

# Holiness in Postmodern Culture

**By Don Thorsen, Ph.D.**

**Professor of Theology, Azusa Pacific University**

Is the biblical message of *holiness* relevant for today? Most of us, with even a rudimentary knowledge of scripture, would enthusiastically say, “Yes!” Certainly, those of us from the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions of Christianity would want to affirm the importance of holiness. The affirmation primarily applies to the holiness of God, who is the only one properly to represent holiness, righteousness, and perfection. The affirmation of the relevance of holiness today also applies to people, more specifically, believers in Jesus Christ, who have totally consecrated their lives to him as savior and lord. God graciously cooperates with our consecration in making people more Christ-like, more loving of God and of their neighbors.

Several things work against making people more like Jesus Christ. I will mention four of them. First, of course, is the problem of sin, which includes active rebellion against God as well as passive indifference to God. Second is ignorance, for—as finite people—we do not always know how to live or pray as we ought. Third is bondage; often this is thought of as bondage to demonic power, but it may also include bondage to psychological and physiological addictions that people have. Fourth is misery, which can occur in our lives many ways—physically, mentally, emotionally, ethnically, and culturally. Such misery can inhibit people from their pursuit of holiness.

In Western societies, there has arisen another an intellectual and cultural threat to holiness. It is called *postmodernism*, or what could be called postmodern culture. Intellectually, postmodernism challenges the claims of Christians because of its emphasis on cultural relativism. Culturally, postmodernism has a variety of meanings with which an increasing number of people identify—many of which are indifferent to, if not rebellious against, God, Christianity, and churches. In Eastern societies, such as South Korea, the name of postmodernism may not be mentioned all that often. Yet, cultural relativism has spread throughout the world, and it behooves Christians to consider it in their theological and ministerial reflections. Thus, I want to address the topic of holiness in a postmodern culture.

*Although Christians must be prepared to speak in ways that are relevant to postmodern culture, the message of biblical holiness is as relevant as ever because of the ongoing needs of people in dealing with sin, ignorance, bondage, and misery in their lives, individually and socially.* In some ways, the concerns and questions of postmodernism help Christians today to present holiness—Christ-like living—more effectively than ever. More particularly, the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions that promote holiness are well poised for interacting with postmodernism because of their contextual approach to theology and ministry, their appreciation for the affective as well as intellectual and ethical dimensions of life, and their therapeutic understanding of salvation and the Christian life, which advocates social as well as personal dimensions of holiness.

I will begin my investigation of holiness and postmodern culture by looking at how Wesley discussed holiness in the intellectual and cultural milieu of what is called *modernism*, or Age of Enlightenment. Next I will talk about postmodern culture and the particular concerns and challenges it has for the biblical message of holiness. I will talk about how Wesleyanism is better suited than other Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions for promoting holiness today. Finally, I will present the Holiness Manifesto, which is a contemporary restatement of holiness, especially applicable for increasingly postmodern people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Wesley and Modern Culture

Wesley lived during the eighteenth century, which in Western societies was considered the height of the Age of Enlightenment, sometimes called modernism or modernity. Modernism is characterized many ways, but the following summary depicts some of the more important aspects of it:

1. Dismissal of historic authorities, including religious authority
2. Individualistic approach to truth
3. Belief in knowledge as certain, objective, and good, based upon the powers of human reason, observation, and experimentation
4. Emphasis upon naturalistic materialism
5. Optimistic about the future of humanity

Although there are various ways for depicting modernism, these characteristics largely summarize the Western worldview for the past several hundred years. These ways of viewing things may have originated in the West, but they influenced people, cultures, and religions around the world.

The past several centuries have born witness to growing individualism, scientific and technological self-reliance, certainty and optimism about what that can be achieved by people, and disregard for past authorities, especially the religious past. In Western societies, the Enlightenment—modernism—represented a time of human self-discovery and self-assertion. Like children learning to become independent of those in authority over them, modern people and societies progressively asserted confidence in people's ability—rather than God and churches—to answer the tough questions of life and to solve the tough problems of life.

