⁴ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 209.

⁴⁵ Smith, "Old Path Methodism," 160.

Perhaps the single most important instrument for the spread of holiness was the camp meeting. The Palmers had utilized the camp meeting in antebellum years to advance their message, and their work proved the effectiveness of such a method for promoting holiness from the very start.⁴⁶ But particularly after the Civil War, holiness believers used the camp meeting to further the message of entire sanctification; indeed, the camp meeting would soon be considered “the distinguishing institution” of the nineteenth century American holiness movement.⁴⁷ The 1867 camp meeting in Vineland, New Jersey marked the start of the modern holiness movement and led to the establishment of the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness.⁴⁸ This organization proclaimed holiness in camp meetings throughout the country and “became the heart of the postwar holiness movement.”⁴⁹ While camp meeting revivals took place throughout the United States, revivalism was especially prevalent in the postbellum South, where it helped to give rise to Lost Cause religion and to make sense of Southern society after the Civil War.⁵⁰ Wherever the holiness revival was taking place, camp meetings were an opportunity to renew relationships among holiness people and to celebrate perfectionist theology in the midst of the beauty of the natural world. Further, camp meetings allowed the holiness movement to spread in a powerful way in that the open-air structure and evangelistic nature of camp meetings offered

⁴⁶ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 111.

⁴⁷ Brasher, *The Sanctified South*, 30.

⁴⁸ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 37.

⁴⁹ Brasher, *The Sanctified South*, 30.

⁵⁰ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), 7, 119.

a way to reach the masses, in spite of opposition that might develop within established churches towards the holiness message.⁵¹

In addition to camp meetings, holiness associations were used to promote ideas of perfectionism and entire sanctification. These holiness associations were a part of holiness culture even before the Civil War, and their pre-war existence would become a pattern for the organization of associations throughout the country after the war.⁵² As the National Association grew in success, similar organizations were created across the country after 1870. These associations were “loosely associated bands which cooperated around their common interest in promoting entire sanctification,” and believers formed them on both a state and a local level throughout the nation.⁵³ While leaders of the National Association were bringing it increasingly under the control of the established Methodist church, new organizations rallied around not an official denomination but around a message of holiness.⁵⁴ The Meridian Holiness Union would later model such an independent method when it convened in 1905 in the form of an association in order to advance the holiness cause.

Well before the Civil War, holiness was encouraged through the distribution of literature. Timothy Merritt's *Guide to Christian Perfection* first appeared in July 1839 with the purpose of encouraging those whose cause it was to advance and

⁵¹ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 111-113.

⁵² Ibid, 58.

⁵³ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 213, and Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 39.

⁵⁴ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 213.

proclaim a message of holiness.⁵⁵ Later, Phoebe Palmer's ideas about entire sanctification were promoted through national Christian journals as well as through her own writing.⁵⁶ Text became an especially influential tool of the holiness movement in post-bellum America. An abundance of holiness literature was issued throughout the 1870's and 1880's from established Methodist publications as well as independent holiness ones.⁵⁷ By the year 1892, editors published forty-one holiness periodicals throughout the country, and most were independent of any denominational control.⁵⁸ One example of such a periodical was *The Pentecostal Herald*. First named *The Old Methodist*, this newspaper was introduced in 1889 by Henry Clay Morrison to circulate a message of holiness to readers across the country.⁵⁹ *The Pentecostal Herald* would be an important vehicle for spreading holiness doctrine for years to come and for advertising other means of holiness promotion such as camp meetings, revival services, Christian holiness schools, and gatherings like the Meridian Holiness Union to readers throughout the United States.

The creation of schools dedicated to the teaching of holiness doctrine were yet another very important means of spreading the holiness message. The scientific emphases of the Modern Period that were sweeping the country were making their way into colleges and seminaries throughout the United States, and where religion had once been a driving force behind American education it was now becoming

⁵⁵ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 1-2.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 28-34.

⁵⁷ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 38.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 45.

⁵⁹ Strong, "Fighting Against Worldliness," 1.

increasingly less of a priority.⁶⁰ Henry Clay Morrison expressed his own negative views towards the American education system in his allegorical work *Confessions of a Backslider*; though the story is fictional, readers can clearly understand the attitude towards education that was becoming increasingly prominent among holiness proponents. The narrator of Morrison's allegory is guilty of great sin and backsliding, and his backsliding is traced several times to the poor quality of education he received at the secular university he attended. Had he attended a religious school rather than a skeptical, secular institution, he "would no doubt have been a happy and useful citizen instead of having lived a miserably wicked life."⁶¹ At the work's end, the narrator urges parents to keep their children out of skeptical institutions and warns of the immoral teachings so prominent in "the average institution of learning."⁶² Viewpoints such as this one were a principal motivation in the establishment of holiness schools throughout the United States. For example, Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky was founded in 1890 by Reverend John Wesley Hughes with the purpose of upholding and teaching holiness doctrine at a liberal arts institution.⁶³ The Meridian Female College and the Meridian Male College, administrated at the turn of the century by brothers J.W. Beeson and M.A. Beeson, respectively, were two prominent holiness schools established in Meridian, Mississippi.⁶⁴ These institutions, of which the Asbury and Meridian schools are but

⁶⁰ Robert Owen Fraley, "An Historical Survey of Asbury Theological Seminary 1923-1949" (Masters Thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1949), 3-5.

⁶¹ Henry Clay Morrison, *Confessions of a Backslider*, (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing Company, n.d.), 68, 89.

⁶² *Ibid*, 89.

⁶³ Smith, "Old Path Methodism," 146.

⁶⁴ Henry Clay Morrison, "Evangelizing," *The Pentecostal Herald*, April 6, 1904, 8.

three examples, sought to provide an “old path” education in the midst of the country’s modernization, and they were seen as a critical channel for the spread of the holiness message to a younger generation.

All of this historical and contextual information contributes to a fuller understanding of the Meridian Holiness Union. Those involved in the Meridian Holiness Union Convention held to the traditional beliefs and theology of the holiness movement, and they sought to take a stand against the sins of modernity they saw spreading throughout the country. Also, the Meridian Holiness Union followed suit with the typical ways holiness proponents used to further their message. The Union met in the form of an association, was advertised throughout holiness literature and publications, hosted revival services as a part of the Convention, and took place in part on a holiness college campus. Indeed, everything about the Meridian Holiness Union seems typical of the currents surrounding the nineteenth century holiness movement. In addition to allowing for a view of the Meridian Holiness Union as a part of a greater movement, understanding the holiness movement itself sheds light on why holiness people found themselves increasingly at odds with the established Methodist church. Although the holiness movement was born out of Methodist tradition, all of the growth of American holiness theology and the outlets proponents used to promulgate the message came to agitate Methodist leaders, another historical and contextual situation that must be understood before more fully grasping the significance of the 1905 Meridian Holiness Union.

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CHAPTER II: CONFLICT AND CONTROVERSY

The previous chapter's explanation of the nineteenth century holiness movement offers important insight into the state of affairs from which arose the 1905 Meridian Holiness Union. From studying this context, we learn that the beliefs of such a group rested in the doctrines of Methodism and that forming an association was a typical approach to spreading the holiness message. However, the previous chapter tells only half of the contextual story necessary for a full understanding of the climate from which the Meridian Holiness Union emerged. The second half of the account is laced with conflict; as America neared the turn of the century, holiness proponents found themselves not only at war with the growing forces of modernism and worldliness, but also at war with the Southern Methodist church itself. The mid-1880s saw the height of popularity for the holiness movement within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.¹ The holiness movement was still seen to be Methodist in nature, and some high-profile Methodist officials were also holiness advocates.² But tensions surrounding both doctrine and organization were developing, and conflict between holiness movement proponents and the established Methodist Episcopal Church, South ensued. The conflict came to a head when Methodist bishops adopted a formal stance of opposition towards the holiness movement, leading many holiness people to take, in turn, a formal stand

¹ Brasher, *The Sanctified South*, 37.

² Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 43-44.

against the Southern Methodist establishment. Holiness advocates responded to the controversy in different ways, some by “coming out” and leaving the Methodist church altogether, and others by remaining within the established denomination, attempting to fight for their beliefs from the inside. But however the conflict played out in individual people’s lives, one thing is certain: by the time of the Meridian Holiness Union, holiness advocates and Methodists could no longer be considered members of the same camp. Instead, they saw themselves as members of two distinct and often contrary groups. When the Meridian Holiness Union formed in 1905, it did so as a means to further holiness beliefs despite the anti-holiness stance of the Southern Methodist establishment.

As the holiness movement grew in strength and in popularity, controversy over doctrine arose between proponents of the movement and leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Many Methodists were skeptical of certain doctrinal emphases of the holiness people; one particular point of debate was the idea of obtaining entire sanctification in a specific crisis moment, or “second blessing” experience.³ The “second blessing” was a benchmark of holiness theology; proponents saw such an experience as the key to living a sanctified life on earth and looked to John Wesley as the pioneer of this great idea.⁴ Some Methodists, however, did not consider this theological point to be in line with the original doctrine of Wesley, as “the emphasis on crisis mitigated the normal process of maturation and growth in holiness.”⁵ Much debate ensued over whether the “second blessing” was,

³ Smith, “Old Path Methodism,” 145-146.

⁴ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 227-228.

⁵ Smith, “Old Path Methodism,” 146.

in fact, of Wesleyan nature. When Wilbur F. Tillett openly questioned the doctrine in 1884, theological leaders from Vanderbilt University began to challenge it as well, and other Methodist pastors and writers throughout the country soon followed suit.⁶ But where Methodists argued that holiness doctrine had strayed from the initial intent of Wesley and the early denomination, holiness people passionately insisted that their theology aligned with original beliefs. The Reverend Henry Clay Morrison addressed this controversy when he published his allegorical work *The Two Lawyers: A Story for the Times* in 1898. Throughout *The Two Lawyers*, two church members oppose their Methodist leaders and argue that holiness theology could be seen throughout all of Methodist history and was not, as was claimed, a modern development or deviation from the norm. The church members of the story pose the question, “Does the Methodist Church in her history, standards of doctrine, Discipline, and Hymn Book teach that there is a second work of grace, wrought of God in the believer’s heart, subsequent to regeneration?”⁷ Morrison uses the remainder of his story to lay out an argument in favor of holiness doctrine on this point, fervently maintaining that “the doctrine of the second work of grace, is not ‘new,’ nor is it from a Methodist standpoint a *heresy*.”⁸

Also in contention was the theology of the two groups regarding the millennium. The official position of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North and South was a postmillennialist view; however, by 1890, a majority of Southern

⁶ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 48.

