

## ***Holiness in Postmodernity:***

# **Holiness and the Five Calls of God**

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Preparing for this lecture, I spent a bit of time perusing the *Historical Dictionary of the Holiness Movement*, edited by Bill Kostlevy, to get some sense of Asbury Seminary's history. I came across two very interesting statements. The article on Asbury College noted that Henry Clay Morrison, the college's long-time president and founder of Asbury Seminary, established the college's "primary identity, which included a passionate commitment to world missions, old-fashioned Methodism revivalism, and the spiritual and theological renewal of North American Methodism."

And I read this about our seminary's second president, Julian C. McPheeters, who succeeded Morrison and was still active at Asbury when I was a student here: "Deeply committed to holistic evangelism, McPheeters was instrumental in the integration of nutrition, exercise, physical healing, and social justice, especially racial justice, into the Asbury Theological Seminary curriculum." The article on H. C. Morrison notes that he was "an economic liberal" but "a social conservative."<sup>1</sup>

Well! There's something to think about as we Asburians enquire into the meaning of holiness in a postmodern world.

Asbury Theological Seminary was raised up to spread *the whole gospel*—to tell the good news that Jesus Christ came to earth to save from all sin. The whole gospel for the whole world. I hope Asbury will always be faithful to that calling.

But times and cultures change. Is the holiness message still relevant in a so-called postmodern age? Or in a *post*-postmodern age? I believe it is. Paradoxically however, the relevance of the holiness message for today becomes clearest when we first go back and look anew at what the Bible says about the holiness message, examining it in light of the questions and challenges of today.

The church has always been the most prophetic when it has rediscovered the relevance of the "eternal gospel" (Rev. 14:6) for a new age.<sup>2</sup> My thesis here is that the biblical message of holiness is pointedly and powerfully relevant to the world in which we live. But to understand God's call to and provision for holiness, we must see it within the context of the *whole* call of God. What does it really mean, biblically, to speak of the whole gospel for the whole world? Too often we pull apart things that should be held together. The need for biblical comprehensiveness is especially important when it comes to the subject of holiness. Holiness *should* mean wholeness, the integrity of heart and life. Therefore we should pay close attention to the full scope of God's call upon our lives, upon the church. This we will attempt to do. We want to see, for instance, how the call to salvation, the call to ministry, and the call to holiness all fit together as one story, making one picture.

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<sup>1</sup> William C. Kostlevy, ed., *Historical Dictionary of the Holiness Movement* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 11, 173, 180.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Citations marked "ESV" are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Good News Publishers, 2001).

I am structuring my presentation therefore around what I am calling *the five calls of God*. We will examine what the Bible says about God's intent for humanity and for his creation. We are called to holiness. But that call is part of a larger intention of God to bring salvation in its fullness. We need to understand the *call to holiness*, and the *grace of holiness*, in the context of the full biblical witness of God's intention for people, cultures, and in fact the whole creation.

We will examine these five calls of God more or less in the order in which they appear in the Bible—that is, in a history-of-redemption sequence. There is a story here. We can trace it through Scripture, and even up to today and into the future, postmodern or not. God is up to something, and he graciously calls us to be part of this great work. We are a called people. The final goal is “a new heaven and a new earth,” the kingdoms of this world becoming “the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah” (Rev. 11:15). Then “every knee [shall] bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue . . . confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10-11).

If we are to play the role God intends in this great drama, we must be a holy people. In fact, God calls and invites us to share his nature and his holiness, for his own good pleasure and purposes.

What then are these five calls of God? And what do they have to do with holiness?

We begin with the first one we find in Scripture: The call to earth stewardship. This may at first seem a strange place to begin, but you will soon catch the drift of the story.

## **I. The Call to Earth Stewardship**

We read in Genesis 2:15, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” The New International Version renders the commission as to “work . . . and take care of” the garden. This is a commission of course to all humankind, both men and women, not just to males. In the Genesis 2 account “the woman” has not yet been created, but the joint commission is clear in Genesis 1:26–28. “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’” (Gen. 1:28).

“Dominion” here clearly means stewardship or nurturing management, not selfish exploitation.<sup>3</sup> John Wesley understood this very well. He wrote of this passage, “Man, as soon as he was made, had the whole visible creation before him, both to contemplate, and to take the comfort of.” Made in God's image, man and woman have “the government of the inferior creatures” and are “as it were God's representative[s] on earth.”<sup>4</sup> This is why Wesley says in his sermon “The Good Steward”: “The relation which [humankind] bears to God . . . is exhibited under various representations,” including that of sinner. “But no character more exactly agrees with the present state of man than that of a *steward*. . . . This appellation is

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<sup>3</sup> The dominion theme can be and often has been misinterpreted theologically, whether in so-called “dominion theology” or in an uncritical acceptance of a free-enterprise capitalism shaped by Enlightenment assumptions. The biblical meaning must “dominate” our hermeneutics here; biblically the meaning of dominion depends totally on the character of the Triune Creator and the nature of the image and reflection of God in humanity and the whole created order.