Wesley was as much a product of modernism as he was the Bible and historic Christianity. For example, he drank deeply from the philosophy of British empirical thinking. John Locke arguably influenced epistemological and ontological assumptions more than anyone else in the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> He claimed that people's ideas come from sensation (experience) and reflection (reason).<sup>2</sup> The mind at birth is a *tabula rasa*, a 'blank tablet', on which are impressed experiences (or impressions), which produce simple ideas. Simple ideas are joined by the simple ideas of reflection to form complex ideas. Significantly, there are no universal, necessary, or a priori (or innate) ideas independent of experience. Locke's British empiricism claimed certainty, but it sowed the seeds of relativity, since all knowledge contains an element of experience. Although some aspects of experience exhibit objective primary qualities, these give rise to subjective (or secondary qualities) that are relative to people's individual and social contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> See Alan Charles Kors, *The Birth of the Mind: The Intellectual History of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, The Great Courses (Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 1998), lectures 10-11, 13.

<sup>2</sup> See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 1997, 2004).

Wesley largely agreed with Locke's epistemology: "There is nothing in the Understanding which was not first perceived by some of the senses."<sup>3</sup> However, Wesley does not think that people have only ideas that derive from empirical sensation and rational reflection. These may be all that unbelievers (or natural people) have. By the grace of God, there is also available to people "spiritual senses."<sup>4</sup> Of these spiritual senses, Albert Outler says, "The phrase denotes for Wesley the human capacity for knowing and responding to God's prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying activities and, in this respect, is equivalent to his other phrase about our 'spiritual sensorium'.... The restoration of our corrupted and disabled 'image' to its pristine capacity is, indeed, the goal of Wesley's *ordo salutis*."<sup>5</sup> From (1) empirical sensation, (2) spiritual sensation, and (3) rational reflection, Wesley believed that people had experimental (or experiential) confirmation of their Christian faith, hope, and love. He describes Christianity as "the true, the scriptural, experimental religion."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John Wesley, "On the Discoveries of Faith," Sermon 117, *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 4:29.

<sup>4</sup> John Wesley, "The Witness of the Spirit, I," Sermon 10, *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 1:283.

<sup>5</sup> Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 1:117n5.

<sup>6</sup> John Wesley, Preface, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, *The Works of John Wesley*, 1:106.

One of the most important theological contributions of Wesley to the historic development of Christian theology is the explicit inclusion of experience as a religious authority. To be sure, scripture was always thought to be the primary religious authority, being divinely inspired and trustworthy. Wesley also considered church tradition and rational reflection to be important religious authorities in matters of Christian beliefs, values, and practices. Together, he affirmed the primacy of scriptural authority along with tradition, reason, and experience as genuine—albeit secondary—religious authorities. No one prior to Wesley included experience explicitly in theological reflection, and it contributed to how Christians subsequently went about their tasks of theology and ministry. Today Wesley’s fourfold understanding is summarized by a shorthand reference to the *Wesleyan quadrilateral*.<sup>7</sup> Although Wesley did not coin the phrase, it is commonly used to talk about his contextual approach to religious authority and theological method.

The quadrilateral, unfortunately, is often misunderstood by people both inside and outside the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions. It is thought, for example, to weaken the primacy of scriptural authority. This is not the case. In fact, Wesley considered his view complementary to the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, ‘scripture alone’, since scripture is an authority unlike other authorities.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Wesley knew how important tradition, reason, and experience were to Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. He also knew how important tradition, reason, and experience were to Christians throughout church history. In talking about experience, then, Wesley did not think that he was saying anything innovative or radical, since he thought Christians understood the contextual nature of the theological enterprise. In making explicit reference to experiential authority, however, Wesley raised the consciousness of Christians about the interdependent relationship between scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

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<sup>7</sup> Albert C. Outler coined the phrase during the late 1960s; see “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 20, no. 1 (1985): 7-18.

<sup>8</sup> See Don Thorsen, “*Sola Scriptura* and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 41.2 (Fall 2006): 7-27.