⁷ Henry Clay Morrison, *The Two Lawyers: A Story for the Times* (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing Co., 1898), 44.

⁸ *Ibid*, 45.

holiness proponents were overtly premillennialist.⁹ This doctrinal difference concerned Methodist leaders for two reasons; first, the divergence in view itself was offensive to Methodist orthodoxy, and, second, a premillennialist stance gave the holiness movement a certain power that the Methodist establishment did not enjoy. Postmillennialism “expected Christ to return in judgment after the millennium, a period hastened by earthly spiritual and social progress,” but premillennialism looked for the second coming of Christ before the millennium, where Jesus would dramatically return to gather his people from the earth to heaven in a particular event called the “rapture.” The idea of the “second blessing” and, therefore, the holiness movement itself gained power when linked to premillennialism; with this view, holiness leaders were teaching that one must always be ready for Christ’s return and that the sanctification experience was “the required initiation preparing believers to meet the coming Lord.”¹⁰ Despite the popularity of a premillennial view, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South maintained its postmillennial stance, making it clear that doctrinal differences of opinion between the established church and the holiness movement would perpetuate.

In addition to the tensions that emerged surrounding doctrine, agitation also developed over the independent nature of holiness movement organization. The methods used by the holiness people to further their cause were fairly autonomous, and this began to trouble leaders within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Chapter one of this work mentions four chief means used to promulgate the holiness cause: camp meetings, holiness associations, religious publications, and holiness

⁹ Brasher, *The Sanctified South*, 37.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 38.

schools. Each of these, in some way, came to involve work that was independent of official Methodist control. For example, the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness was originally guided primarily by Methodists, but it never became an entirely Methodist entity.¹¹ The National Association's commitment to holiness as an experience rather than a particular denominational idea led to an expansion of its influence beyond Methodism itself, and the Association generated an interdenominationalism through which the holiness message was spread in spite of great doctrinal and organizational differences.¹² This fueled conflict between leaders of the National Association and the Methodist Episcopal Church, as the Association's independent and interdenominational nature appeared "repugnant to the traditionally well-organized and tightly knit polity of the Methodist Church."¹³ If the National Association was cause for wariness among conventional Methodists, the countless other regional and city holiness associations sprouting up around the country were surely reasons for concern. Regional associations were even more likely to be interdenominational, reaching beyond Methodism for fellowship with believers of other Christian sects.¹⁴ Methodist leaders came to be skeptical of associationism in general, and by 1894, some even considered membership in a holiness association to be an act of disloyalty against the Methodist church.¹⁵

¹¹ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 45.

¹² Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 137.

¹³ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 45.

¹⁴ Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 50.

¹⁵ Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 50, 91.

The literature being published to promote the holiness cause was also largely outside of Methodist control; by 1892, believers published forty-one holiness periodicals throughout the United States, most of them associated with the National Holiness Association rather than with the Methodist church or any other denomination.¹⁶ Though some of these papers featured largely Methodist contributors, they were not necessarily limited to content from the denomination. Henry Clay Morrison would allow Methodists and non-Methodists alike to contribute to *The Pentecostal Herald*; indeed, "a non-Methodist like William Jennings Bryan could appear in his publication as readily as Methodist Episcopal leader so long as it supported the desired cause."¹⁷ Furthermore, the holiness schools, even if founded by Methodists, were not necessarily Methodist schools. Asbury College, for instance, was founded by Methodist John Wesley Hughes as a means to promote "'old-path' Methodism," but it was not an institution of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Some viewed such a school independent from Methodism to be "problematic for the denomination."¹⁸

Finally, Southern Methodists found fault with the concept of the holiness evangelist himself. Early in the nineteenth century, a class of holiness evangelists had emerged as the American revivalist tradition grew.¹⁹ The nature of the camp meeting, which was so crucial for the spread of the holiness message, called for preachers to travel to speak as guest evangelists. Indeed, with so many camp meetings and holiness associations growing in popularity and calling for speakers,

¹⁶ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 45.

¹⁷ Smith, "Old Path Methodism," 189-190.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 146-147.

¹⁹ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 23.

some holiness ministers sought to leave their full-time commitments to their local churches and to instead take on positions as full-time evangelists. Methodists felt that this increasing number of independent evangelists threatened established ecclesiastical authority, as the Methodist discipline did not recognize the office of evangelist as an official position of the denomination.²⁰ Differing views over the legitimacy of the evangelist contributed to much of the controversy between holiness people and the Southern Methodist church. As holiness evangelists moved beyond their initial audiences and ventured to make the message of the second blessing known to every man, Methodist leaders viewed their endeavors as increasingly irregular and objectionable.²¹

The combination of these political tensions as well as the doctrinal disputes made for a very delicate relationship between the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the holiness people as the turn of the century drew near. Keeping in mind that the United States of America itself was undergoing great change at this time with the onset of modernism, it is undoubtedly possible to understand how a growing sense of despair could have been gripping proponents of both sides. The Methodist church was already undergoing change to keep pace with the changes of the nation; what Methodist leaders saw as deviant doctrine within the church and as power growing independently of church control would have contributed to a fear of even more instability. Indeed, there grew a sense of “increasing despair among loyal Methodists concerning the possibility of the recovery of the disciplinary standards which they believed necessary to the maintenance of the spiritual life of the church.”

²⁰ Brasher, *The Sanctified South*, 37-39.

²¹ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 221.

In turn, holiness people were alarmed. They, too, were already battling the effects of a rapidly changing United States, and opposition from the Methodist church meant they were facing even greater giants. Not only were holiness advocates attempting to fend off worldliness, higher criticism, and the other “acids of modernity,” they now must also confront challenges within Methodism itself. As the Methodist church was, in their opinion, the particular group to which God had entrusted the care and promotion of the doctrine of entire sanctification, holiness people were distressed to see their church set its special doctrine aside.²²

Controversy between the two groups deepened as the Methodist Episcopal Church, South chose to formally declare its position on some of the matters under dispute. At the 1894 Southern Methodist General Conference, bishops forcibly rejected numerous proposals to establish and acknowledge an official office of an evangelist – a position, of course, that holiness leaders both recognized and sought. Leaders did not reject the message of the holiness movement entirely, reiterating the church’s dedication to promoting “holiness of heart and life.”²³ But they did issue a statement that clearly showed their skepticism and distaste for the growing holiness movement activity:

There has sprung up among us a party with holiness as a watchword; they have holiness associations, holiness meetings, holiness preachers, holiness evangelists, and holiness property. Religious experience is represented as if it consists of only two steps, the first step out of condemnation into peace and the next step into Christian perfection... We do not question the sincerity and zeal of their brethren; we desire the church to profit by their earnest preaching and godly example; but we deplore their teaching and methods in so far as they claim a monopoly of the experience,

²² Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 228.

²³ Brasher, *The Sanctified South*, 39.

practice, and advocacy of holiness, and separate themselves from the body of ministers and disciples.²⁴

The 1894 General Conference can be seen as a turning point in the dispute between Methodists and holiness advocates.²⁵ After Methodist leaders officially declared their disapprobation of the holiness movement in this way, holiness proponents that wanted to further the movement were left to do so in blatant opposition to the church. Holiness activity was no longer merely frowned upon by Methodist leaders who now formally opposed it. Instead, it was becoming more and more difficult for a person to claim to be a member of both camps.

Consideration of the impact that such escalating hostility had on individual people's lives provides a greater understanding of the stormy situation. Memoirs of certain holiness leaders offer insight as to how the tension affected individuals. For example, holiness evangelist L.L. Pickett addresses the matter in his 1896 publication *A Plea for the Present Holiness Movement*; in this work, he presents numerous specific examples of people who encountered conflict as a result of their holiness beliefs. One case Pickett discusses is that of Brother Carradine. After two highly successful years as pastor of a large Methodist congregation in Saint Louis, Carradine felt called to pursue evangelistic work rather than remain in the full-time pastorate. Carradine travelled and preached as an evangelist for three years, meeting the same success and experiencing what holiness people considered the blessing of God; however, his presiding elder B.M. Messick "endeavored to put the

²⁴ William Warren Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1961), 1953, quoted in Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 63.

²⁵ Brasher, *The Sanctified South*, 39.

brakes upon him and drive him from the ministry, if not from the Church.”²⁶

Another example Pickett offers is that of John H. Appell, who was a Methodist minister also involved in holiness movement work. Pickett argues that Appell was a faithful Methodist and loved by all; however, the church took his credentials from him because of his active involvement with the Waco Holiness Camp Ground. Denominational leaders forced Appell to choose between his commitment to the holiness camp meeting and the Methodist church.²⁷

One particular clash between a holiness leader and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South especially made its way into Southern religious spotlight in 1896. Henry Clay Morrison, who had previously left his full-time position pastoring a Methodist congregation in Kentucky to allow freedom for traveling evangelism, agreed to speak at a laity-sponsored camp meeting in Dublin, Texas.²⁸ Shortly after deciding upon a September meeting date, Morrison was contacted by a Methodist Episcopal Church, South pastor in Dublin who forbid him to follow through with the planned revival services; after continued exchanges, Methodist leaders threatened to bring official charges against Morrison if he came. He carried on with the services and enjoyed great local support, but he soon found himself expelled from the Methodist church and a part of an interesting trial with the denomination.²⁹

Leaders bringing charges against Morrison looked to a specification in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South’s discipline interpreted to suggest that no Methodist

²⁶ L.L. Pickett, *A Plea for the Present Holiness Movement* (Louisville, KY: Pickett Publishing Company, 1896), 13-15.

²⁷ Ibid, 18-19.

²⁸ Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 93.

