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# Theological Transition In American Methodism 1790-1935

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Robert E. Chiles



## Synopsis

Reprinted from the 1965 Abingdon Press edition, this historical study traces the changes that have taken place in Wesleyan theology in America. Focuses on three representative theologians: Richard Watson, John Miley and Albert Knudson; and three central themes of revelation, sin, and grace. Of interest to ministers, theologians and seminary students.

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## Customer Reviews

In 1965 Robert E. Chiles published *Theological Transition in American Methodism* (reprinted in 1983). He traced three major changes in Methodist doctrine from 1790-1935.â ¤ From Revelation to Reasonâ ¤ From Sinful Man to Moral Manâ ¤ From Free Grace to Free Will Each doctrinal change is traced through three periods of development. Whether the change is viewed as progress or apostasy depends upon our perspective. The first period was that of the founders of Methodism: John Wesley, John Fletcher, Richard Watson, Adam Clarke, and Joseph Benson. The second period covers the last half of the nineteenth century, culminating in John Miley. By the third period, which brings us up to 1935, Methodism has become liberal and had departed from its foundations. Methodism was slower to adopt higher criticism than any other major denomination in Great Britain in the decades prior to World War I. I believe this conservatism may have been due to the heavy emphasis upon Scripture in Methodist liturgy, along with their emphasis on fervent Christian experience. However, American Methodism was sold out by its educational institutions. In the section dealing with authority, Chiles establishes Scripture as the basis of early Methodist teaching. However, Wesley certainly allowed for the validity of tradition, reason, and experience to confirm his

interpretation of Scripture. While the authority of Scripture was still affirmed in the next generation of Methodists, there was a growing awe of science and philosophy. By the early twentieth century Methodism has succumbed to a rationalism based upon evolutionary philosophy. The early Methodists did not trust reason as their ultimate authority because they believed that human depravity darkened the unregenerate mind.

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