<sup>4</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*.

exactly expressive of his situation in the present world, specifying the kind of servant he is to God, and what kind of service his divine master expects of him.”<sup>5</sup>

Affirming man and woman as stewards of God’s good gifts, including the created order, thus is basic biblical teaching. It has been fundamental in Christian history and theology, though more or less emphasized or neglected in various traditions.<sup>6</sup> The call to earth stewardship predates the fall. It is an early commission given to all humankind—therefore, today, to all nations, peoples, and governments, and not just to Christians. But sound biblical exegesis, viewing the combined callings of God, bids Christians in particular to be committed to protecting and nurturing the physical environment. As Prof. Sandy Richter eloquently points out, the sense of Genesis 2:15 is that the Lord God put the human in the garden to serve and guard it. She writes that “the larger message” of the creation accounts

is clear: the garden *belongs* to Yahweh, but [humankind] was given the privilege to rule and the responsibility to care for this garden under the sovereignty of their divine lord.

This was the ideal plan—a world in which [humankind] would succeed in constructing the human civilization by directing and harnessing the amazing resources of the planet under the wise direction of their Creator. Here there would always be enough, progress would not necessitate pollution, expansion would not demand extinction.<sup>7</sup>

Earth stewardship may also be called creation care.<sup>8</sup> It is the faithful human nurture and management of the God-created order. For Christians, creation care is an integral part of the faithful following of Jesus Christ and the worship of the Holy Trinity.

This then is the first of the five calls of God. We may view earth stewardship or creation care as the broadest circle of God’s call. It is a call to all humanity. All men and women were and are called to care for God’s good earth, thus fulfilling their mandate to be God’s regents on earth. We are to serve and honor God by caring for his creatures; to worship and glorify God by our work and our enjoyment of the garden God planted.

To understand God’s call to holiness, then, we need first to understand the *context* within which that call comes: The call to earth stewardship. But this in turn leads us to the second call of God:

## **II. The Call to Covenant Peoplehood: Repentance, Faith, Obedience, Community**

The second biblical call we must consider is the call to covenant peoplehood. This call appears in Scripture after the fall, though it is implicit earlier, as God’s abiding intent.<sup>9</sup> It is the beginning act in God’s initiative to restore and heal a fallen creation. It is foreshadowed by the call of Noah to build the ark,<sup>10</sup> but the call to peoplehood really begins with the call of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis. It continues through Isaac and Jacob and then expands as

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<sup>5</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 51, “The Good Steward.” Cf. Wesley on Lk. 16:1, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*. Wesley is here of course using “man” in the inclusive sense of “all humankind,” men and women.

<sup>6</sup> See Alister McGrath, *The Re-enchantment of Nature: Science, Religion and the Human Sense of Wonder* (London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Sandra Richter, “Stewardship of the Environment: A Christian Value,” Unpublished paper, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> *Creation Care* is the name of the quarterly magazine of the Evangelical Environmental Network ([www.creationcare.org](http://www.creationcare.org)).

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 1–2 shows that humankind living responsibly, worshipfully, and joyfully in covenant communion with God in the world he created was always the divine intent.

Israel becomes a nation. We know well the Genesis and Exodus stories. God liberates Israel from slavery in Egypt and forms a covenant people for himself. He gives his people not only his law—itsself a revelation of God’s character—but a whole way of life, an identity and a future as God’s special people.

The Bible is explicit that this call was for God’s glory and for the sake of all peoples and nations. The call is the expansion, partial fulfillment, and development of God’s word to Abraham: “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3; cf. 18:18, 28:14; Ps. 72:17). Since humankind went astray, rebelled and wandered from God, Yahweh raised up his own people, a holy people called to serve him both in worship and in witness. In the Old Testament this witness was largely in the form of a contrast society among the nations—his “peculiar people” and “priestly kingdom.”<sup>11</sup> But the Hebrew Scriptures also signal a broader expanding, “centrifugal” mission to the nations.<sup>12</sup> This of course is the background of Jesus’ great commission in the New Testament to “be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”; to make disciples of all nations and peoples.

Notice especially the two main elements of this call: *covenant* and *peoplehood*. Peoplehood: The call is not just to individuals. Rather it is a call to form, be, and act like a people—a human community in solidarity internally and with God. And covenant: The call is not simply to be just *any* kind of people; simply one more people group among the nations and ethnicities of the earth. The point is to be a people in covenant with God—so closely connected with Yahweh that their actual way of life is shaped more by God’s character than by the nations and cultures all around. God’s people are to be salt and light—so faithful in their love-relationship with God and in their revelation of his character that they season, heal, and illuminate the world rather than taking on the world’s flavors or being dazzled by the Klieg lights of the world and its enticing show.

In Scripture, the call to covenant peoplehood is unmistakably a call to holiness. This call to holiness for God’s covenant people is explicit and emphatic, and I’ll say more about it a bit later.

Notice also that the call to covenant peoplehood is a call to *repentance, faith, obedience, and community*. Because of sin, we cannot simply of our own initiative become God’s people. Here we face the biblical teaching about human rebellion and waywardness—the deep stain of sin that requires the healing medicine of salvation through Jesus Christ. The call is to be the redeemed people of God, the community of the Spirit, in the world. I do not need to elaborate these truths here, but we need to be clear about them. The call to covenant peoplehood is a call to transformation and healing—to turn from evil and alien ways to truly be the people of God *on the basis* of the provision God has made available through Jesus Christ.

The call to peoplehood is thus the call to salvation—to accept the healing offer of salvation that God graciously makes in Jesus Christ by the Spirit. This is a call God now makes to everyone, everywhere. God “now . . . commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30); to “repent and believe” the Good News (Mark 1:15). It is the gospel call to all

<sup>10</sup> The call to Noah is a call to and promise of preservation of the earth, and thus reinforces the call to earth stewardship.