²⁹ Smith, “Old Path Methodism,” 178-180.

minister could hold services near another church without the consent of that church's pastor.³⁰ Surely this provision was one that Methodist ministers would – and could – lean on to rid their towns and territories of unwanted holiness evangelists. But despite Morrison's initial expulsion from the ministry, he was well represented by Reverend W.E. Arnold in an appeal before the Kentucky Annual Conference, which reinstated him as an honorable member and pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in September 1897.³¹

While this remains but one incident, it is clear that Morrison's Dublin, Texas controversy is decidedly representative of the greater debate. Morrison's trial at Annual Conference evidently drew great attention; important Methodist figures such as H.C. Morrison (Missionary Secretary in Nashville at the time, not to be confused with our H.C. Morrison mentioned throughout) and Dr. John Tigret, both who would later become bishops, traveled to Kentucky to monitor the case.³² Their presence suggests an intentional interest in the situation from the side of the Methodist leadership; perhaps they sensed that the outcome of the case would have ramifications beyond the fate of one holiness evangelist and, rather, would affect the overall controversy. W.E. Arnold eloquently expressed this idea of a greater impact in his legal argument in favor of Morrison:

His trial does not affect him alone. Questions are involved which greatly concern the church. All Southern Methodism is interested in the issues that are connected with this unfortunate affair. The rights and powers of presiding elders and preachers in charge; the sphere, privileges, and amenability of local preachers; evangelists, their right to exist, their

³⁰ Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 93.

³¹ Smith, "Old Path Methodism," 180.

³² Morrison, *Some Chapters of My Life Story*, 90, and Smith, "Old Path Methodism," 180-181.

regulation and control; the Wesleyan doctrine of Entire Sanctification, as a work of grace subsequent to regeneration; the "Holiness Movement," with its camp-meetings, associations and literature, all are directly or indirectly involved.³³

By the turn of the century, the rift between holiness people and Southern Methodists was clearly widening with little optimism for reconciliation on the horizon, becoming what has even been referred to as an outright "Holiness War."³⁴ What choices, then, did holiness proponents from the Methodist tradition have if they were so at odds with the denomination of which they were originally a part? Most holiness people found themselves presented with three primary paths to take in response to the controversy. First, they could choose to relocate membership to the Methodist Episcopal Church, North; Northern Methodists were sympathetic to the plight of Southern holiness people and even actively sought members from those in the South who were put out by their bishops and other Episcopal leaders.³⁵ Well-known pastor and evangelist Bud Robinson decided to take this approach and joined the Methodist Church, North when he was faced with a choice between his holiness theology and Methodist Episcopal Church, South membership.³⁶

A second way holiness people responded to the controversy with the Methodist church was to leave Methodism altogether, both North and South. This approach, referred to as "comeoutism," appeared even before the 1894 General Conference, but both Methodists and some more moderate holiness proponents

³³ W.E. Arnold, *The H. C. Morrison Case: A Statement of Facts: An Investigation of the Law* (Louisville, KY: Kentucky Methodist Pub. Co., 1897), 1, and Smith, "Old Path Methodism," 181.

³⁴ Bud Robinson, *Sunshine and Smiles* (Chicago: IL: The Christian Witness Company, 1904), 71.

³⁵ Brasher, *The Sanctified South*, 40.

³⁶ Robinson, *Sunshine and Smiles*, 75.

highly criticized it as being an improper way to handle the conflict.³⁷ Regardless of the disapproval of comeoutism that existed, this remained a popular response to the holiness hostilities; come-outers felt as if the holiness message could not survive in its current environment and decided that the best way to protect their sacred doctrine was to carry on its promotion in a more favorable environment.³⁸ This comeoutism had very lasting effects on the American religious landscape. Holiness groups began to break away from Methodism in the years following 1894 and form their own independent denominations. Two of the largest of these groups were the Church of the Nazarene, which fully emerged in 1914 but traced its roots back as early as 1894, and the Pilgrim Holiness Church that began in 1897. Dozens of other smaller denominations were established during this time as holiness people across the country, but especially in the South and Midwest, “came out.” Some of these new groups had negligible impact on the holiness movement once they left the Methodist church, but others would play a major role in the pentecostal movement that took place later in the twentieth century.³⁹

While some holiness proponents relocated to the Methodist Episcopal Church, North and others left the Methodist church altogether, a third group rejected both a relocation of membership and comeoutism. A number of holiness supporters determined to stick with what they felt to be their original callings and to remain a part of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Henry Clay Morrison was one of these “loyalists.” Morrison was baptized and accepted into membership

³⁷ Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 62-64.

³⁸ Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 274.

³⁹ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, 59-61.

of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South shortly after his conversion in December 1870 when he was thirteen years old.⁴⁰ It is clear from Morrison's autobiographies and work in *The Pentecostal Herald* that he intended to stay with the church of his initial Christian upbringing. In one 1896 editorial Morrison calls comeoutism a "dangerous enemy" of the holiness movement, and he encourages holiness readers to follow his example and remain in the Methodist church, telling them, "We must win our battle all together, and on the inside."⁴¹ One of Morrison's biographers fittingly dubbed him "the holiness preacher who wouldn't 'come out.'"⁴² Other holiness spokesmen – and spokeswomen – encouraged fidelity. *Pentecostal Herald* contributor Georgia D. Shelley clearly discouraged comeoutism and wrote favorably towards the Methodist establishment; she writes, "Yes, the old Methodism is what we holiness people hold to, and shall we withdraw from a church whose doctrine and polity are what we believe?"⁴³ Despite this type of outspoken condemnation of schismatics, however, many loyalists continued to associate with separatists and to speak at independent camp meetings or revivals, thus seemingly contradicting their supposed full allegiance to the Methodist institution.⁴⁴ But while such tensions and contradictions continued, a number of holiness people insisted on loyalty to the Methodist church, holding the same position as Morrison when he asserted that he

⁴⁰ Percival A. Wesche, *Henry Clay Morrison: Crusader Saint* (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1963), 20.

⁴¹ Henry Clay Morrison, "A Dangerous Enemy," *The Pentecostal Herald*, August 31, 1896, 5.

⁴² Jennifer Woodruff Tait, "Henry Clay Morrison (1857-1942): The Holiness Preacher Who Wouldn't 'Come Out'," *Christian History and Biography*, no. 82 (2004): 33-34.

⁴³ Georgia D. Shelley, "Loyalty to the Master," *The Pentecostal Herald*, January 20, 1904, 3.

⁴⁴ Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 92.

“never contended for holiness for contention’s sake, or to form a faction, or to cause friction in the church, but because there are multitudes of people in the church who know and care nothing about holiness, and because without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”⁴⁵

Surely the last decade of the nineteenth century was one of considerable controversy between the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the holiness movement. What had once been a largely favorable and closely linked relationship was now an almost constant clash between two increasingly polarized camps, each growing ever more disillusioned with the other. Holiness people faced a choice; would they leave the church that they had so long been a part of in hopes of a better avenue for promoting their message, or would they remain Southern Methodists, attempting to advance their doctrine in spite of resistance? Stands taken by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, such as the anti-holiness position adopted at the 1894 General Conference, give new significance to holiness associations that continued to meet. The Southern Methodist establishment on the whole now opposed holiness activity, so when holiness advocates who remained Methodists chose to carry on with their meetings, they did so at risk of losing considerable favor with Methodist leaders and possibly even of losing their membership. But many holiness people did indeed carry on, those who joined together as a part of the Meridian Holiness Union in 1905 being one prime example. As a result of this contextual knowledge, we can see the Meridian Holiness Union as an association that passionately met in spite of disapproval from, and even in open defiance

⁴⁵ Henry Clay Morrison, *Open Letters*, 4.

towards, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. This group of people clearly believed in their message so strongly that they were willing to carry on with its promotion at very great cost. Understanding the conflict from which they emerged proves that even the most basic decision of the Union to meet together holds considerable significance. That same passion for holiness that drove them to gather together would continue to be seen in countless other powerful ways, through both the activities and decisions of the Union's 1905 meeting itself and through the lasting legacy that those activities and decisions would leave behind.

CHAPTER III: THE 1905 MERIDIAN CONVENTION

The information provided in the previous two chapters concerning both the nineteenth century holiness movement itself and the conflict between the holiness movement and the Methodist church sets up the historical, social, and religious context into which the Meridian Holiness Union came forth. On one side of the camp, support for the doctrine and religious culture of holiness was growing ever stronger. On the other side, distaste for the holiness movement among Methodist leaders caused an irrevocable rift between holiness leaders and the established denomination. By the turn of the century, it was clear that the holiness movement would not be a united movement within one denomination. Rather, it would proceed outside of denominational lines and be promoted outside of Methodist control in order to survive and flourish. In the midst of uncertainty about the future of old path religion, Henry Clay Morrison emerged as a true champion of the movement, providing a means for holiness people to join together for encouragement and for the furtherance of their cause in spite of the seeming chaos of the times. The Meridian Holiness Union Convention of 1905 can be seen as a culmination of the way Morrison sought to bring both stability and fervor to the holiness movement in the South.

Sensing the need for unity among holiness proponents now scattered throughout the South and Southwest in different churches and associations,

Morrison proceeded to develop a plan for bringing holiness people together.

Although the National Holiness Association had been in operation for several years at the time, Morrison claimed that it had been ineffective as of yet in the South and that it should not seek to control territory so far away from its centralized location in the North in the first place. Morrison did not see this type of geographical separation as a form of sectionalism but, rather, "practical common sense."¹

Morrison's plan for collaboration among holiness people involved creating one comprehensive Holiness Union that would operate as "a loosely constructed federation of holiness bands...similar to the National Association for the Promotion of Holiness," that could particularly guide the South and Southwest United States.² Other existing holiness associations were effective, but this Holiness Union could even more broadly encompass the work of promoting holiness at the start of the twentieth century in the South.³

To establish his grand coalition of holiness people, Morrison organized a meeting in Memphis, Tennessee, to begin Tuesday night October 11, 1904 and to continue over the course of several days. He advertised the convention in *The Pentecostal Herald*, informing readers that the meeting would involve both the general organization of the Holiness Union and also preaching and evangelism throughout Memphis.⁴ Morrison's colleagues and *Herald* readers heeded his call; holiness proponents from various states gathered in Memphis to fellowship and to

¹ Henry Clay Morrison, "Harmony in the Holiness Movement," *The Pentecostal Herald*, October 19, 2004, 8.

² Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 93.

³ Morrison, "Harmony in the Holiness Movement," 8.

⁴ Henry Clay Morrison, "The Memphis Pentecostal Convention," *The Pentecostal Herald*, September 14, 1904, 8.

encourage one another, to reflect on the past and to prepare for the future, to pray, to preach, and to plan. The meeting did indeed provide opportunities for people with the same purpose but separate spheres or locations of ministry to come together. John Wesley Hughes, president of Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky, was able to meet with J.W. Beeson, president of the Meridian Female College in Meridian, Mississippi. Morrison, as editor of *The Pentecostal Herald*, was able to encourage and fellowship with the editor of another holiness publication, Brother Keith of *The Texas Holiness Advocate*. Other prominent holiness movement leaders such as L.L. Pickett of Kentucky and C.B. Jernigan of Texas were present. The Memphis Convention ended with the general realization of the power of united fellowship and with plans to undertake another meeting of the Holiness Union the following fall.⁵

Henry Clay Morrison continued to emphasize the importance of collaboration among holiness people throughout the year following the Memphis Convention. His *Pentecostal Herald* editorials frequently warned against sectarianism, and, for Morrison, continuing with the work of the Holiness Union was a means to prevent such a divisive evil. Morrison reminded readers that “close union is the purpose of God” and urged them to come to the next meeting of the Holiness Union, which was set to be held in October 1905 in Meridian, Mississippi.⁶ The purpose of the Meridian meeting would be the same as that of the Memphis one; Morrison and other leaders sought to prevent fanaticism and sectarianism within the holiness

⁵ Henry Clay Morrison, “Editorial Convention Notes,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, November 2, 1904, 8.

⁶ Henry Clay Morrison, “Close Touch,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, August 9, 1905, 1.

movement, to unite holiness people of various groups and denominations, and to promote revival work on mission fields overseas.⁷

Newspaper records reveal other cities chosen to host the convention each fall; in addition to the initial meeting of the Holiness Union in Memphis and the 1905 meeting in Meridian, future meetings of the Holiness Union would be held in cities such as Atlanta, Georgia; Birmingham, Alabama; and Nashville, Tennessee.⁸ When taking into account this lineup of seemingly more prestigious cities, it is interesting to consider why Meridian might have been chosen. Over one hundred years later, Meridian may not make such a list; however, at the turn of the century, the Mississippi city was a logical choice. Several factors may have contributed to the selection of Meridian as a host location for the Holiness Union. First, Meridian was the largest manufacturing center in the state of Mississippi at the turn of the century. The city was home to twenty-two manufacturing establishments in 1890 but boasted one hundred nineteen by 1900; this rapid growth was greater than any other Mississippi city was experiencing in the post-bellum period. Also, the city was considered the leading railroad center in eastern Mississippi. Meridian served as the junction for the Mobile and Ohio, New Orleans and North Eastern, Alabama and

⁷ Henry Clay Morrison, *The World Tour of Evangelism* (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing Company, 1911), 7.

⁸ The Holiness Union met in Atlanta in 1906 (*The Pentecostal Herald*, November 14, 1906, 1); Birmingham in 1908 (*The Pentecostal Herald*, July 15, 1908, 8); and Nashville in 1911 (*The Pentecostal Herald*, August 2, 1911, 1).

Vicksburg, Alabama Great Southern, and St. Louis and San Francisco railroad lines, clearly setting the city apart from other towns in the area of transportation.⁹

In addition to Meridian's prominence in manufacturing and transportation, Meridian was home to the Meridian Female College and Conservatory of Music and the Meridian Male College, led by brothers J.W. and M.A. Beeson, respectively. These institutions were important for both the city of Meridian and also the holiness movement, as they were among the leading holiness schools in the South.¹⁰ J.W. Beeson, who had been a part of the Memphis Holiness Union meeting, was already clearly in support of the Union's mission and existence.¹¹ Further, Morrison himself frequented Meridian on his evangelism tours and had come to establish a close relationship with the Beeson brothers and others involved at the Meridian schools.¹² Surely religion, even outside the holiness tradition, was of considerable importance throughout the city; Meridian was "particularly blessed" with seven white and seven colored Baptist churches, five white and four colored Methodist churches, three Presbyterian churches, one Congregational church, and two Episcopal churches. Additionally, although Lauderdale County was a legally "wet county," no saloons existed in Meridian as every attempt to petition for a saloon had so far been unsuccessful.¹³ The lack of saloons, though seemingly less significant than other

⁹ Dunbar Rowland, *Mississippi: Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions, and Persons, Arranged in Cyclopedic Form*, Volume II (Atlanta: Southern Historical Publishing Association, 1907), 58.

¹⁰ J.W. Beeson, "Meridian Colleges: Meridian, Miss.," *The Pentecostal Herald*, October 4, 1905, 12, and Rowland, *Mississippi*, 58.

¹¹ Henry Clay Morrison, "Editorial Convention Notes," 8.

¹² James T. Dawson, *John Wesley Beeson and the Beeson Colleges* (Birmingham: Samford University Press, 1995), 69.

¹³ Rowland, *Mississippi*, 220.

factors, was sure to please holiness proponents who vehemently supported prohibition. With its prominence throughout the state of Mississippi, its convenient transportation system, and its existing holiness culture, Meridian could easily be regarded as a favorable location for the meeting of the 1905 Holiness Union.

Once leaders selected Meridian as the site for the convention, much preparation and excitement preceded the event. *Pentecostal Herald* advertisements and editorials promoted the coming meeting in the months leading up to the 1905 Meridian Holiness Union Convention, which was originally scheduled to take place October 18 through 22.¹⁴ Holiness proponents encouraged others to come to Meridian to join together in a “spirit of oneness,” to refresh themselves and in turn return to their home churches and ministries driven to promote holiness with renewed zeal and enthusiasm.¹⁵ President J.W. Beeson himself wrote to the *Herald* to encourage readers to travel to his hometown and campus for the festivities; Beeson had been a part of the Memphis meeting and waited expectantly for an even greater Holiness Union gathering in Meridian:

Everybody is invited, men, women, young and old. It will doubtless be the largest holiness convention ever held in the south. The one at Memphis last year was large, having people from twelve states and many churches, bands, missions, etc. But this one bids fair to be much larger, judging from indications. Come praying and expecting a spiritual feast.¹⁶

As Beeson wrote, the Convention was open to everyone. Organizers invited existing holiness associations and expected them to bring delegates to the Holiness

¹⁴Henry Clay Morrison, “Close Touch,” 1.

¹⁵ Henry Clay Morrison, “Go to the Meridian Convention,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, November 15, 1905, 8.

¹⁶ J.W. Beeson, “Holiness Convention at Meridian, Mississippi,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, October 18, 1905, 9.

Union.¹⁷ Evidence proves that the Arkansas Holiness Convention responded to this call and elected two delegates to send to Meridian; it is likely that other associations throughout the South followed suit.¹⁸ Importantly, one did not have to be a part of an existing holiness group in order to come to the Holiness Union; anyone interested in the promotion of holiness or the idea of full salvation was welcome, even if he or she had not yet entered into that second-blessing state of entire sanctification. As one advertisement for the Convention reads, "This is not a delegated convention. But all brothers and sisters who are in the experience of full salvation whatever their church relations, are heartily welcome, and all who are seeking the experience of full salvation are also most heartily welcome."¹⁹

To ease the burden of travel expenses for those wishing to attend the Convention, organizers secured a reduced railroad rate provided travelers obtained the signatures of the Secretary of the Holiness Union and a Meridian railroad ticket agent. An entertainment committee organized room and board throughout the city for attendees, many of whom would stay on the campuses of the Meridian schools.²⁰ With all of the organization and advertisement leading up to the Convention, it is evident that leaders had high hopes for the Meridian meeting. A minor setback in planning the Convention did occur when an epidemic of yellow fever began to

¹⁷ John Paul, "Articles of Pentecostal Union," *The Pentecostal Herald*, October 18, 1905, 5.

¹⁸ Jos. N. Speakes, "Arkansas Holiness Convention," *The Pentecostal Herald*, October 18, 1905, 16.

¹⁹ Henry Clay Morrison, "The Holiness Union Convention," *The Pentecostal Herald*, November 8, 1905, 8.

²⁰ J.W. Beeson, "Reduced Board and Railroad Rates for Meridian Convention," *The Pentecostal Herald*, November 1, 1905, 8, and Unknown Author, "Meridian Women's Club," *The Pentecostal Herald*, November 22, 1905, 13.

spread throughout the South; the Holiness Union planning committee deemed it in the Convention's best interest to change the date from October to November 22 through 26.²¹ The date change was widely advertised and does not appear to have had any substantial positive or negative impact on the Meridian Convention.

