



HOLINESS MOVEMENT

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(Dictionary of Christian Spirituality. Glen Scorgie, General Editor. Zondervan. 2011.)

The holiness movement describes a spiritual current within the 19th and early 20th century church emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit in the experience of sanctification as well as social engagement. Attaining heart purity and the filling of the Holy Spirit were prominent themes within the movement. Influence from a variety of sources includes the protestant reformation with its emphasis on individual faith, 17th century pietism, the Roman Catholic emphasis on community faith, and a unique Wesleyan interpretation of the Eastern Orthodox concept of theosis.

The most direct influence resulted from the 18th century Methodist revival. John Wesley's publication of *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1777) represents a standard reference point for the holiness movement. Terms such as entire sanctification, Christian perfection, holiness, and infilling of the Spirit became common in the movement as adherents sought a deeper, inner work of purification in living the holy life.

The holiness movement became clearly defined within the broader church spectrum during the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening with its emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit and entire sanctification. It represented a strong ecumenical dimension in early years. Although largely driven by American Methodists many non-Methodists contributed to the holiness movement. Presbyterian William Boardman promoted holiness through his evangelistic campaigns and book *The Higher Christian*

Life (1858). Asa Mahan, of Oberlin College, and evangelist Charles Finney also promoted holiness as a result of their own personal experiences. Mahan testifies to a baptism of the Holy Spirit in which he was cleansed from the inclination to sin – a phrase reminiscent of Charles Wesley's "bent to sinning."

An early reference point for the holiness movement is the Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness begun in New York City by Sarah Lankford and her sister Phoebe Palmer in 1836. The emphasis focused on being wholly devoted to God and experiencing a subsequent inner transformation by eradication of the carnal nature. Mrs. Palmer published *The Way of Holiness* (1854) which became a foundational book for the holiness movement by providing an experiential description of how to live a life free from sin and have entire sanctification.

The early emphasis on inner cleansing through the filling of the Spirit was integrated with social concern during the social upheavals of the 19th century. This integration of social and personal transformation gave the movement a prophetic dimension especially related to national issues as well as freedom of worship, heart purity, and sanctification.

The perceived narrowness of early 20th century voices championing sola scriptura served as a contrasting force motivating the holiness movement to emphasize right living as well as right belief. The resulting effect placed it at odds with Fundamentalism in appealing to multiple sources of truth, embracing a broad diversity of views on eschatology, and believing that the church could make a difference in society before the return of Christ. This motivated active social engagement on behalf of the poor as well as aggressive missionary efforts.

Late in the 19th century a pentecostal emphasis became noticeable in camp meetings where people were invited to come out of worldliness in living a holy life. The first of these convened in 1867 led by Methodist ministers. The second camp meeting was called a Pentecost. Later, holiness preacher William Seymour emphasized this pentecostal experience in his Los Angeles church. A revival there in 1906 drew other holiness preachers like C.H. Mason. Though criticized for its emphasis on demonstrable gifts, this largely interracial revival, known as the Azusa Street Revival, birthed the Pentecostal Movement which quickly splintered along racial lines as well as leaving the holiness movement with Pentecostal and Revivalist branches. The Pentecostal movement, with its heavy emphasis on gifts, especially tongues as a confirmation of the gift of the Holy Spirit, quickly became more isolated from the Revivalist branch. The Historic Holiness groups expelled or distanced themselves from the Pentecostals as too extreme and without substance and order.

The holiness movement was characterized by salvation through grace, instantaneous sanctification and infilling of the Holy Spirit, revivalism, and living a holy life. These emphases became codified in behavioral expectations of the many denominations birthed in the late 19th century. Disputes arose regarding the nature of sanctification. Specifically, the question of sanctification as an instantaneous attainment as a second work of grace subsequent to regeneration, or an ongoing process of appropriating grace has fueled continuing debates. Consistent with the roots of the movement, early support for civil rights in the mid 20th century continued although not as real as rhetorical.

The holiness movement was forged on basic commitments to heart purity, social concern, women's ordination, creation care, racial equity, economic relief, and liberal arts education. These remain central concerns for the churches and organizations which the movement spawned.

Churches birthed in the holiness movement and the subsequent rise of Pentecostalism from it, represent significant impact on global Christian influence and continue to represent fast growing segments of the Church worldwide.

Further Reading: M. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, (2006); W. Kostlevy, *Historical Dictionary of the Holiness Movement*, (2001).

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