Wesley's emphasis on experience draws attention to the affective dimension of Christianity, which he referred to as 'heart religion' or 'religion of the heart'. Similar views were presented by Jonathan Edwards in *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*.<sup>9</sup> Both Edwards and Wesley were concerned about what could be called 'right affection' (*orthoaffectus*), 'right passion' (*orthopathy*), or a 'right heart' (*orthokardia*), depending upon the particular nuance you want to emphasize: affection, passion, desire, or disposition. Regardless of the particularities of meaning, Wesley wanted people to realize that 'right belief' (orthodoxy) alone was insufficient for what it meant to be Christian, biblically and holistically conceived. Even the addition of 'right action' (orthopraxis) was insufficient in describing Christianity, though Christians also neglected right action, for example, holy living and compassionate advocacy on behalf of the needs of others, especially the poor. Wesley said:

And herein it is more especially my desire, first, to guard those who are just setting their faces toward heaven (and who, having little acquaintance with the things of God, are the more liable to be turned out of the way) from formality, from mere outside religion, secondly, to warn those who know the religion of the heart, the faith which worketh by love, lest at any time they make void the law through faith, and so fall back into the snare of the devil [sic].<sup>10</sup>

Wesley warned against a formal, rationalistically oriented Christianity that lacked both "the religion of the heart" (*orthoaffectus*) and "the faith which worketh by love" (*orthopraxis*). In a sense, Wesley advocated a holistic understanding of Christianity—and the holiness to which God calls people—that encapsulated all aforementioned dimensions of Christian life. They include:

- Orthodoxy (right belief)
- Orthopraxy (right action)
- Orthoaffectus (right affection)

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<sup>9</sup> See Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections (A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections)*, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, ed. John E. Smith (1746; repr., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959; Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Wesley, Preface, *Sermons on Several Occasions, The Works of John Wesley*, 1:106.

These dimensions are important for understanding Christianity. They are also important for understanding holiness, and they contribute to our understanding Christianity and holiness in postmodern culture.

## **Postmodern Culture**

What is postmodernism? That is question to which there have been a variety of answers, and there is no consensus about what postmodernism is or if it even exists. Although it may not be possible to provide a precise definition of the term, postmodernism certainly has become a dominant descriptor of contemporary culture, at least, within Western societies.

To begin with, postmodernism is ‘post’ modernism. That is, it rejects what has been the dominant worldview in the West, since the seventeenth century. Modernism is characterized by the following:

- Truth is thought to be culturally influenced, relative to particular times, places, and people
- Belief in knowledge as uncertain and incomplete, due to social and cultural influences
- There are no foundations of absolute truth upon which people can make certain, unqualified claims of belief, value, and practice
- Considers people’s narratives (or stories) the way truth is communicated
- Importance of openness or tolerance of all stories, lest violence be done to them through neglect, marginalization, or persecution



Although there are various ways for depicting postmodernism, these characteristics largely summarize a growing worldview among people in Western societies. It is not as systematic as modernism; postmodernism does not present a coherent worldview. Some consider it more of a reaction than a replacement worldview or philosophy. In that sense, postmodernism has not replaced modernism, rather, it is a dismissal of modernism, a critique and rejection of the certainty, objectivity, and goodness of human claims to knowledge. Regardless of how postmodernism is conceived, its concerns are increasingly characteristic of people inside as well as outside churches.

It is important to realize that the growing preoccupation with postmodernism in the West, especially the United States, does not necessarily apply to people and societies around the world. Just as the Enlightenment did not directly influence people outside Western societies, there is no reason to expect that postmodernism has worldwide relevance. In fact, in Western societies, postmodernism is thought to be inextricably bound up with the development of Enlightenment and modern thinking. If others around the world never went through a period of Enlightenment, then there would be less reason to expect the development of postmodern concerns.

Although postmodernism arose in a particular place and time among particular people, there are reasons to expect that the concerns of postmodernism affect indirectly, if not directly, people everywhere. There are several reasons why this is the case. For example, the world is becoming more global, more international. Ideas that affect one part of the world increasingly affect other parts of the world. Not every part of the world may have gone through a period of Enlightenment. However, they have experienced the effects of the Enlightenment, Scientific Revolution, and Industrialization in faster, abbreviated ways. To the extent that other societies experienced these modernistic developments, they became modernized, and are thus susceptible—more or less—to postmodern critiques of people and society in general, and of religion in particular.