All of the eagerness preceding the Meridian Holiness Union meeting was surely well warranted, as the Convention appears to have been an exciting several days for all involved – both holiness proponents already living or attending school in Meridian and those who chose to travel to the Mississippi city for the week. Thanks to editorials about the Convention written and published by various attendees, a fairly detailed record of what exactly took place during this highly anticipated gathering exists. First, Holiness Union planning committee members indeed proved wise in their choice of location; Meridian was found to be a favorable environment for the meeting. M.A. Beeson, J.W. Beeson, and their associates at the Male and Female Colleges served as the primary entertainers and hosts for the conference and were thought to have done so splendidly. Not only did the Holiness Union benefit from the hospitality of the Beeson institutions, it enjoyed the kindness and generosity of the city itself. Court adjourned for the week so that the revival services and business meetings of the Holiness Union could be held in the courthouse, and citizens throughout the city welcomed the holiness incomers warmly. One participant praised the sweeping extent of Meridian's hospitality: "Even the sheriff was on the entertainment committee, and said that if a sufficient amount of lodging could not be found, he would furnish us some nice clean beds in

²¹ Henry Clay Morrison, B.W. Huckabee, and John Paul, "Change of Date of Fall Holiness Convention," *The Pentecostal Herald*, October 4, 1905, 9.

jail.”²² Meridian’s sobriety also especially impressed holiness prohibitionists. “And think of it, ye inhabitants of the earth,” declared one holiness pastor reminiscing on the Convention a week after it ended, “there is not one dirty ill-smelling saloon in the city!”²³

Where the Memphis Holiness Union meeting the previous year had seen about one hundred attendees, an estimated four hundred people gathered for the Meridian Convention.²⁴ These four hundred people came from sixteen states and represented various different holiness associations and congregations.²⁵ Prominent holiness movement leaders such as L.L. Pickett, H.W. Bromley, B.W. Huckabee, John Paul, and, of course, the Beeson brothers and Henry Clay Morrison were among those present. Also in attendance were B.F. Haynes, President of Asbury College, and his group of thirty students and representatives, as well as W.W. Danner of Iowa, a messenger from the National Holiness Association.²⁶ A meeting of the Evangelistic Brotherhood, another holiness group, met in conjunction with the Holiness Union, so members of the Brotherhood came to Meridian and enjoyed participating in the meetings of both groups.²⁷

²² Unknown Author, “Notes on the Convention,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, November 29, 1905, 5.

²³ Jordan W. Carter, “Seein’ Things at the Convention,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, December 13, 1905, 2.

²⁴ Morrison, *World Tour of Evangelism*, and Henry Clay Morrison, “Editorial,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, December 6, 1905, 1.

²⁵ B.F. Haynes, “The Meridian Convention,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, December 6, 1905, 2.

²⁶ Unknown Author, “Notes on the Convention,” 5.

²⁷ H.W. Bromley, “The Holiness Union Nov. 22-26, Meridian, Miss.,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, November 1, 1905, 3.

During the Meridian Convention, holiness proponents kept busy. The daily schedule for conference attendees appears to have been as follows: prayer meeting every morning from eight to nine o'clock, a business session from nine to eleven, preaching at eleven, business again at two, preaching at three, followed by preaching yet again after dinner.²⁸ The gathering provided an opportunity for various holiness associations and leaders to update one another on recent affairs. Those in attendance were fortunate to observe the work and progress of the Meridian holiness schools firsthand; one day of the five was spent at the Beeson Colleges, with the convention held in the Female College auditorium and meals for those present served in both dining halls.²⁹ Official business meetings were an important part of the Convention; attendees held elections to choose officers of the Holiness Union for the following year. They selected L.P. Brown of Meridian as president, with L.L. Pickett, B.W. Huckabee, John Paul, and Henry Clay Morrison all elected as vice presidents. H.W. Bromley was selected for secretary and E.C. DeJernett for treasurer. One of the first tasks of these newly elected officers was to decide a location for the following year's Convention; the group settled on Atlanta, Georgia for 1906.³⁰ In addition to the necessary business work of the Holiness Union, revival services were an objective of utmost importance. Charlie Tillman, along with a seventy-five person choir and various instruments, led worship music throughout the week, and various preachers addressed the group. According to Henry Clay Morrison, the Reverends Sanders, Huckabee, B.F. Haynes, L.L. Pickett,

²⁸ Carter, "Seein' Things at the Convention," 2.

²⁹ Henry Clay Morrison, "Meridian Convention: Chapter Two," *The Pentecostal Herald*, December 13, 1905, 1.

³⁰ Unknown Author, "Notes on the Convention," 5.

Danner, Andrew Johnson, and Dunaway all brought clear, theologically sound messages that aligned with great holiness doctrine.³¹ Morrison himself preached the sermon for the closing night of the Convention.³² Though about four hundred people travelled to Meridian for the meetings, additional holiness proponents joined in the revival services. The night service in particular drew a crowd; the large courthouse auditorium, as well as the altar, could be filled. These revivals were a crucial part of the Meridian Holiness Union, as the services represented what the spirit of the Holiness Union was all about; in describing the Convention, Morrison noted that first and foremost "it was what, of all things it was designed to be, and always should be, a great religious meeting."³³

Perhaps the most important action taken by the Meridian Holiness Union was the creation of a Missionary Board dedicated to sharing the Gospel overseas. Foreign mission work was a priority for those who gathered at the Memphis Convention the year before, but no real action towards that end appears to have been taken; with more participants and better organization a year later, the Holiness Union was ready to establish a definitive plan for spreading the holiness message to the nations. A Missionary Board was elected to oversee fundraising and to serve as a support system for several missionaries in various countries around the world.³⁴ Delegates elected L.P. Brown of Mississippi, B.F. Haynes of Asbury College, M.A. Beeson of the Meridian Male College, Louisiana evangelist Joshua

³¹ Henry Clay Morrison, "The Meridian Convention," *The Pentecostal Herald*, December 6, 1905, 1.

³² B.F. Haynes, "The Meridian Convention," *The Pentecostal Herald*, December 6, 1905, 2.

³³ Morrison, "The Meridian Convention," 1.

³⁴ Morrison, *World Tour of Evangelism*, 7-8.

Sanders, pastor Charles Dunaway, and Henry Clay Morrison to the Board, with L.P. Brown chosen as both chairman and treasurer. Haynes and Beeson were both college presidents, and Sanders, Dunaway, and Morrison were primarily evangelists. Significantly, L.P. Brown and M.A. Beeson were remarkable businessmen; their past experiences and skills would have been highly important for the undertaking of this new campaign that would often involve raising considerable monetary support. In addition to the establishment of the Missionary Board, a special offering was also taken up for foreign missions during one of the evening revival services. It produced around seventeen hundred dollars to launch the overseas work of the Holiness Union.³⁵

The Meridian Holiness Union approached foreign mission work from an evangelistic angle; the Missionary Board did not seek to establish new churches or schools but rather to encourage existing ones and to promote revivals. Henry Clay Morrison expounded on the intentions of the Board at the time of its creation:

It was the unanimous decision of this Board of Missions that we should not undertake the organization of churches, or the establishment of independent missions or schools in any of the foreign fields but that our work should be evangelistic and that we should send out evangelists to travel in the various mission fields, assisting the missionaries of existing churches in promoting revivals of religion. It would be the special work of such evangelists to seek to bring missionaries and native Christians into the experience of entire sanctification. The great desire and purpose of the Holiness Union is to assist in promoting a world-wide revival of full salvation, to help, so far as in them lies, to carry to the ends of the earth the glad news that Christ Jesus is able to save all men from all sin.³⁶

³⁵ Morrison, "The Meridian Convention," 1.

³⁶ Morrison, *World Tour of Evangelism*, 8.

This collaborative foreign mission effort established at the Meridian Convention was the first of its kind for holiness people.³⁷ Holiness leaders considered it to be of the highest importance for the spread of the holiness message and a crucial step towards the permanency of the aim and existence of the Union.³⁸

The activities in which the Meridian Holiness Union engaged can certainly be seen as representative of Southern holiness movement culture. First, the Union was inexplicably intertwined with both associationism and revivalism. Associationism was one of the most characteristic traits of the nineteenth century holiness movement, and, notably, it was one of the qualities of holiness culture that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South disliked the most. It is interesting to realize that, even after the Methodist church condemned associationism, forming just such an association remained a seemingly automatic response for holiness leaders who sought to promulgate their message and organize those who would join in supporting their cause. At the meeting of the association itself, revivals were of prime importance. Multiple services a day, with particular attention given to the evening service, were typical of camp meeting services that were so important for the spread of the holiness movement. Attendees emphasized the preaching and teaching of holiness theology; during the Union revival services, the sermons delivered brimmed with references to the second-blessing work of grace and the experience of full salvation. Preaching messages that could cross denominational

³⁷ Morrison, "The Meridian Convention," 1.

³⁸ Haynes, "The Meridian Convention," 1, and Morrison, "Greetings for the New Year," *The Pentecostal Herald*, January 3, 1906, 1.

barriers was not enough; stressing distinctly holiness movement doctrine was both expected and seen at the Meridian Convention.³⁹

Just as the nineteenth century holiness movement emphasized ethics, the Meridian Holiness Union expected the tangible fruit of the sanctified life. For those holiness supporters who gathered at Meridian, committing to sharing the Gospel abroad through the formation of a Missionary Board and the donation of funds was a means of practically living out their faith. Further, the Meridian Holiness Union fits with the loyalty embraced by certain holiness people who chose to remain Southern Methodists rather than join the Northern church or come out. Although this Convention would not have been looked at favorably by leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, it did nothing to openly or forthrightly defy Methodism. The purpose of the Convention was never to encourage comeoutism or to establish a new denomination, and Morrison continued to stand by this assertion in years to come.⁴⁰

At the end of the Meridian Holiness Union meeting, participants certainly looked back at the week with great favor. Although much anticipation had led up to the event, the Convention exceeded expectations. B.F. Haynes called it an “epochal” dawning of a “distinctively new era” for the holiness movement.⁴¹ Positive feedback covered the pages of *The Pentecostal Herald* in the following weeks, ranging from compliments to the Meridian Colleges on their excellent hospitality to excitement regarding the creation of the Missionary Board. One *Herald* contributor from the

³⁹ Morrison, “The Meridian Convention,” 1.

⁴⁰ Morrison, *World Tour of Evangelism*, 7.

⁴¹ Haynes, “The Meridian Convention,” 3.

Meridian Female College expressed the College's pleasure to host the Convention and intimated the strength of the impact that the previous several days had on the hearts of those present and on the holiness movement in general.⁴² The Meridian Convention had indeed been a wonderful several days, and participants were sad to leave the spiritually charged environment and the loving fellowship. But just as leaders had predicted, those present would leave feeling refreshed and renewed, ready to more powerfully promote holiness of heart and life wherever they would go. Truly, the effects of the Convention were not limited to what occurred within the walls of the Meridian courthouse or the halls of the Beeson schools. Much had been accomplished with the preaching, the prayers, the establishment of the Missionary Board, and the general camaraderie, but leaving Meridian did not mean leaving all of this. As time would tell, perhaps the act of leaving is when the real work of the Meridian Holiness Union began.