<sup>11</sup> Deut. 14:2, 26:18; Titus 2:14; 1 Pt. 2:9 KJV; Ex. 19:6.

<sup>12</sup> See Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. 3rd ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), especially “The Historical Perspective,” pp. 195-370.

nations, tribes, languages, and peoples. In this gospel age of the Spirit, especially, this means that those who are called become also those who call. God commissions his called people to be his coworkers in the calling of the nations to Christ.

In terms of the five calls of God I am outlining here, we may view covenant peoplehood as a second circle inside the larger circle of the call to earth stewardship (Figure 1). The creation-care call is a call to all humanity, as previously noted. We see in Scripture, especially in the New Testament, that this “peculiar” call to covenant peoplehood ultimately also extends to all humanity. In the Bible the peoplehood call proceeds progressively from the call to Abraham and Sarah, to the whole people of Israel, to the ever-expanding Body of Christ, and thus to all peoples everywhere. So we represent this second call of God as the circle of covenant peoplehood within the initial circle of earth stewardship.

QuickTime™ and a Graphics decompressor are needed to see this picture.

*Figure 1.*

### **III. The Call to God’s Reign: Allegiance and Loyalty**

Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again” (John 3:3 TNIV). But not everyone who is born again sees the kingdom of God! For many born-again Christians, the call to covenant peoplehood *exhausts* the meaning of God’s call to humanity. Many people who have been converted to Jesus and the church have not yet been converted to Christ’s kingdom. That requires a deeper, more comprehensive conversion. So, much of the church thinks it is called only to be the church—that is, to be a community or organization that says “Jesus Christ is our Savior,” and that’s it. A sort of religious club, or a life-long waiting room for heaven.<sup>13</sup> This is sad, for it misses another essential divine call. Listen to what Jesus’ remarkable words:

“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33 ESV). Pray everyday, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10 ESV). John Wesley comments that we should pray, “May Thy kingdom of grace come quickly, and swallow up all the kingdoms of the earth! May all [humankind], receiving Thee, O Christ, for their King, truly believing in Thy name, be filled with righteousness and peace

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<sup>13</sup> This is of course a distortion of biblical ecclesiology, which in the person of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is always linked with the kingdom of God and thus with kingdom mission.

and joy, with holiness and happiness, till they are removed hence into Thy Kingdom of glory, to reign with Thee for ever and ever.”<sup>14</sup>

This, then, is the call to the kingdom of God—the call to God’s reign. It is a fundamental biblical call. Scripture is all about God’s reign, even where the precise term “kingdom of God” is not used. The Bible is a book about God’s sovereign providential oversight; his beneficent government; his loving care and sure purposes, and his concern with righteousness and justice. The kingdom call therefore concerns *allegiance* and *loyalty*. God’s call upon us Christians is a call not only to repentance and faith; it is also the call to an allegiance above all other allegiances and a loyalty that trumps all other loyalties. It is a call not only to be God’s church but also to serve his kingdom.<sup>15</sup> Christians today, says N. T. Wright, “need to think afresh through the issues of what allegiance to Jesus means in practice.”<sup>16</sup>

At one level “kingdom of God” is really a metaphor reflecting a cultural context of monarchy—and most nations today don’t have kings. The United States rebelled against England to get rid of the king, so as a nation we have no king, at least officially. Thus for Americans the concept “kingdom of God” may lack concreteness.

But the truth of God’s reign is not confined to nations that have actual kings or queens. Faithful biblical exegesis shows that a broad web of key scriptural themes and metaphors weave together to teach us what the kingdom of God really means. These themes all make essentially the same point: God is “high over all,” the one to whom we owe total obedience and loyalty. Yet he is a God of love whose rule and care are life-giving and beneficent. This is essential teaching, relevant in every cultural context.

More than a God who demands obedience, however, the Holy Trinity is the Lord who *promises* the kingdom of God in its fullness. He is the *shalom*-promising God, the one with healing medicine for our bodies and souls; our land and all earth’s cultures. The Bible makes the same point through various metaphors and word pictures—for example, the eloquent statement in Colossians 1:20 that through Jesus Christ “God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” If we are well grounded in the Old Testament, we will not read New Testament references to *peace* without thinking of the rich Old Testament meaning of *shalom*. The kingdom of God is the reign of *shalom* because of the nature and character of the Triune God.

The kingdom call is a call to kingdom values and virtues, kingdom ethics—to *really live* in the world so that we become *sunergoi*, “co-workers” toward the visible manifestation of God’s reign on the earth.<sup>17</sup> It is a call for the church to *live out* the meaning of God’s reign within our particular sociocultural contexts. It is a call to kingdom loyalty and allegiance—pledging allegiance first and above all to Jesus Christ and his purposes, thus viewing all other identities and allegiances as secondary.

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<sup>14</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, on Matthew 6:10.

<sup>15</sup> The kingdom call may be seen as part of the call to peoplehood, as suggested for instance by Exodus 19, 1 Peter 2 and many other passages. But because Christian theology (both popular and academic) in the West, especially, tends to drive a wedge between church and kingdom, we today in our contemporary context get a more faithful understanding of God’s call by making the kingdom call explicit.

<sup>16</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2000), x.

<sup>17</sup> Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003).