I want to mention one final distinction that needs to be made with regard to postmodernism and Christianity. Nowadays Christians seem to refer to postmodernism two ways: one that is philosophical and theological, and another that is more popular. Philosophically and theologically, postmodernism is problematic for Christianity because of its cultural relativism. How can Jesus claim to be ‘the way, the truth, and the life’? Such claims to truth would appear to be a kind of meta-narrative that postmodern people reject. If emphasized too strongly, Christians would be accused of triumphalism, intolerance, and of doing violence to the stories of other people—other cultures, languages, nationalities, ethnicities, genders, religions, or other worldviews. Thus, it is problematic when Christians advocate a postmodern understanding of Christianity, without sacrificing the biblical and historic under-girding of their beliefs, values, and practices.

Christians sometimes refer to postmodernism in a popular way. Because they want to minister to an increasingly postmodern culture, they like to call their outreach ministries as being postmodern. For example, worship styles are considered postmodern; styles of preaching are considered postmodern; and styles of evangelism are considered postmodern. Whole church movements are considered postmodern, most notably the so-called ‘emergent church’ movement. However, this popular usage of postmodernism has more to do with how and to whom ministry occurs than it has to do with a philosophical and theological description of Christianity. The two are compatible in the minds of some Christians, but it is my suspicion that most would consider Christianity and postmodernism mismatched, given their different views of truth.

## **Wesley and Postmodern Culture**

What does Wesley and the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions constructively have to offer people, who are increasingly influenced by the concerns of postmodernism? Actually, I think they have much to offer, at least, much relative to most other Christian attempts to speak relevantly to postmodern people. I will begin by talking about the special relevance of Wesley and those who follow him to postmodern culture. Then I want to look more specifically at their relevance to the topic of holiness.

## **Wesleyan Quadrilateral**

To begin with, the Wesleyan quadrilateral represents a more contextual approach to doing theology than other Christian approaches to the topics of religious authority and theological method. The quadrilateral is a realistic approach to understanding people as well as religious truth, factoring in the various dimensions, voices, stories, or narratives of people. Wesley was not afraid to consider the experiential dimensions of human knowing, even human knowing about God. Such considerations did not leave one hopelessly subject to philosophical and theological relativism. They certainly made such considerations more complex and sometimes dissatisfying to Christians who yearned for a simpler—and actually more simplistic, almost pre-modern—way of viewing truth, especially the truth of scripture and historic Christianity. Yet, Wesley and others in the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions have been able to maintain biblical and historic Christianity, without relying upon unrealistic foundations thought to be absolute anchors of certainty.

Reflective of the quadrilateral is the contextual way that Wesley and others approach theological reflection as well as the way they go about doing ministry and promoting holiness. William Abraham says that Wesley's significance as a theologian reflects his ability to hold together elements in Christian tradition often pulled apart and expressed in isolation. He says:

Consider the following disjunctive pairs: faith, works; personal devotions, sacramental practice; persona piety, social concern; justification, sanctification; evangelism, Christian nurture; Bible, tradition; revelation, reason; commitment, civility; creation, redemption; cell group, institutional church; local scene, world parish.<sup>11</sup>

Wesley integrates contrasting emphases that are vital to a healthy and comprehensive vision of Christian beliefs, values, and practices. At the center of this vision is holiness, which to Wesley signified the totality of who God wants people to be as well as to the totality of who God is. Certainly, when people are saved, God claims that they are holy due to the atoning work of Jesus Christ, facilitated by the work of the Holy Spirit. Luther and Calvin persuasively argued for salvation by grace through faith, and Wesley affirmed the Protestant Reformation. But he thought that holiness involved more than the alien righteousness that God ‘imputed’ to believers; Wesley thought that God also wants to ‘impart’ righteousness to believers. He was very hopeful about the power of God, through the Holy Spirit, to work graciously in the lives of believers so that they might become more like Christ, more loving of God and of their neighbors.

### **Semi-Augustinianism**

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<sup>11</sup> William J. Abraham, *The Coming Great Revival: Recovering the Full Evangelical Tradition* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 67.

