

The Holiness Manifesto: An Ecumenical Document

By Don Thorsen¹

The ‘Holiness Manifesto’ is a document written by church leaders and scholars from the Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions. It summarizes the heart of Christian holiness beliefs, values, and practices, relevant to the twenty-first century. Holiness, of course, is not a new topic; it is as old as the Bible. Yet, holiness is not always a theme to which Christians are drawn for various reasons.

Authors of the Holiness Manifesto intend that it become a clarion call to the kind of salvation and lifestyle to which God calls all Christians. The terminology is not commonly used these days, but it is believed that holiness encapsulates the totality of God’s nature as well as biblical emphases upon Christian beliefs, values, and practices. As such, it serves as a unifying or ecumenical document both for Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions, and for other Christians, churches, and denominations. *Although the pursuit of Christian unity is an ongoing process, the Holiness Manifesto serves to unite disparate church and theological traditions as well as to promote the biblical emphasis upon the holiness of God and God’s call for Christians to be holy.*

I want to begin by talking about the creation of the Holiness Manifesto through the Wesleyan Holiness Study Project. I will continue by talking about the ecumenical dynamic that is growing among Christians and churches from the Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions. Finally, I want to talk about the potential of the Holiness Manifesto for promoting unity and cooperation among all Christians, churches, and denominations in affirming God’s holiness and the fullness of holiness that God provides for people.

Wesleyan Holiness Study Project

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 three-year period (2004-2006). Denominations would send up to three representatives, including administrators, scholars, and pastors to participate in the study. Representatives at the initial meeting of the WHSP in 2004 came from the following denominations:

- Brethren in Christ
- Church of God, Anderson, Indiana
- Church of the Nazarene

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- Evangelical Friends Church
- Free Methodist Church
- Salvation Army
- Shield of Faith
- Wesleyan Church Don, the Wesleyans never formally supported it. Keith Reeves was there at my invitation. To this day they do not formally endorse or support the effort.

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. Although a variety of outcomes were considered by a planning committee before the WHSP began, the project participants largely determined the goals and work they undertook. The planning committee included David Bundy, Don Dayton, Lisa Dorsey, Bill Kostlevy, Kevin Mannoia (Chair), and Don Thorsen.

One of the more creative goals was the writing of a short document, which would summarize the WHSP's view of holiness in order to distill its relevance for the twenty-first century. Among several assignments participants gave to themselves, one was ~~them~~ to write short descriptions of holiness to be share the following year. In 2005, half a dozen descriptions were written, discussed, and summarized by the WHSP. Their work became the foundation of the eventual writing of the Holiness Manifesto.

Another goal of the WHSP was to invite additional participants, including those from denominations that promoted holiness or had historic ties with the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions. The denominations that participated at subsequent meetings of the WHSP include the following:

- Christian and Missionary Alliance
- Church of God in Christ
- International Church of the Foursquare Gospel
- International Pentecostal Holiness Church

Noteworthy were a growing number of Pentecostal churches, who identified with holiness as an emphasis in their beliefs, values, and practices. The United Methodist Church sent an official observer to the WHSP, who participated in the study. Thus, a wide variety of voices were heard over the three years, voices that were heard, understood, and incorporated into the goals and work of the WHSP.

The summary document created by the WHSP was the Holiness Manifesto. It drew upon bits and pieces of the short descriptions written by participants. However, the majority of it was written by more than forty participants in the WHSP. Modifications were written over the last two years of the study project, and they included input from dozens of local pastors, district superintendents, and others. However, pastors were especially invited in order to help them understand the message of holiness and its power in engaging and transforming individuals, churches, and communities.

Immediately following the second and third gatherings of the WHSP (2005-2006), Mannoia organized a minister's conference called 'Holiness in the Twenty-first Century'. At the minister's conferences, participants heard from numerous speakers and forums from denominations. Speakers from outside representative denominations were also invited to speak on the message of holiness, including Robert Schuller and George Barna. All the participants were in-

vited to read, discuss, and offer comments on the Holiness Manifesto. Such input helped make the document more understandable and relevant to a wide audience—one that reached out to everyone in the twenty-first century.