So our allegiance is to the Triune God and therefore to intentional solidarity with his people, our sisters and brothers in Christ throughout the earth. Loyalty to God's reign thus trumps national loyalty. As a Jesus-follower, my highest allegiance is not to my nation or party or president or state or social or ethnic group, but to Jesus Christ and the righteousness and justice of his reign. God's kingdom redefines, for example, the meaning of "homeland security." It calls us to the primary task of discerning the difference between kingdom allegiance and a proper national patriotism—a high-priority task for American evangelicals today, as well as for Christians in other lands.<sup>18</sup>

Jesus was explicit that the kingdom call is a call to the justice and righteousness of God's reign. The kingdom thus calls us to social and economic justice—to righteousness and justice in family and neighborhood, in and among the nations and families of the earth.<sup>19</sup> It is a call particularly to the poor and oppressed of the earth, for Jesus himself said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18-19).<sup>20</sup>

In terms of the five calls of God, we picture this kingdom call as a third circle within the larger circles of earth stewardship and covenant peoplehood (Figure 2). It is not however a lesser or more restricted call; just the opposite. It is a call that is intended to—and in fact *will*—penetrate to the farthest circumference, accomplishing God's overall, underlying, penetrating, constant purpose: That in all things, all places, all spheres, God may be glorified, his creation gladly serving and praising him.

This also is a call ultimately to the whole human race. But it proceeds through covenant peoplehood. That is, while people and nations and cultures everywhere are under God's sovereign government, it is God's special people, the church, who are called to be the initial visible embodiment of the kingdom of God—the community of the King.<sup>21</sup> The church is called to be God's subversive agency in the earth, constantly working—much of the time below the radar screen of the media—to witness to and actually speed the coming of the kingdom of God in its fullness.

So we may picture this call of God, this kingdom call, as a third circle within the calls to covenant peoplehood and earth stewardship:

*Figure 2.*

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<sup>18</sup> This is true for Christians everywhere, but especially for those in contexts where ethnic pride or national identity threatens to compromise kingdom allegiance. If the shoe fits . . . !

<sup>19</sup> In my book *Kingdom, Church, and World* I show how the biblical kingdom of God theme ties together many other biblical themes, including *shalom*, sabbath, jubilee, land, justice for the poor, and city of God.

<sup>20</sup> It is clear from this as well as the larger biblical context that "poor," "captives," and "oppressed" here include all forms of poverty, bondage, and oppression. The terms should not be limited either to exclusively spiritual or to solely political or socioeconomic categories.

<sup>21</sup> Howard A. Snyder, *The Community of the King*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

QuickTime™ and a Graphics decompressor are needed to see this picture.

#### **IV. The Call to Specific Ministry: Gifts and Particular Vocations**

The Bible speaks of another very important call of God: The call to specific ministry. This is the fourth call of God we must consider.

The church has often discussed this call in terms of “vocation,” or of “being called into the ministry.” But how are we to properly understand this call biblically? How does it relate to the call to holiness? Are only “ministers” called to minister, or to live a high standard of holiness?

We know that Jesus Christ called the twelve apostles. Paul said numerous times that he also was “called to be an apostle” (Rom. 1:1, 1 Cor. 1:1). In the Old Testament we read of God calling Moses, David, Deborah, Esther, and Jonah, for example. These were all called to fairly specific ministries. They received calls unique to their lives and contexts.

Jesus called twelve apostles, but clearly these were not the only persons he called into ministry. He called many disciples, though relatively few apostles. Many men and women, many slaves and some masters, many poor and some rich responded. By the help of the Holy Spirit and the discipling process of the Christian community, these Jesus-followers were able to discern and live out God’s special call on their lives.

Behind this reality of the New Testament church is an amazing, and socially unsettling, teaching of Scripture: *Everyone called to salvation is called also to minister*. Every man and woman, boy and girl whom Jesus calls to be a disciple he calls as well to be his ministering servant. No exceptions; no distinctions on the basis of wealth, class, gender, intelligence, physical characteristics, or ethnic or national identity. This is revolutionary! And the choice is up to the sovereign Spirit, not to us.

If we are rightly to understand the gospel and the call to holiness, we must also understand the call to particular ministry. The Bible gives us a rich and fully practicable theology of the ministry of the whole people of God. We need to mine it, understand it, and apply it in all our churches. This is absolutely essential if the church is to be the agent of God’s reign as Jesus intends, and to be his holy covenant people.



Unfortunately, most of the literature on ministry that has accumulated over the centuries assumes that the subject of ministry concerns only the ordained ministry. This is grossly misleading. It is not possible to understand biblically the meaning of the church's ordained ministry if we do not see such more specialized ministry within the context of the *universal* call to ministry—the call God graciously extends to every believer to be a minister and servant (*diakonos*) of the Good News.

Scripture reveals a clear and rich doctrine of the ministry of the whole people of God. The teaching rests on three pillars. All three have Old Testament roots and are elaborated in the New Testament as essential aspects of the New Covenant in Jesus and the new age of the Spirit. Here are the three pillars:

First, the *priesthood of believers* (1 Pt. 2:4-10). Old Testament Israel was called to be “a kingdom of priests,” God’s priestly people among the nations. Within this general call was the more restricted Levitical priesthood.

This Old Testament history lies behind the New Testament teaching. We learn in the New Testament, particularly in Acts and Hebrews, that the New Covenant brings two key changes to the Old Testament priesthood. On the one hand, the priesthood is narrowed to just one person: Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, through whom we have salvation and receive the call to discipleship. But at the same time the priesthood is expanded to include all believers—fulfilling the original intention of a faithful, holy, priestly people in the earth. To be a Christian is to be a priest of God.