Human freedom is an important affirmation by Wesley. It seemed clear to him from experience—as well as from scripture—that God created people to act responsibly, and God expects to partner with people for matters of life, including the pursuit of holiness. This synergistic understanding was so important to Wesley that he debated with beloved friends, such as George Whitefield, who were dedicated Calvinists with regard to their views of divine predestination and human freedom. Rather than side with the Protestant Reformers, who emphasized Augustinianism and the meticulous sovereignty of God, Wesley sided with the longstanding tradition of semi-Augustinianism, characteristic of Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican Churches. It was also characteristic of Arminianism, which was the first noteworthy break by continental Protestants from the magisterium of the Reformers, especially Calvin's doctrine of double predestination. Arminianism thought that God's grace began, continued, and completed salvation in the lives of believers, and God's grace enables people to decide genuinely to accept or reject God's grace in all that God wants to do in their lives.

Christians from a Reformed (or Calvinist) perspective often misunderstand the nature of semi-Augustinianism. They know that Augustine, rightly, rejected the views of Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism because they advocated the need for people to take initiative in meriting salvation as well as in living the Christian life. However, those in the Augustinian tradition too often make the mistake of thinking that, if people are not Augustinian, then they are Pelagian, which historically was considered heresy. They do not always realize that the dominant view in church history was the semi-Augustinian view of Catholic, Orthodox, and eventually Anglican Churches. Even today, semi-Augustinianism is the dominant view of divine predestination and human freedom among Christians in the world. Such a view is crucial to how Wesley challenged people to pursue holiness with earnestness and self-discipline because these are divinely ordained ways that God wants believers to use in becoming more like Christ.

## **Therapeutic Salvation**

Wesley did not believe that God saved people just so that they may get to heaven. He believed in heaven, but Wesley thought that God wanted so much more for the lives of believers. Salvation does not simply represent a free ticket to heaven. It represents a therapeutic healing of people—of the image of God within them as well as the healing of other hurts that are physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social. Randy Maddox points out that Wesley used therapeutic language to talk about the total healing he envisioned. Maddox says: “Indeed, Wesley characterized the very essence of religion as a *θεραπεία ψυχᾶς*—a therapy by which the Great Physician heals our sin-diseased souls, restoring the vitality of life that God intended for us.”<sup>12</sup>

The therapeutic nature of salvation is closely related to Wesley’s emphasis upon holiness. God wants people to be holy, wholly holy. Too often people spiritualize the holiness to which God calls us. But that is not the case with Wesley. He was not only concerned about the challenge for individual believers to become holy, Wesley was concerned about the challenge for the church to transform society into a more holy, righteous, and just society. The extent of his understanding of salvation and holiness is far-reaching. For example, Wesley said:

By salvation I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth. This implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and by consequence all holiness of conversation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 145.

<sup>13</sup> John Wesley, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, §Pt. I, 3, *The Works of John Wesley*, 11:106.

Wesley's pursuit of holiness reflects his concern for right belief, right action, and right affection. It is holistic; holiness must not be reduced into a spiritualized state of existence, or legalistic list of what and what not to do. Instead, holiness needs to encapsulate all dimensions of human life—individual and social. As such, our understanding of holiness needs to grow, develop, and adapt in order to be relevant to changing times, places, and concerns.

## **Wesleyan Holiness Study Project**

In the history of the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions, there have arisen a number of individual and church statements about the nature and importance of holiness. Like the Protestant Reformers, members of the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions need to be 'always reforming', not becoming overly attached to tradition. Rather, they need to approach holiness in the contextual way that Wesley approached it, adapting in ways that would be most relevant and persuasive to the cultural context in which Christians find themselves.

I want to share an example of a recent attempt to promote holiness, which was cognizant of the need to speak to people influenced by postmodern culture. Granted, the example I give represents just one statement about holiness, but it serves as both a model and challenge for others to make similar statements, reflective of their particular cultural context. That includes West and East, English and non-English, ethnically homogeneous groups and ethnically heterogeneous groups, and so on.