The full text of the Holiness Manifesto follows. It is not a finished document; its work needs to continue in order to communicate holiness effectively to different peoples, places, and times. 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. There certainly were not representatives from outside North America. Perhaps such representation can occur in the future.

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 as possible to a broad readership.

The Holiness Manifesto²

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.

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!

² 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>.

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.

Ecumenical Dynamic

Although the overarching emphasis of the WHSP is on holiness, there is an underlying emphasis upon unity. The desire for unity among Christians and churches traces back to Jesus' prayer for his followers (John 17:2). Subsequent attempts to bring about visible unity have been thought to be at the core of ecumenism (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-20). The ecumenical dynamic of bringing Christians together represents an equally powerful contribution of the WHSP, though ecumenism may not have been the reason motivating those involved. Unity has been a high value for Mannoia in his various ministries as pastor, superintendent, and bishop of the Free Methodist Church, and later as President of the National Association of Evangelicals. His commitment to unity carried through in his organization of Wesleyan and Holiness denominational leaders, and eventually he was able to enfold Pentecostals as well. The WHSP succeeded, practically speaking, in successfully promoting ecumenical participation by the various individuals, church-

es, and denominations in addition to participation that reconceived and promoted biblical holiness.

After the first gathering of the WHSP in 2003, Mannoia worked with John Schaub to set up a website that published many of the writings of the study. It was entitled 'Holiness & Unity' at HolinessAndUnity.org <holinessandunity.org>. Initially, the website contained papers presented at the annual gatherings of the WHSP. It also contained summaries of the WHSP, occasional newsletters, and other writings that promote holiness. Eventually, the website included the Holiness Manifesto, including translations of it in Chinese, Korean, and Spanish. Also included in it are news releases, videos, and a monthly article and discussion.

At the time, the WHSP represented one of the most effective ecumenical activities of the historic Wesleyan and Holiness denominations. The respective denominations committed people, administrative priority, and finances to its success. Results of the WHSP continue to influence on behalf of ecumenism. Soon a book will be published, edited by Mannoia and Thorsen, that contains the Holiness Manifesto along with chapters that contain papers written by participants in the WHSP or by others inspired by the emphasis on biblical holiness. They include:

- Jim Adams, Church of the Foursquare
- David Bundy, United Methodist Church
- Jon Huntzinger, Church of the Foursquare
- Cheryl Bridges Johns, Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee
- David Kendall, Free Methodist Church
- Bill Kostlevy, Church of the Brethren
- Diane LeClerc, Church of the Nazarene
- James Earl Massey, Church of God, Anderson, Indiana
- George McKinney, Church of God in Christ
- Jonathan Raymond, Salvation Army
- Steven Schell, Church of the Foursquare
- Howard Snyder, Free Methodist Church
- Ken Waters, United Methodist Church

Noteworthy is the diversity of denominations represented by the various authors.³ It includes historic Wesleyan and Holiness denominations, but much more are included. There are several Pentecostal authors, who help to broaden our understanding of the full holiness family of Christians. United Methodist authors are also included, reflecting the earliest roots of the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions.

A significant ecumenical event took place in the Fall of 2006, a half year after the third meeting of the WHSP. The Wesleyan Holiness Consortium was created, spearheaded by Mannoia's emphasis on holiness. Consider the following news release:

Top leaders from eight denominations met for a one day gathering to discuss the need for a coordinated and unified effort among them surrounding their common heritage and commitment to the Holiness message. The outcome of the gathering was the creation of

³ There are also plans to include an appendix that contains initial statements on holiness written by Don Dayton (Wesleyan Church), Lisa Dorsey (Shield of Faith), Craig Keen (Church of the Nazarene), Tom Noble (Church of the Nazarene), Keith Reeves (Wesleyan Church), and Lyn Thrush (Brethren in Christ).

the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium. The Consortium will be working cooperatively to multiply efforts already started and piloted in the Southern California area among these churches over the past three years.⁴

Some of the expected denominations participated in this event, and some did not. It includes seven Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal denominations, and it includes a denomination never before associated with holiness:

- Brethren in Christ
- Christian & Missionary Alliance
- Church of God, Anderson, Indiana
- Church of God in Christ
- Church of the Nazarene
- Free Methodist Church
- Salvation Army
- Wesleyan Church