This is just what Israel’s prophets foretold. Peter announced on the day of Pentecost,

This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:  
“In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.  
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:16-18).

In other words, all Christians now live in the Pentecostal dispensation when the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all believers—precisely so that we can be God’s witnesses, King Jesus’ priestly people in the earth.

Second, Jesus’ high priestly work and the pouring out of the Spirit open the door to another foundational pillar: *the gifts of the Spirit*. Just as every Christian is a disciple, so every believer receives special gifts for ministry. No one left behind; no one left out. As everyone is a priest, so everyone is spiritually gifted.

The doctrine of the gifts of the Spirit clarifies a key point. While we are all priests, we do not all have the same priestly ministry. “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:4–7). One universal priesthood, but diverse gifts.

Here is the beauty of Christian community! Socially and politically speaking, this is the most radical teaching in Scripture because it says that *no one*—only the Holy Spirit—is authorized to determine who receives which gifts. As we look at Christian movements down through history, we see the amazing way God has raised up the most unlikely of leaders (from a worldly viewpoint). Repeatedly society has expressed the same puzzlement we find in Acts 4:13—“When they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus.” This was the only explanation the Jewish leaders could find: These troublemakers had hung out with Jesus.

The Bible is explicit in both testaments that this is precisely God’s strategy. As Paul summarized it in 1 Corinthians,

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast (1 Cor. 1:25–29).

This is true generally, and it is true specifically with the gifts of the Spirit.

So in the New Testament we see that God has ordained a whole variety of gifts and ministries. All Christians are gifted, but not all have the same ministry.

How then are we to understand the role of what the church usually calls “ordained ministry”? The key passage is Ephesians 4:11–13. The Lord Jesus ordained a diversity of gifts so that “some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”

Finally, the third pillar supporting the biblical doctrine of ministry is the call to be *servants of Jesus Christ*. In the Old Testament we read of people like “Moses the servant of God” or “David the servant of the Lord.” But now, in the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, we are *all* God’s servants. We are *all* called to servanthood—to what the New Testament calls *diakonia*.

The call to be servants and ministers of Jesus Christ teaches another key truth. It reveals the spirit, the attitude and character, the incarnational manner in which ministry is to be carried out. Jesus’ words, “*As the father has sent me, so I send you*” (John 20:21), were not meant for the first apostles only. They set the model for all ministry in the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Here then is our commission to ministry. We are all—each one of us—called as *priests* of God, *gifted* by the Spirit, and sent as *servants* of Jesus Christ.

We may view this comprehensive call of God—the call to specific ministry—as a fourth circle within the calls to earth stewardship, to covenant peoplehood, and to the kingdom of God (Figure 3). These other calls then clarify and amplify our understanding of what ministry is. Ministry is not just “church work” but is all that Christians faithfully do to show the truth of God in all areas of life and culture—arts, science, economics, politics, creation care; the

<sup>22</sup> As Peter, John, Paul, and other NT writers emphasized—e.g., Phil. 2:1-15; 1 John 2:6; 1 Pt. 2:21-23.

full range of kingdom concerns. In and through all of these dimensions pulses the great apostolic concern to reach people with the transforming love of Jesus Christ and form faithful Jesus-like communities of the kingdom of God.

QuickTime™ and a Graphics decompressor are needed to see this picture.

*Figure 3.*

## **V. The Call to Holiness: Trinitarian Love**

We come now to the flaming heart of our concern today, and the heart of the Good News: God’s call to holiness. This is the call to know God in his fullness; to enter into the fellowship of Triune, self-giving love.<sup>23</sup>

This is the call—and the amazing, gracious invitation—to “participate in the divine nature” (2 Pt. 1:4 NIV)—to know the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who allows us to enter into gracious fellowship with him such as otherwise we cannot even imagine. God “has given us . . . his precious and very great promises, so that through them [we] may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature” (2 Pt. 1:4).

Mind-blowing as it sounds, holiness means sharing the very character of God—communion with the Trinity. This is precisely what Jesus prayed for in John 17:

Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. . . . Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know

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<sup>23</sup> I am assuming here a comprehensive doctrine of the Trinity which I do not take the time to spell out.

that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:11, 17–23).

Here Jesus beautifully blends the call to holiness, participation in Trinitarian love, and mission in the world. This is what true biblical holiness, understood within the five calls of God, really means! The call to holiness is to be understood within the larger story of the other four calls—because God is one and his plan is one.

A key reason, in fact, for the call to holiness is so that we may faithfully and graciously fulfill the other four calls. These earlier calls give us a fuller understanding of the larger context and the ethical and missional implications of holiness—what it really can mean to pursue what Wesley called “all inward and outward holiness.”

Let us consider, then. What would it mean for us, for the church empowered by the Spirit and inspired by the example of Jesus and “all the saints,” to live out the manifold call of God in postmodern society, and globally?

**Holiness and earth stewardship.** This is most fully understood in the context of the call to holiness. The creation-care mandate is an integral part of the heart-call of God. The more we share the character of God, the more we are concerned with God’s concerns. So we want to fulfill the call first given to Adam and Eve to tend the garden. We want to preserve, nurture, and protect the physical environment, playing our part in helping it thrive to the glory of God and for his creative, esthetic, and redemptive purposes—as well as for our own survival!