⁴² K.E.S., "Meridian Female College," *The Pentecostal Herald*, December 6, 1905, 13.

CHAPTER IV: ONGOING IMPACT

“The great Holiness Convention is over. Only eternity will reveal what it meant to many hearts and to the town of Meridian.” So noted a *Pentecostal Herald* contributor from the Meridian Female College several days after the Meridian Holiness Union Convention concluded.¹ How true this statement would prove in the days to come! The Meridian Holiness Union of 1905 was not simply an incidental gathering of holiness people who joined together for several days and then separated again without having much of a lasting effect. Rather, the Meridian Convention played a role in both the immediate spheres of influence of which the holiness people were a part and also in areas far beyond what one might ordinarily expect. The Meridian Holiness Union is significant, first, simply for what, in essence, it was, and second, for the greater impact that it had, shaping the religious landscape both immediately and over time, locally, nationally, and globally, and both inside and outside of the Methodist denomination.

By the time Morrison organized the Memphis Holiness Union meeting that led to the Meridian event, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South had already made their opinion of holiness activity very clear. All of the tensions and conflict between the Southern Methodist Church and holiness people described in the second chapter of this work transpired before the Holiness Union came into being. The Southern

¹ K.E.S., “Meridian Female College,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, December 6, 1905, 13.

Methodist General Conference issued their statement against the holiness movement a decade earlier in 1894, and Morrison and countless other holiness leaders and evangelists had already found themselves in direct altercations with the Methodist Church by the time the Meridian Convention met. Many, like Morrison, chose to remain loyal to the Methodist Church instead of transferring membership or coming out; however, they did so knowing that the Church did not fully support their beliefs and activity and that, depending on the extent of their outspokenness, they could be at risk for losing their Methodist membership. This gives incredible import to the Meridian Holiness Union. Simply by gathering together, those involved were making a statement that could have been received very poorly by Episcopal leaders. Choosing to come together in the face of known opposition proves the fortitude of Meridian Holiness Union leaders and attendees. They considered their special doctrine of holiness with the highest regard and clung to it in spite of already existing and potential future adversity, and this, in and of itself, makes the Meridian Holiness Union of 1905 a significant meeting.

But far greater than the significance of the motive behind the meeting, the Meridian Convention is significant because of what came of it in the days and years to come. In his study of the Georgia Holiness Association titled *A Wheel Within a Wheel*, Briane K. Turley notes the lasting impact that holiness associations had on the American religious landscape. Turley writes: "The Holiness tradition continues to play a role in Methodism because the southern Holiness associations...possessed acumen and financial resources to establish machinery that would nurture future

generations of Methodists with their teachings.”² This statement holds incredible truth when considering the enduring effects of the Meridian Holiness Union; indeed, the group of holiness people who gathered in 1905 clearly had both an astute sense of purpose and vision for promulgating their message as well as the financial resources with which to do so. This combination of visionary discernment and financial capability truly resulted in the extension of the Meridian Holiness Union’s significance far beyond the Southern holiness movement itself.

Henry Clay Morrison initially called for the formation of the Holiness Union with the ultimate goals of uniting and reviving the hearts of holiness people and of promoting foreign mission work.³ Both of these goals were met with the Meridian Convention in both an immediate and a lasting way. Immediately, the Meridian Holiness Union had a great impact with regards to rekindling the fire of holiness within the hearts of those present at the Convention. Joining together in such grand fellowship encouraged holiness people, who returned to their homes and churches with a “thrill of new hope” as a result of all they had experienced.⁴ The Convention had an especially strong impact on the people of Meridian who were fortunate enough to attend, or even to witness the activity. A newspaper contributor from the Meridian Male College discussed the enduring effect that the Convention had on the students of both Beeson schools:

The Convention has passed; but has left a marked enobling and beneficial influence among the students of the colleges. Great and good men,

² Briane K. Turley, *A Wheel Within a Wheel: Southern Methodism and the Georgia Holiness Association* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 208.

³ Morrison, *World Tour of Evangelism*, 7.

⁴ Haynes, “The Meridian Convention,” 2.

guests and friends have gone, but a blessing and a ben[e]diction akin to heaven itself lingers behind.⁵

One specific way the Convention impacted the Meridian schools was through the revival meeting led by the Reverend H.W. Bromley in the days immediately following the Convention. Bromley had been scheduled to speak during this time for several months, but though his remaining in Meridian was not a direct result of the Convention, his time there was still affected by it. According to Bromley, the Convention served as an incredible start to the seven-day revival that he led for both the Male and Female College. About seventy-five people were saved or professed full salvation.⁶ Outside of the Beeson schools, the Convention affected Meridian citizens who were simply looking on from the outside. A Presbyterian Synod meeting was taking place at the same time as the Holiness Union one, and, according to Kentucky evangelist Jordon W. Carter, one Presbyterian leader "stated publicly that something was woefully lacking with them" when he considered the fervor with which the holiness people gathered and worshipped, giving the Meridian Convention an influence even beyond the holiness tradition or Methodist denomination.⁷

In addition to its effect on Meridian alone, the Convention impacted areas across the South, as attendees returned to their homes and spread the message and the zeal they had come by in Meridian. For example, Asbury College sent word that the delegation of students who had travelled from Kentucky to Meridian returned to

⁵ H. Faulk, "Meridian Male College," *The Pentecostal Herald*, December 20, 1905, 13.

⁶ H.W. Bromley, "Bro. H.W. Bromley's Letter," *The Pentecostal Herald*, January 3, 1906, 2.

⁷ Carter, "'Seein' Things' at the Convention," 2.

Wilmore more zealous about the Lord and, in particular, more excited than ever about missions.⁸ The thirty or so students who spent time at the Meridian Convention were able to share the message and heart of the Holiness Union with other students who were unable to attend, thus giving the Meridian work an impact beyond the host city itself. Surely the participants of the 1905 Convention left Meridian feeling rejuvenated about the Lord and about holiness, passing that ardor on to those they encountered in their homes, churches, workplaces, and schools, contributing to the enduring legacy of the Meridian Holiness Union.

The convicting, rejuvenating, and rallying effects the Meridian Holiness Union had on Meridian itself and on those individuals who attended or were somehow touched by the Convention fulfilled one of the goals for the formation of the Union. The other goal, that of bolstering a program of holiness-based overseas mission work, was also reached during both the Convention itself and in the days to come. The Meridian Holiness Union had an immediate effect on foreign missions in that the holiness Missionary Board was established to carry out future work and, also, in that the gathering collected a seventeen hundred dollar offering for overseas evangelism.⁹ But the Meridian Holiness Union became particularly significant for the global mission field in the years following 1905. In his *World Tour of Evangelism*, Henry Clay Morrison tells how the Missionary Board established in Meridian came to have a very real effect on his personal life and also on the lives of thousands of people around the world. The Missionary Board was created in 1905

⁸ Junior, "Asbury College, Wilmore, Kentucky," *The Pentecostal Herald*, December 20, 1905, 13.

⁹ Morrison, "The Meridian Convention," 1.

with the purpose of supporting full salvation missionaries around the world and of promoting a global holiness revival. To actualize this purpose, the Missionary Board determined to sponsor an international tour of evangelism, and they selected Henry Clay Morrison as the man for the mission. The Board appointed Morrison in the fall of 1908

to make an evangelistic tour around the world preaching full salvation, assisting missionaries in revival meetings, making careful note of the spiritual state of the church, and gathering such information as would be of general use to the Board in future efforts to promote the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification in the various mission fields of the world.¹⁰

Morrison's task as a representative evangelist of the Holiness Union was not to organize new churches or establish new programs but rather to support those that already existed and to encourage them with the message of holiness and full salvation. To allow Morrison the freedom to leave his life in the United States for such a task, the Missionary Board provided for both his personal traveling expenses and the expenses his wife and children would incur during his absence. As a result of the Board's work and appointment, Morrison left in July of 1909 for a journey around the world that would change his life and the lives of many he encountered forever.¹¹

Throughout his *World Tour of Evangelism* memoir, Morrison recounts the places to which he traveled and the events he witnessed during his international expedition. After finishing up a month's worth of revival services in the States, Morrison and travel companion J.L. Piercy sailed out from Montreal, Canada on

¹⁰ Morrison, *World Tour of Evangelism*, 8-9.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 9.

August 21, 1909 to begin their journey. Over the course of the next year, Morrison would visit and preach in the following locations: England, Scotland, Paris, Rome, Egypt, Jerusalem, India, Singapore, the Philippines, China, and Korea. At each of these sites, Morrison would visit existing churches, missions, and schools; for example, he spent time at the American School for Girls in Port Said, Egypt, and worked with a Christian Missionary Alliance school in Jerusalem.¹² He spent a large part of his evangelism tour in India, where he encountered many Methodists and even attended an Annual Conference meeting in Bombay.¹³ Connections Morrison had with holiness people and associations throughout the United States contributed to the work he did abroad. For instance, he visited acclaimed missionary E. Stanley Jones's church in India; Jones was an Asbury College graduate and holiness advocate.¹⁴ Encouraging those holiness people scattered around the globe for the sake of the Gospel was a chief motive behind the Holiness Union Missionary Board's commissioning of Morrison's tour, and he certainly did promote holiness and revival wherever he went, encouraging those who were already believers and seeking new converts to Christianity and to full salvation through the second blessing. Even when Morrison was confined to a ship while traveling from place to place, he was spreading his message and preaching services for his fellow passengers and crewmen.¹⁵ Because of the Meridian Holiness Union's decision to appoint a Missionary Board and, in turn, that Board's decision to appoint Morrison to a worldwide evangelism tour, people all around the world heard the message of

¹² Morrison, *World Tour of Evangelism*, 44-45 and 51-52.

¹³ *Ibid*, 122.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 85.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 77.

holiness. Morrison's international travel at this point in his life may be considered a direct result of the work of the Meridian Holiness Union for its establishment of a Board with this type of mission and, importantly, for its provision of financial resources to carry out this mission. Through Morrison's world tour, the Meridian Holiness Union impacted people all over the world for years to come.