In 2003, Kevin Mannoia, then Dean of the School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University, envisioned a collaborative effort on the part of Wesleyan and Holiness denominations to reconceive and promote biblical holiness for the twenty-first century. To this end, Mannoia secured from these denominations the financial as well as conceptual support for the Wesleyan Holiness Study Project (WHSP). The WHSP would take place over a four-year period (2004-2007). Denominations would send up to three representatives, including church leaders, scholars, and pastors to participate in the study. Representatives at the initial meeting of the WHSP in 2004 came from seven denominations, including Brethren in Christ; Church of God, Anderson, Indiana; Church of the Nazarene; Evangelical Friends Church, Southwest; Free Methodist Church; Salvation Army; and Shield of Faith. Most participants came from traditional Wesleyan and Holiness denominations, with the addition of representatives from the Evangelical Friends Church, Southwest, and the Shield of Faith, a Holiness Pentecostal denomination. Eventually more than ten denominations participated in the work of the WHSP, representing Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions.

One of the goals of the Wesleyan Holiness Study Project was the writing of a short document, which would describe the nature and relevance of holiness for the twenty-first century. The document was completed and called “The Holiness Manifesto.” (The full text of the Holiness Manifesto is written below.) Participants in the WHSP were well aware that their views reflect the limitations of their North American context. Although a great deal of denominational diversity was present, there was not as much gender and ethnic diversity as desired, though such diversity was present in the WHSP.

The Holiness Manifesto is divided into three sections: *The Crisis We Face*; *The Message We Have*; and *The Action We Take*. It was hoped that the document would function like a manifesto, publicly challenging people with the biblical emphasis upon holiness, and making it as accessible and persuasive as possible to a broad readership for people today. Let me present the Holiness Manifesto (written in italics).



## The Holiness Manifesto<sup>14</sup>

### *The Crisis We Face*

*There has never been a time in greater need of a compelling articulation of the message of holiness. Pastors and church leaders at every level of the church have come to new heights of frustration in seeking ways to revitalize their congregations and denominations. What we are doing is not working. Membership in churches of all traditions has flat-lined. In many cases, churches are declining. We are not even keeping pace with the biological growth rate in North America. The power and health of churches has also been drained by the incessant search for a better method, a more effective fad, a newer and bigger program to yield growth. In the process of trying to lead growing, vibrant churches, our people have become largely ineffective and fallen prey to a generic Christianity that results in congregations that are indistinguishable from the culture around them. Churches need a clear, compelling message that will replace the 'holy grail' of methods as the focus of our mission.*

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<sup>14</sup> The 'Holiness Manifesto' was written by participants in the Wesleyan Holiness Study Project (2004-2006), and it was completed at Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California, February 2006. This document is the most up-to-date version, and it will be published in an anthology titled *The Holiness Manifesto*, edited by Kevin Mannoia and Don Thorsen. An early version of the 'Holiness Manifesto' can be found on the Holiness and Unity website <[http://holinessandunity.org/fs/fileadmin/hau/text/Holiness\\_Manifesto\\_Feb\\_2006.pdf](http://holinessandunity.org/fs/fileadmin/hau/text/Holiness_Manifesto_Feb_2006.pdf)>.

*Many church leaders have become hostages to the success mentality of numeric and programmatic influence. They have become so concerned about 'how' they do church that they have neglected the weightier matter of 'what' the church declares. We have inundated the 'market' with methodological efforts to grow the church. In the process, many of our leaders have lost the ability to lead. They cannot lead because they have no compelling message to give, no compelling vision of God, no transformational understanding of God's otherness. They know it and long to find the centering power of a message that makes a difference. Now more than ever, they long to soak up a deep understanding of God's call to holiness—transformed living. They want a mission. They want a message!*

*People all around are looking for a future without possessing a spiritual memory. They beg for a generous and integrative word from Christians that makes sense and makes a difference. If God is going to be relevant to people, we have a responsibility to make it clear to them. We have to shed our obsession with cumbersome language, awkward expectations, and intransigent patterns. What is the core, the center, the essence of God's call? That is our message, and that is our mission!*