What does earth stewardship lived to the glory of God mean today, in practical terms? It means everything from recycling paper and plastics and caring for church property according to good environmental principles here locally, to supporting larger efforts to protect endangered species and combat global warming and the disasters it is bringing to the world’s poor. Consuming less energy and supporting public policies that help protect God’s good earth: This is practical holiness. These are not mere secondary or peripheral ethical concerns, nor are they primarily political issues. They are good old-fashioned holiness issues.

Can we develop Jesus communities that practice creation care? Of course we can! It’s simply a matter of the vision and the will. We can show once again in history that we can be God’s people in God’s land, practicing the principles of jubilee.

Creation care means, as well, the care of our bodies as part of holy and holistic living—a theme strongly emphasized by John Wesley, E. Stanley Jones, J. C. McPheeters, and Frank Bateman Stanger, among many others. Our bodies were created by God, as were marriage and the family, so these are part of our earth-stewardship mandate.<sup>24</sup>

Holy people are those who feel deeply about all the creatures God has made. We notice a curious thing about the great saints of God, even some who were very otherworldly and saw little value in material things. Many of them saw God manifest in nature and were very

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<sup>24</sup> The issue here is *stewardship*, biblically understood. The biblical doctrine of stewardship is based on two correlative principles: Responsible care for the entirety of the material world entrusted to humankind (including time, money, and the physical environment), and responsible stewardship of God’s “manifold grace” (1 Pt. 4:10). By the Spirit God grants us “supernatural” grace as the necessary resource for his people to be good stewards of the “natural” world. By the faithful Spirit-empowered stewardship of grace Christians in their stewardship of God’s world are able to counteract the downward pull (entropy) of sin and its effects in the world.

sensitive to the well-being or the suffering of all living creatures. Francis of Assisi and John Wesley are, of course, prime examples.

So, holy people tread lightly and joyfully on the earth. Living in reciprocal harmony with God, they seek to live in harmonious reciprocity with God's good land. (Having just returned from a week or so in Cambridge, England, and noting the tide of bicycles there, I found myself wondering how we here in our own community could be more bicycle- and walker-friendly!)

In our age when we are learning the mysteries of earth and space as never before, we should be even better in our applied holiness in the sphere of earth stewardship than the church has been in the past.

**Holiness and covenant peoplehood.** Here the implications of holiness are fairly obvious but very profound. We are called to holy, loving, covenant community, and it is the sanctifying Spirit of God who makes this possible.

Covenant peoplehood reminds us that holiness, while personal, is not first of all individual. It is primarily social, as Wesley insisted. That is, it concerns the character of the Christian community, and of each of our lives within it. Thus sanctification is not in the first instance the sanctification of the individual person but the sanctification of the Body of Christ. As Jesus' physical body on earth was holy, so the Body of Christ on earth is to be holy—loving God with all its heart, mind, soul, and strength, and loving its earthly neighbors as itself. Holiness therefore means loving, mutually-accountable community, the sanctification of the Body of Christ. This is the key to maintaining our own individual moral and ethical integrity. Holiness as personal experience is most healthily entered into in the context of Christian community.<sup>25</sup>

The New Testament says this in many places, but perhaps nowhere more plainly than in Ephesians 5:19–21—“Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Jesus calls us to live in community with God and one another because God wants to share his very loving, holy, compassionate, merciful, gracious, out-reaching self with us—thus to make us like himself, like Jesus Christ.

Practical holiness as a matter of covenant peoplehood therefore means attention to the priorities and structures of biblical *koinonia*—building healthy, holy, and just community. It means affirming the gifts and fruit of the Spirit; practicing ministry and mission as taught in Scripture and modeled by Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit we will find ourselves actually fulfilling Jesus' words that his followers would “also do the works that I do and, in fact, . . . greater works than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). We will find ourselves fulfilling Jesus' call to serve others, not just ourselves, and we will see that this is rooted in the very character of God. The more we grasp the meaning of the Trinity and Jesus' incarnation, the more we see that holy love (true Christianity) is all about relinquishing status for the sake of lifting others.

Christians are to be specialists in building covenant community to the glory of God. In regeneration we receive the very life of God so that we may do this. Building healthy missional community is in fact a major focus of New Testament teaching. Note how much of

<sup>25</sup> This was of course a key discovery of John Wesley and the early Methodists as they developed the community/discipling structures of society, class, and band.

the New Testament is devoted, *not* to exhortations or strategies for evangelism or mission, but to building community that truly is the Body of Christ. Why is this? Because the biblical writers knew that covenant communities which truly incarnate the character of Jesus Christ would in fact do Jesus' work and fulfill God's mission in the world. It is that simple and that profound. The community-building that Paul and the other New Testament writers focus on is the Spirit's missionary strategy.