The world tour of evangelism was not the only way the Meridian Holiness Union would have a lasting effect on the world. The 1905 Meridian Convention provided an opportunity for the formation and the bolstering of many powerful relationships among holiness proponents, and they passed down these relationships to later generations with great consequences. The story of the Meridian Holiness Union intersects with the story of Henry Clay Morrison and of Asbury Theological Seminary, of the Beeson family and the Meridian schools, and of an academic and evangelistic Missouri native by the name of Julian Claude McPheeters who was involved with both the Asbury and Meridian holiness institutions. The Meridian Holiness Union played a role in the strengthening of connections among these men and their institutions, and these influential relationships became particularly crucial for the history of Asbury Theological Seminary, resulting in a donation of millions of dollars for the holiness school a generation after the Meridian Holiness Convention took place. The Meridian Holiness Union played a significant role in the holiness work of Meridian, Mississippi, and the holiness work of Meridian, Mississippi, played a significant role in the story of Asbury Seminary, which can be understood by examining some aspects of the history of the establishment of the school and of the seminary's early leaders.

Even before the 1905 Convention, Henry Clay Morrison had a relationship with the holiness movement in the city of Meridian. Meridian was a frequent site for revival services, and Morrison was among those evangelists brought in to lead various holiness meetings.¹⁶ More specifically, Morrison worked with the Meridian holiness colleges and their leaders, J.W. and M.A. Beeson. In the spring of 1904, Morrison preached a revival at the Meridian schools. A *Herald* contributor who refers to himself or herself as “one who was benefitted” notes that Morrison’s revival meeting was “one layer...placed in helping build here a stronghold for God and the doctrine of entire sanctification through faith.” The article suggests Morrison’s prior involvement with the schools and tells of the importance of the work Morrison did in bolstering the schools and encouraging them in their pursuit of holiness.¹⁷ Later that fall, J.W. Beeson attended the Memphis Holiness Union Convention, where he would have continued to interact with Morrison.¹⁸ By the time of the 1905 Convention, Morrison and the Beeson brothers would have had significant interaction with one another, as Morrison served as the leading influencer behind the Holiness Union and the Beesons served as hosts for the Convention. The frequency of and the enthusiasm with which *The Pentecostal Herald* discusses and advertises the Meridian schools, as well as the clear indication of significant involvement on the part of the Beeson brothers with Morrison’s brainchild the Holiness Union serve as evidence of a clear and convivial relationship

¹⁶ Dawson, *John Wesley Beeson and the Beeson Colleges*, 69.

¹⁷ One Who Was Benefitted, “Bro. Morrison at Meridian College,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, March 23, 1904, 4-5.

¹⁸ Henry Clay Morrison, “Editorial Convention Notes,” *The Pentecostal Herald*, November 2, 1904, 8.

between Morrison and the Beesons. This relationship, full of mutual respect and hope for a holiness-filled future, was a basis for the later ongoing interaction between the Beeson family and Asbury Theological Seminary, which Morrison would establish just two decades after the Meridian Holiness Union.

Shortly after Morrison returned from the world tour of evangelism commissioned by the Holiness Union Missionary Board, he accepted an invitation to become the second president of Asbury College, Wilmore, Kentucky's undergraduate holiness institution. Asbury College was failing, and its Board of Trustees looked to Morrison as the man to save it. Morrison had many requests for revival services and other evangelistic meetings as well as much *Pentecostal Herald* work to catch up on after his lengthy overseas tour, but as a result of much convincing on the part of the Board and of a special assurance from the Holy Spirit, Morrison accepted the position just several weeks before school was set to open for the fall of 1910.¹⁹ Morrison was highly effective as president and employed various methods to grow the school both financially and spiritually; one way he sought new levels of spiritual depth for Asbury College was through the introduction of theological classes. The college remained a liberal arts institution, but Morrison stressed the importance of preparing students for the ministry and introduced a full theological course in 1914.²⁰ If America's churches and secular universities were not teaching the Bible as they should, Asbury College would be a place where students could learn about the Scriptures and the doctrine of holiness. However,

¹⁹ Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary* (Lexington, Kentucky: Emeth Press, 2010), 38-39.

²⁰ Kinghorn, *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary*, 47.

before long, Morrison realized that providing this theological teaching on an undergraduate level would not be enough to counteract the “acids of modernity” that continued to taint the American education system. After a decade of receiving letters of complaint from Asbury College alumni and *Pentecostal Herald* contributors regarding modernist and liberal doctrine being taught in Methodist seminaries, Morrison decided to personally do something about the situation. Asbury Theological Seminary opened its doors to graduate students seeking ministerial degrees in the fall of 1923.²¹

Evidence of Morrison’s continued interaction with the holiness people of Meridian, Mississippi throughout this new undertaking is abundant. While Morrison was serving as president of Asbury College, John Paul of Meridian was brought on to serve as his vice president from 1916 to 1922. Paul attended classes in Meridian and later served on the faculty of the Meridian Male College before coming to join Morrison at Asbury.²² He had also attended the Meridian Holiness Union meeting in 1905.²³ John Paul served as a supporter and trusted confidant of Morrison’s in the time leading up to the establishment of Asbury Theological Seminary.²⁴ Morrison’s close relationship with John Paul demonstrates the way that Meridian is woven into the story of Asbury Seminary. First, Morrison and Paul were both elected as vice presidents of the Holiness Union at the Meridian Convention.²⁵ Next, they served alongside each other as president and vice president of Asbury

²¹ Ibid., 53-55, 64.

²² Ibid, 62.

²³ Unknown Author, “Notes on the Convention,” 5.

²⁴ Kinghorn, *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary*, 62.

²⁵ Unknown Author, “Notes on the Convention,” 5.

College, and later they would work together yet again as leaders of Asbury Theological Seminary. In addition to his ties with John Paul, Morrison had close relationships with others from Meridian throughout the process of the establishment of the seminary. At least three of the nine original Asbury Seminary faculty members are known to have previously spent time at the Meridian schools. Daisy Dean Gray served as the seminary's first Professor of Expression and Public Speaking, Walter E. Harrison was the original Professor of Biblical Theology and Missions, and F.H. Larabee served as Professor of both Literature and New Testament as well as Dean.²⁶ Gray, Harrison, and Larabee all taught at the Beeson schools before coming to Asbury Seminary; Gray was the Female College's Director of Expression and Physical Culture, Harrison led the Male College in the studies of English and History, and Larabee served both the Male and Female College as Professor of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.²⁷

Morrison clearly had great respect for Meridian and the holiness people he encountered there; it may come as no surprise, then, that he continued to look to Meridian people for counsel and leadership for his new undertaking with Asbury Seminary. In addition to his early connections with Meridian holiness greats like Paul, Gray, Harrison, and Larabee, Morrison developed a close relationship with Julian Claude McPheeters, a man who also had strong ties to Meridian and whose relationship with Morrison and with Asbury Seminary would alter the history of the new school. McPheeters was born and raised a Methodist from southeast Missouri and felt a call to preach from a young age. But before entering full-time ministry, he

²⁶ Kinghorn, *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary*, 66.

²⁷ Dawson, *John Wesley Beeson and the Beeson Colleges*, 77-78, 84-85.

sought additional academic preparation; to obtain this, the twenty-one year old McPheeters accepted a teaching position at the Meridian Male College that would allow him to continue his studies while he also began teaching Latin and Greek at the school. During his career in Meridian, which began in 1910, McPheeters developed close relationships with important holiness leaders. He met F.H. Larabee, John Paul, and Walter E. Harrison, all with whom he would later serve in Wilmore at Asbury.²⁸ He began a special friendship with L.P. Brown, the mighty business leader and man of prayer who had been elected president of the Meridian Holiness Union and both chairman and treasurer of the Missionary Board.²⁹ McPheeters also met the Beeson brothers. As a member of the Male College faculty, he worked for M.A. Beeson, but he also encountered John Wesley Beeson, his wife Annie, and their two sons Ralph Waldo and Dwight Moody Beeson. This relationship would prove more significant than McPheeters at the time could possibly imagine.³⁰ McPheeters came to Meridian after the great 1905 Convention had passed; however, the network of relationships among holiness people that was fostered at the Convention and at the Meridian schools themselves continued to weave its way in and out of McPheeters's life. McPheeters first encountered Henry Clay Morrison after he had left his position at Meridian College; the two met at an annual conference meeting that Morrison was preaching. McPheeters later invited Morrison to preach to his congregation in Tucson, Arizona and to accompany him on a three-day quail hunting trip. The two men developed a lifelong friendship and corresponded frequently after the trip, and

²⁸ Kinghorn, *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary*, 110.

²⁹ Unknown Author, "Notes on the Convention," 5; Kinghorn, *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary*, 110; and Morrison, "The Meridian Convention," 1.

³⁰ Kinghorn, *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary*, 110.

soon Morrison brought in McPheeters to be a part of the Asbury Seminary family.³¹ McPheeters was one of ten people who signed the original Articles of Incorporation for Asbury Theological Seminary on June 4, 1931, and in 1932 McPheeters officially joined the seminary's Board of Trustees.³² His leadership with the new institution culminated when he accepted the seminary's proposal to serve as the second president of the school after Henry Clay Morrison's death.³³

In his study of the Beeson holiness colleges, James T. Dawson indicates the important link between McPheeters's time in Meridian with his later presidency at Asbury. "Apparently, his early professional experience was of considerable significance," Dawson writes, referring to the establishment of the John Wesley Beeson Chair of Missions at Asbury Seminary, in which McPheeters played a part.³⁴ But the connection between McPheeters's work in Meridian and Wilmore does not stop with the creation of a professorship in J.W. Beeson's honor. The relationship McPheeters formed while in Meridian with J.W. Beeson and his wife and children proved to be of incredible importance. After leaving Meridian, McPheeters kept up his friendship with J.W. Beeson and also kept in contact with J.W.'s sons Ralph and Dwight. Just as their father J.W. and uncle M.A. had shared a passion for Christian education, these second-generation Beeson brothers placed a high value on their personal commitment to the Christian faith and on Christian teaching. Throughout the years of McPheeters's presidency and after their father's death in 1956, Ralph and Dwight Beeson gave several large financial gifts to Asbury Seminary. One of

³¹ Kinghorn, *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary*, 115.