*People in churches are tired of our petty lines of demarcation that artificially create compartments, denominations, and divisions. They are tired of building institutions. They long for a clear, articulate message that transcends institutionalism and in-fighting among followers of Jesus Christ. They are embarrassed by the corporate mentality of churches that defend parts of the gospel as if it were their own. They want to know the unifying power of God that transforms. They want to see the awesomeness of God's holiness that compels us to oneness in which there is a testimony of power. They accept the fact that not all of us will look alike; there will be diversity. But they want to know that churches and leaders believe that we are one—bound by the holy character of God who gives us all life and love. They want a message that is unifying. The only message that can do that comes from the nature of God, who is unity in diversity.*

*Therefore, in this critical time, we set forth for the church's well being a fresh focus on holiness. In our view, this focus is the heart of scripture concerning Christian existence for all times—and clearly for our time.*

### ***The Message We Have***

*God is holy and calls us to be a holy people.*

*God, who is holy, has abundant and steadfast love for us. God's holy love is revealed to us in the life and teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. God continues to work, giving life, hope and salvation through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, drawing us into God's own holy, loving life. God transforms us, delivering us from sin, idolatry, bondage, and self-centeredness to love and serve God, others, and to be stewards of creation. Thus, we are renewed in the image of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.*

*Apart from God, no one is holy. Holy people are set apart for God's purpose in the world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, holy people live and love like Jesus Christ. Holiness is both gift and response, renewing and transforming, personal and communal, ethical and missional. The holy people of God follow Jesus Christ in engaging all the cultures of the world and drawing all peoples to God.*

*Holy people are not legalistic or judgmental. They do not pursue an exclusive, private state of being better than others. Holiness is not flawlessness but the fulfillment of God's intention for us. The pursuit of holiness can never cease because love can never be exhausted.*

*God wants us to be, think, speak, and act in the world in a Christ-like manner. We invite all to embrace God's call to:*

- *be filled with all the fullness of God in Jesus Christ—Holy Spirit-endowed co-workers for the reign of God;*

- *live lives that are devout, pure, and reconciled, thereby being Jesus Christ's agents of transformation in the world;*
- *live as a faithful covenant people, building accountable community, growing up into Jesus Christ, embodying the spirit of God's law in holy love;*
- *exercise for the common good an effective array of ministries and callings, according to the diversity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit;*
- *practice compassionate ministries, solidarity with the poor, advocacy for equality, justice, reconciliation, and peace; and*
- *care for the earth, God's gift in trust to us, working in faith, hope, and confidence for the healing and care of all creation.*

*By the grace of God, let us covenant together to be a holy people.*

### ***The Action We Take***

*May this call impel us to rise to this biblical vision of Christian mission:*

- *Preach the transforming message of holiness;*
- *Teach the principles of Christ-like love and forgiveness;*
- *Embody lives that reflect Jesus Christ;*
- *Lead in engaging with the cultures of the world; and*
- *Partner with others to multiply its effect for the reconciliation of all things.*

*For this we live and labor to the glory of God.*

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there is often a tension between theory and practice, when it comes to the topic of holiness. On the one hand, our actions and our lives do not always live up to what we believe about holiness; and on the other hand, our beliefs do not always correspond to how we live our lives. This tension may be inescapable, as long as we live on earth, bound by the limitations of sin and finite human existence. However, it behooves us as Christians to be as consistent as possible. This is especially true in the context of postmodern culture. People influenced by postmodernism are as unimpressed by the claims of Christianity as they are unimpressed by the claims of modernism. Christians need to be attuned to the particularities of their cultural context, if they want to be relevant and winning in proclaiming their beliefs, values, and practices. The need for contextual relevance is also true for Christians' promotion of the holiness to which God calls people, and the Holiness Manifesto represents one attempt to address the questions and concerns of postmodern culture.

How should we then live? For starters, the Holiness Manifesto provides a contemporary statement of holiness that does justice to the biblical and historic foundations of the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions. In this regard, there is concern not only for the sin that thwarts people. There is also concern for the ignorance that prevents people from understanding the holistic, therapeutic nature of holiness; there is concern that holiness impact people (1) collectively as well as individually; (2) socially, politically, and economically as well as spiritually; and (3) environmentally as well as humanly. Finally, Holiness Manifesto encourages people to take action—to utilize their God-given freedom to choose to make a difference, following Jesus Christ as the role model of holiness, facilitated by the gracious leading and power of the Holy Spirit.