For us here at Asbury, the call to covenant peoplehood means both *learning* about the nature of healthy community and how to build it, and *practicing* healthy, accountable community within the seminary and in our churches. Much that we learn in our classes can be applied to the building of wholesome community. We need to care for one another as genuine Christian community here, among ourselves. We are not first of all students, faculty, staff, or administrators. We are first of all sisters and brothers in the Body of Christ, hopeful but vulnerable, and that reality and identity transcends all other identities and distinctions. Jesus said much about this in instructing his disciples to walk as he walked.<sup>26</sup>

**Holiness and the reign of God.** Holiness people are kingdom of God people—if they are biblically grounded. Our kingdom vocation means living for God's larger global and eternal purposes. "Only one life; 'twill soon be past—only what's done for Christ [and his kingdom] will last." Holiness in a postmodern age means holy, healthy living for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Holiness means living the reality God's reign *now* in this present age. This was the great new insight that came to E. Stanley Jones in the 1930s. Jones was raised in the holiness tradition; he was a holiness missionary. But after visiting Russia in the heady days of communism's utopian vision, Jones came to realize that he had no adequate theology of the kingdom of God now, in this age, this present time. He was troubled, and out of that questing came two of Jones' most prophetic books: *Christ's Alternative to Communism* (1935) and *Is the Kingdom of God Realism?* (1940). The Christian alternative to communist utopianism, Jones said, is the liberating biblical vision of the kingdom of God. And yes, the kingdom of God is *realism*—the way the world was made to be—not just *idealism* in the sense of some unattainable ideal.<sup>27</sup>

So E. Stanley Jones concluded that the gospel is not only about "the unchanging Christ" but also about "the unshakable kingdom." The gospel concerns a Person and a Plan—Jesus Christ and his kingdom—and the two must be held together in our theology and in our lived discipleship. This is holiness lived within the sphere and the forward pull of the kingdom of God.

So it must be for us. The work of the sanctifying Spirit is to make us kingdom-of-God people—people who, like Jesus, incarnate the reality and priorities of God's reign in our personal lives, our families, our economics, and our politics.

**Holiness and particular vocation.** The call to holiness is the call to so open ourselves to God's Spirit that his gifts and graces flow and flourish in our lives. This also is a key part of holiness. Lived holiness is what Hebrews 10:24–25 is talking about: "Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

<sup>26</sup> See especially Matt. 20:25–28, 23:8–11; John 13:1–17; 1 John 2:6; 1 Pt. 2:21–25.

<sup>27</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *Christ's Alternative to Communism* (New York: Abingdon, 1935), E. Stanley Jones, *Is the Kingdom of God Realism?* (New York: Abingdon, 1940).

Holiness means life empowered by the Holy Spirit so that what is said of Jesus in John 3:34 becomes true also of his disciples: “The one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit” (NIV).

Holiness means each of us finding our own vocation within, and guided by, the Body of Christ. In this way we each make precisely the contribution to God’s kingdom purposes that the Spirit intends. Understanding vocation in terms of the larger vision of God’s reign, not narrowly in terms of church ministry, is part of the ecclesiological meaning of holiness. Our ministry for Jesus Christ is kingdom ministry—our whole life and witness in the world—not just church ministry.

How do we come to experience this holiness, this deeper life in the Spirit? It comes through receiving the cleansing, empowering presence of the Holy Spirit by faith and obedience. Here pastors, disciplers, and other leaders have a keen responsibility to lead believers into the deeper life in the Spirit.

The Wesleyan emphasis on Christian perfection, or perfecting, holds together two vital emphases at this point. First, the goal (the *telos*) of Christian community, and of each of our lives within community, is always to grow up into the fullness of the character of Jesus Christ. This is the central point of Ephesians 4:7–16 and like passages which speak of the church as the Body of Christ, animated by and filled with the Spirit.

Second, this walking in the Spirit is to be our present experience, not just a future hope. We need to help one another enter into the fullness of the Spirit, to be filled with and walk daily in the Spirit of Jesus. Generally, as Wesley taught, this deeper dimension of Spirit-life comes as a distinct experience subsequent to conversion, though (as Wesley acknowledged) it may be experienced more gradually or less perceptibly—and thus possibly through multiple fresh fillings (or deeper workings) of the Spirit. For most people, it seems, this *process* of growing in the Spirit is enlivened or activated by *crisis* points, more or less perceptible, along the journey.

If our holiness teaching is to be practical and lived, we should not lose this key crisis and process link. Today’s stress on gradual growth and on character and moral development is helpful and it is true, I think, that the nineteenth-century holiness movement at times overemphasized crisis and underplayed process in the work of sanctification, particularly in some branches of the movement. But today we may face the opposite danger of overemphasizing process, either in reaction to Pentecostal/ Charismatic emphases or in reaction to our own history. It would be un-Wesleyan as well as unbiblical to lose the crisis/process nexus.<sup>28</sup>

As a practical matter of preaching, discipleship, and growth, we need to help believers understand the deeper life of the Spirit that is available to them in Christ. We should give believers opportunities to enter into that deeper life—to confront the dividedness of their own hearts and enter into the fullness, wholeness, and integration *in Christian community* that is our inheritance in Jesus Christ and is a foretaste of that communion we will enjoy in the heavenly kingdom. This was Wesley’s concern, and it should be ours.

So this is the call to holiness in relation to the other calls discussed earlier. I emphasize again: It is the Spirit’s infilling that supplies the power, the energy, the effective movemental

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<sup>28</sup> The Wesleyan understanding of holiness, properly understood, also maintains the dynamic biblical link between faith and works (as for instance in Eph. 2:9–10, Phil. 2:12–13, and Gal. 5:6).

impulse that enables the church and each of us as Jesus' disciples to fulfill the other calls God extends to us.