³² *Ibid*, 84-85.

³³ *Ibid*, 120-121.

³⁴ Dawson, *John Wesley Beeson and the Beeson Colleges*, 77.

these gifts involved the aforementioned John Wesley Beeson Chair of Missions position; others funded scholarships for international students, the construction of homes for missionaries staying at the Seminary during furloughs, and the establishment of an inn on campus. These gifts were transformational for the still recently founded Asbury Theological Seminary, but none was as momentous as the gift that would come after Ralph Waldo Beeson's death. Ralph Beeson passed away on October 15, 1990, and, soon after, the world saw just how important he deemed the work of Asbury Seminary through the instructions he left in his will.³⁵

In November 1990, Ralph Waldo Beeson's estate gave a gift of thirty-eight million, nine hundred thousand dollars to Asbury Seminary. An equal donation was given to Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, the largest private university in the state. The gifts were some of the largest gifts to educational institutions in the late twentieth century and quickly made national news.³⁶ The Beeson bequests to both schools notably altered the Southern evangelical religious landscape. Asbury Theological Seminary was changed forever because of the donation; as a result of the money, the Beeson Center for Biblical Preaching and Church Leadership was established to provide advanced training for Doctor of Ministry candidates at the Seminary. A chapel, residence halls, and townhouse apartments were also built.³⁷ David McKenna, who was president of Asbury Seminary at the time the Beeson bequest was given, noted that the 1990 gift traced back to the time McPheeters

³⁵ Kinghorn, *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary*, 311-312.

³⁶ Associated Press, "2 Southern Schools Get \$38 Million Donations," *The New York Times*, November 19, 1990.

³⁷ Kinghorn, *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary*, 313-314.

spent in Meridian where he first interacted with J.W. Beeson and his sons.³⁸ Surely the importance of Meridian can be seen in the history of Asbury Theological Seminary, an institution that has impacted countless lives around the world from the time of its establishment until today. The work of Asbury Seminary would not be the same today were it not for the Beeson money, which continues to play a role in making the fulfillment of Asbury's purposes and goals possible. The Beeson bequest can indeed be seen as a result of the close relationship between J.C. McPheeters and the Beeson family. Additionally, however, understanding the Meridian Holiness Union provides evidence of an even greater relationship as far as the Asbury institution and the Beesons are concerned. McPheeters, Morrison, and the Beesons can be seen as part of a great relationship triangle, which brought about transformational work for the doctrine of holiness and the kingdom of God and of which the Meridian Holiness Union surely played a part.

The Meridian Holiness Union is significant because it is representative of the unique network of relationships among holiness people and the great desire those people had to further their cause; the Union sheds light on the way that holiness people and places were intertwined, despite a lack of denominational unity, regardless of geographical separation, and in spite of opposition they may have faced from the American religious establishment. The Union impacted both people who attended the 1905 Convention and also mere onlookers; it affected those who were immediately touched by the work of the Union in Meridian, as well as throughout the South and eventually across the world. Finally, it was a crucial

³⁸ Ibid, 110.

means of fostering relationships – relationships that matter likely more than words can express. Studying the Meridian Holiness Union provides evidence of interaction between Henry Clay Morrison and the Beeson family; the fact that Morrison was the champion of the Holiness Union and that the Beeson brothers were highly involved with the work of the Union as well suggests that a seed may have already been planted in the minds of the Beeson family towards Asbury Seminary by the time Morrison founded the institution and brought on McPheeters as a part of his faculty and as his eventual successor. This contact between the parties at the very start of the twentieth century as a result of the Holiness Union surely would have fueled the ongoing interaction between Meridian and the Asbury world, setting the stage for the relationship between McPheeters and the Beesons to flourish and ultimately to culminate in the form of great financial bestowal years later. The *Pentecostal Herald* contributor who claimed that only eternity would reveal the importance of the Union was insightful indeed.³⁹ A full century after the Meridian Convention itself, traces of the Union's impact can clearly be seen, and, because of the financial endowment that came about perhaps indirectly but nevertheless as a result from the Holiness Union ensure that the Meridian Holiness Union will continue to be a source of impact for the holiness movement and the American and global religious landscape for years to come.

³⁹K.E.S., "Meridian Female College," *The Pentecostal Herald*, December 6, 1905, 13.

CONCLUSION

“Men may so live that they cannot die. Their bodies crumble into dust, their immortal souls ascend to God, but their lives, words, and actions, seem to linger, an invisible hallowed presence to bless the world.”¹ So wrote Henry Clay Morrison in his *World Tour of Evangelism* narrative. With these words he did not refer to himself or to any of his peers or colleagues, but, rather, he praised Christian leaders who had lived and died before him. However, his words also prove true for his own life and the lives of those involved with the work of the Meridian Holiness Union. What they did to preserve and to promote the doctrine of holiness in the American South was a truly important effort that has come to affect more throughout history than they ever could have initially imagined.

The Meridian Holiness Union can be seen as a product of its times and of the nineteenth century American holiness movement. The 1905 Convention, like the nineteenth century holiness movement, had its theological roots with the doctrines espoused by John Wesley, the great founder of Methodism. Holiness proponents in the United States embraced his emphasis on the experience of entire sanctification as a second-blessing work of grace and gave the doctrine an immediacy and urgency that marked it as distinctly American. This urgency is evident in the widespread work that holiness proponents undertook throughout the nineteenth and into the

¹ Morrison, *World Tour of Evangelism*, 33.

twentieth centuries; they published newspapers, held revival services, formed associations, and established schools all with the purpose of promulgating a message about the necessity of "holiness of heart and life." The Meridian Holiness Union can be seen as an ideal example of how holiness people chose to communicate and gather; the 1905 Meridian Convention met in the form of an association, was advertised and explained in holiness periodicals, involved nightly revival services, and took place, in part, on the campus of a holiness school. With its additional emphasis on ethics and on missions, the Union indeed appears to be typical of a gathering of holiness believers in seemingly every way.

Opposition did not stop the Meridian Holiness Union from meeting and from carrying out its work. By 1905, the Methodist establishment was outspokenly critical towards the holiness movement because of doctrinal differences and organizational disputes. Many people who helped organize the Convention, like Henry Clay Morrison, had already experienced some sort of repercussions from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South as a result of their holiness beliefs. But knowledge of the distaste of Methodist leaders towards their activity did not deter them from meeting in Meridian; instead, holiness believers considered the promotion of their message worth the cost of potential backlash from the Methodist denomination. The fact that the Union met in spite of known opposition surely gives an added significance to the gathering, as it suggests the fortitude of holiness proponents and the strength with which they would cling to their special doctrine.

The Meridian Convention itself was a grand occasion for attendees. The Meridian Holiness Union was Henry Clay Morrison's way of promoting and

preserving holiness doctrine as well as bringing organization to believers scattered throughout the South, and the success of the 1905 meeting clearly fulfilled his vision. The city of Meridian did not disappoint as the chosen location, as believers from various states joined together in worship and mutual encouragement. Attendees enjoyed their time on the campuses of the Meridian holiness schools and accomplished that which Morrison and other leaders hoped; they voted for leaders to oversee the organization of future Holiness Union meetings, established a missionary board for the effective carrying out of overseas mission work, and were rejuvenated in their faith after meeting together.

But even more than accomplishing the immediate work for which its organizers created it, the Meridian Holiness Union left a lasting legacy that would impact countless lives throughout the years to come. Attendees returned to their homes and schools across the southern United States newly zealous for the holiness message; the missionary board sent Dr. Morrison on a global tour where he would share the message of the Gospel and the second-blessing with people all over the world. Further, the Union fostered relationships among holiness believers that would continue throughout later generations and that would ultimately change the southern evangelical landscape. The effects of many of these relationships are felt today throughout holiness circles, but none perhaps so much as the Beeson bequest to Samford University and Asbury Theological Seminary. Because the Union provided an opportunity for the fostering of such relationships and the carrying out of overseas mission work through Morrison's tour, the story of the Meridian Holiness Union does not remain a nineteenth century holiness movement narrative.

While it is certainly that, in part, it also becomes the story of Asbury Theological Seminary and the story of a global revival – all of which are stories that may never be fully understood or explained on this side of eternity.

Broadly speaking, the story of the Meridian Holiness Union can be seen as a story of a group of people who altered the future. Undoubtedly those involved with the Union did have a significant number of factors weighing in their favor when it came to fulfilling the accomplishment of their goals and tasks. For example, chapter four of this work quotes Briane K. Turley as he notes the importance of business acuity and financial resources in the lasting legacy of southern holiness associations.² But in addition to economic savvy and assets, those involved with the Meridian Holiness Union exemplified dedication, passion, and commitment, unashamedly living out a love for their message of holiness and for the God who gave them that message. The ongoing influence of the Meridian Holiness Union suggests that the actions of individuals are significant; that the formation of friendships and other personal relationships are powerful and that they often have a ripple effect far beyond what one might typically predict; that when people stand up for their beliefs, even in the face of great opposition, lives can be changed; and that passion and love and zeal do in fact make a difference. “Let the lower lights be burning!” The people of the Meridian Holiness Union sought to be the “lower lights,” to indeed send a gleam of hope and of holiness across the nation and over the sea, all with the purpose of ultimately saving those whom they encountered and bringing them into lives of sanctification and full salvation. The Meridian Holiness Union

² Turley, *A Wheel Within a Wheel*, 208.

succeeded in its endeavors; it united holiness proponents, strengthened their faith, and equipped them and their future generations to continue to spread the holiness message in exceedingly powerful ways. The story of the Meridian Holiness Union truly is a beautiful story that helps explain both the past and the future. The Union's story explains an interesting situation in Southern United States religious history and also reveals what may be a key to our futures today – we, like the believers of the Meridian Holiness Union, may be capable of greater influence than we can even imagine, if only we too choose to live as “lower lights.”

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