The Wesleyan Holiness Consortium (WHC) represents dramatic evidence of cooperation among a growing number of denominations. In addition to annual meetings scheduled for the WHC, there are a number of other cooperative efforts planned around the country in the hope of expanding the growing interest in relevant articulation of the holiness message to other regions, nations, and continents. For example:

1. The Wesleyan Holiness Study Project will continue as a means to provide ongoing theological dialogue among the churches regarding the message of holiness;
2. A Wesleyan Holiness Young Leaders Hangout in August of 2007, in Dallas to glean input and engagement of the young generation of leaders in carrying the holiness message forward in the new century; and
3. A Wesleyan Holiness Pastors' Day will be developed in a second city to replicate the already successful Pastors' Day conducted in Southern California over the two previous years.⁵

In time, the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium may function as a replacement for the near non-operational Christian Holiness Partnership (CHP). The CHP has a long and distinguished history, going back to its founding in 1867 as the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, holiness denominations grew up alongside this ecumenical organization, which became known as the Christian Holiness Association (CHA). The CHA changed its name in 1997 to the CHP, but its effectiveness in unifying denominations waned. Today it no longer meets. It remains to be seen whether the WHC fills the void left by the CHP. Regardless there continues to be interest in unity among

⁴ "Wesleyan Holiness Consortium Is Created," Holiness & Unity home page, HolinessAndUnity.org, accessed 9 February 2007 <<http://holinessandunity.org/fs/index.php?id=1254>>.

⁵ Ibid.

Christians as well as holiness, and the two may create an ecumenical dynamic seldom seen among Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal denominations.

There are, of course, always questions and concerns about efforts to unite Christians in cooperative ministries, if not actual church mergers. Ecumenism, after all, occurs in many shapes and forms. For example, the WHC and CHP are not exactly alike, and people rightly care about how the two can and should relate to one another. Other questions and concerns have to do with increasing unity among Wesleyan and Holiness denominations, on the one hand, and Pentecostal denominations, on the other hand. Despite the family resemblance they all share in terms of shared beliefs, values, and practices related to holiness, they have not historically cooperated much together. It remains to be seen whether they can cooperate here and now through the WHC.

Promoting Unity and Cooperation

An amazing amount of ecumenical cooperation has occurred in response to the WHSP and the leadership of Mannoia, in general, and to the Holiness Manifesto, in particular. It remains to be seen just how far its influence will reach in terms of developing unity and cooperation among Christians, churches, and denominations that lasts. Ecumenism, like so many other Christian beliefs, values, and practices, is already present, and yet not complete.

Frankly, there already appear cracks in the tenuous strands of ecumenism. It is hoped that the WHSP will continue, enjoying the priority and financial support offered by denominations in the past. However, some of the denominations are pulling back in their support. Another gathering of the WHSP is scheduled in March 2007. Participants then will have to assess its long-term goals as well as viability. The practicalities of life, for example, the prioritization of finances, sometimes prohibit individuals, churches, and denominations from participating as much as they want, no matter how great the cause.

Despite obstacles that may arise, holiness—its study and promotion—has already proved itself to be more vibrant and inspiring of ecumenical cooperation than most imagined for quite some time. Even those in the historic Wesleyan and Holiness traditions have been surprised at the responsiveness of pastors and laity to a renewed emphasis on holiness. After all, does it not seem self-evident that holiness is *passé*? Certainly it is not like the ‘old time religion’ or ‘old time holiness’ preaching and teaching of the past. Perhaps the words, conceptions, and means of communicating holiness became outdated, even though biblical holiness has not.

The intent behind the Holiness Manifesto was to reconceive and promote biblical holiness in the twenty-first century. So far, so good. Will holiness still ‘sell in Peoria’? Will it sell, so to speak, to people in urban centers? ethnically diverse populations? and so-called post-moderns? We shall see. However, if holiness is thought to be at the core of God’s nature and of what God wants for people—to be holy as God is holy⁶—then its message is timeless. It will never become irrelevant or trite in its essence; it will only become so in its communication by Christians through what they do and live as well as by what they say. Thus, the Holiness Manifesto is timely in order to reorient Christians toward biblical holiness in the holistic way the document presents it.