We may view this fifth call of God—the call to holiness—as the central circle among all God's calls (Figure 4). This is the heart of our vocation, for it is the call to the heart of God. It is the call to love the Lord our God with all our heart, strength, soul, and mind, and thus to love our neighbors as ourselves. It is the central, the capacitating, the essential equipping call—the call that enables us to live out our gifts and callings; to see and serve his liberating reign; to be God's covenant people; to care for the good earth. Thus responding willingly to all God's calls, the church and each of us personally glorifies God and serves the world through the gifts Christ bestows (cf. 1 Pt. 4:10-11; Rom. 12).

*Figure 4.*

QuickTime™ and a Graphics decompressor are needed to see this picture.

Since holiness touches and penetrates every sphere of life, we could just as well conceive of holiness not as the inner circle, but as an outer circle that includes all the other calls of God. It is the dynamic work of the Spirit that penetrates all dimensions of life.

This vision thus is dynamic, not static. It is movement, like the wind of the Spirit. It is going somewhere—to the fulfillment of God's mission and the coming of God's reign in all its fullness. It is active and dynamic, for the Spirit draws us forward in mission in the spirit and character of Jesus. We can therefore reframe the picture as follows (Figure 5), showing how God by his Holy Spirit leads and draws the church into the fulfillment of mission in all its dimensions.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> I have in mind here also the ecclesiological model depicted in Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Theological Vision for the Sending Church in North America* (Eerdmans, 1998).





Figure 5.

**Postmodern Holiness?** How does this biblically-grounded conception of holiness respond to the challenges of postmodernity? In four ways.

First, *holiness is holistic*. It meets the human need for a way of life that reaches all dimensions of our existence. Even though postmodernity is famously hostile to holism and “metanarratives,” yet people sense the need for an existence which at some deep level is whole.

Second, *holiness is particular*. It recognizes the uniqueness of each person created in God’s image; that the Holy Spirit works uniquely in each individual, cleansing, empowering, and granting gifts that especially fit each person’s needs, capacities, and cultural context—without becoming self-preoccupied or overly individualistic.

Third, *holiness is narrative*. It is not first of all an abstract idea, philosophy, or theology. It is a story about what God has done for us and how our own stories find meaning but also self-transcendence within the story and personal reality of the Triune God who sent Jesus Christ into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill God’s plan.

Finally, *holiness is life*. It is experience. It is not first of all a doctrine but a love relationship with God in Jesus Christ and the Spirit. Thus holiness is community—*koinonia* with God and with one another in a new kind of fellowship, the church, which simultaneously lives in two worlds—the one we now see visibly around us, and the one which is to come and which in fact is constantly, invisibly, penetratingly around us right now. Holiness is *undividedness*—the life in which, lost in God, we find ourselves. And thus finding God’s love in us, we reach out and find others.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Holiness is the opposite of what the Bible calls being “doubleminded” (e.g., Jas. 1:7).

## Conclusion

On a warm October afternoon as I was preparing for this lecture, my wife Jan called me outside to see something strange. The sun was shining; golden leaves were falling from the hickory trees. I went out and looked, but all I saw was scattered leaves drifting down.

“I see only some leaves falling,” I said, “obeying the law of gravity.”

“Look higher!” she said. “Way up in the sky.”

I looked higher—and saw something I’d never seen before. Thousands of leaves high above our tree, fluttering and floating and drifting upward and away in all directions. Heading up and outward, not down to earth.

“What happened?” I asked.

Just minutes earlier, she said, a gust of wind had swept up through the tree, driving a cloud of leaves high in the sky where they floated and scattered, not returning to earth. The leaves had conquered the law of gravity by a superior force—a breath of wind that lifted the leaves from the branches and scattered them far and wide.

Aha, I thought. Now I get it. This is a lesson for the church! How can the church overcome the deadening gravity, the weight of sin, self-centeredness, bureaucracy and institutionalism, rigid and obsolete structures? *There is a way*—the breath of the Spirit of God. “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

Brothers and sisters, we can look higher!

The five calls of God may seem like demands, but they are really the breath of the Spirit. They not only drive us; they lift us, call us higher, call us to such faithfulness, ministry, love and joy as has hardly entered our minds and imaginations.

But we have to be open to the Spirit. We have to place ourselves in God’s currents. Like those autumn leaves, the church can soar and scatter its witness to the world, in the name of Jesus and the power of the Spirit.

The five calls of God are the compound call of the Spirit. *By the Spirit of the living God*, Jesus-people today can:

- be filled with all the fullness of God in Christ, living holy, devout, pure, healing lives, being Jesus’ counterculture and contrast society in witness to the world.
- exercise a beautiful and effective array of ministries and callings, according to the diversity of the gifts of the Spirit.
- be God’s kingdom people in the world, living in full allegiance to Jesus and his reign
  - Spirit-endowed coworkers for the kingdom of God.
- live as a faithful covenant people, building accountable community, growing up into Jesus Christ, embodying the spirit of God’s law in holy love.

—care for the garden, this good earth, God’s gift in trust to us, working in faith, hope, and confidence for the healing of all creation, being the leading edge among the nations for the care and feeding and eventual reconciliation of all things—things visible and invisible; things in heaven and on earth.<sup>31</sup>

This is what holiness—life in the Spirit in response to the fivefold call of God—means in a postmodern world and within earth’s diverse cultures. We must be a holy people. For God says, it is “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit” (Zech. 4:6) that he fulfills his designs.

In faithful response to the fivefold call of God we learn more fully what the words mean: “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:31).

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<sup>31</sup> E.g., Eph. 1:10, 22; 3:9; Col. 1:16-20; Heb. 1:2-3.