⁶ For example, see Leviticus 11:44-45; Matthew 5:48; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:16.

Ironically, potentialities in something are not always found (or remembered best) by those closest to the potentialities. Instead, it sometimes takes outsiders to notice, appreciate, and remind us of the message we have. This is true of holiness. Although those of us within the historic parameters of the Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions may consider ourselves the keepers of biblical holiness, we can be enriched by listening to what others have to say about the holiness we cherish and stumblingly try to promote. In particular, we may not always notice the potential biblical holiness has for promoting unity and cooperation within historic denominations as well as ecumenical dynamics with those outside our traditions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me offer three ‘points of light’ with regard to the ecumenical potential holiness has, which is embodied in the words of the Holiness Manifesto. By points of light I mean insights about the importance of holiness recognized by people outside the historic manifestations of the Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions. Let me summarize them with the words: spirituality, ecumenism, and worship.

Spirituality

The first point of light pertains to the longstanding desire on the part of people to be holistic, to find the right balance, to find the *via media*—the middle way—of biblical beliefs, values, and practices. Aristotle tried to find the ‘mean’ between extremes, what philosophers since the time of Aristotle call the ‘golden mean’; Anglicans after the Continental Reformation wanted to find the *via media* between the excesses of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism; and for decades, New Age aficionados have sought after anything holistic—foods, clothes, crystals, and drugs. Not surprisingly, it has been Christians all the while who have had access to the holiness—the wholeness and completeness—which only comes from God, which is available to people through faith, repentance, and obedience.

Ironically, it has not always been historic Wesleyan and Holiness traditions that have promoted interest in holiness as much as it has been the recent preoccupation with spirituality, especially Christian spirituality. Promoters of spirituality such as Richard Foster and Dallas Willard have pointed out time and time again that it is Wesleyan and the Holiness traditions that epitomize the kind of biblical holiness that appeared throughout church history, regardless of whether it appeared in the east or west, Catholic or Protestant, mainline or evangelical. The recognition and respect of the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions outside those traditions sometimes exceeds the recognition and respect those in the Wesleyan and Holiness traditions have for themselves.

Ecumenism

A second point of light, where the value of holiness is recognized, is in ecumenical groups around the country. For example, the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches has long recognized, valued, and incorporated members of the Wesleyan

Theological Society as representatives of holiness-oriented churches that are Wesleyan and evangelical. Such representation is not required by the NCC, but it is wanted.

Much of the value in Faith and Order, admittedly, came as a result of the decades of ecumenical work done by Don Dayton. Dayton and others pioneered ecumenical involvements on behalf of the Wesleyan Theological Society, which in turn served as a kind of ecumenical leaven that has nourished the Society more than by denominations represented in it. Mannoia also helped to promote the Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions in the ecumenical movement, broadly conceived, through his work in the National Association of Evangelicals. Thus, the Holiness Manifesto serves as a persuasive as well as up-to-date presentation of holiness as understood in holiness-oriented denominations, which make them more noticeable and applicable to the larger Christian world.

Worship

A third and final point of light, where the value of holiness is recognized, is in contemporary ways that worship is publicly undertaken in churches today. Although a variety of worship styles persist in churches, the growing freestyle of worship in churches reflects a remarkable interest in and concern for holiness. Consider the words of popular Christian choruses:

Holiness, holiness is what I long for
Holiness is what I need
Holiness, holiness is what You want for me, for me⁷

Other contemporary choruses can easily be added to this one. One might think that contemporary worship choruses would not have such words, if holiness seems so out-of-date. It is not!

The remarkable thing is that holiness—biblical holiness—is not out-of-date. On the contrary, it is up-to-date and needed more than ever by Christians and by churches, locally and denominationally. As the Holiness Manifesto seeks to make holiness understandable and relevant to people today, it also seeks to unite Christians in their promotion of holiness.

⁷ Michael Stampley, "Take My Life," *Unknown*, Lyrics and Songs website
<<http://www.lyricsandsongs.com/song/554705.html>> accessed 24 February 2007.