

# SOCIAL HOLINESS

## Journey, Exposures, Encounters

Jonathan S. Raymond

Every faith community is faced from time to time with the challenge of rethinking, reformulating, and re-articulating its core beliefs, values, and practices. This is not easy work, but it is essential for any and all faith communities who desire that each generation respond to new, contemporary circumstances, challenges, and opportunities. Wesleyan holiness faith communities face this challenge now with the passing to a next generation an understanding and articulation of a doctrine of holiness.

The present day status of holiness is a far departure from our past. We are challenged because so many Christians today pay such little attention and interest to the idea of holiness anymore. Holiness is rarely taught, preached, or pursued. It is viewed by many Christians in a negative light. This may in part be due to its false identification with perfectionism, legalism, judgmentalism, privitism, and introspection. It is seen as optional and only something for a few saints; as restrictive and repressive summarized by a long list of behavioral prohibitions; as individualistic and unattainable for most being a matter of superhuman striving. It is viewed by many as unimportant. Tragically, what is commonly considered important for Christians is “getting saved” (from sin), going to heaven and in the meanwhile only leading a good, decent life. At best for a few, holiness is seen as a possible mountain top experience attained at special spiritual retreats, not a way of life. Most see holiness as socially irrelevant and not necessary to a life of ministry and mission. The dwindling few who do embrace its importance remain divided in their understanding of its means of attainment, some conceiving of holiness as process (growth in grace) and others as crisis (a cleansing, second work of grace). For the majority, a great shroud of apathy cloaks and hides the idea of holiness as a viable, available, and necessary reality of the Christian faith journey.

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## The Idea of Holiness

Historically, the pursuit of holiness has been the center piece and orienting principle of Wesleyan Holiness faith communities. “Be holy as I am holy” echoes in our collective heart and mind as a people who like Israel are by our own choice “set apart” for God. The foundation of our understanding and vision of holiness remains scriptural. Holiness and related terms appear in Scripture of 1,000 times (800 in the Old Testament; 300 in the New Testament). In both the Old and New Testament, holiness is the quality of God’s character that the people of God are to evidence in their lives as they are one in spirit with God being filled with the Holy Spirit. For this reason, our understanding of holiness does not place us on the fringe of Christian belief as obscure sects holding strange idea. Rather, we are in the mainstream of Christian orthodoxy. At the very core of Scripture’s portrayal of God and his church, we find the idea of holiness.

Holiness is not an option. We may like to think it is, and many live like it is. Many who treat holiness as such may do so because they think it is an individual, private matter. They may hope that the Lord might do a work of holiness in the other person, but otherwise leave them alone. They hope the Lord will do a work especially on those whose behaviors are found to be particularly bothersome, obnoxious, or disagreeable. However, in our theological orthodoxy, we know that holiness is for everyone, at all times, everywhere and as such it is not only a private matter. Holiness is very much a social matter. Its expressions are always worked out in the faithful fabric of social life in the community of believers and in the larger world.

In more traditional language, holiness is a major part of the *ordo salutis*, the way of salvation. Here we understand salvation to be a big idea. It is not restricted to merely that forensic point in time when we come to faith, accepting Jesus Christ into our hearts as Savior, repenting of our sins, and receiving God’s forgiveness of our sins. Rather it is also that ongoing therapeutic work of God by his prevenient grace, by which we are being restored to the likeness of Jesus Christ. We sing about the *ordo salutis* when we sing “Jesus is mighty to save . . . from the uttermost to the uttermost.” God commands us to “Be holy . . .” It is our natural course of development in the presence of a holy God. We are predestined to holiness. It has always been and remains our destiny. It is a fulfilled destiny and identity to the extent that we are faithful to the words of Jesus Christ in John 15 when he repeatedly says “Abide in me.” In our Lord’s great imagination, he created us in his image. Though the glory of his image in us was marred and stained through

the Fall, still God's plan and intention is to restore us to that which he imagined from the very beginning, that we would be like Jesus through exposures to his grace, and to life changing encounters by which we are filled with God's Holy Spirit, his very self.<sup>1</sup>

## The Great Divide

The doctrine of holiness is historically the central doctrine of my own, relatively young denomination, The Salvation Army. It is "the doctrine with which we most clearly identify ourselves as a people of God with something important to say to the wider Christian church."<sup>2</sup> In his address to the Christian Mission (the forerunner of The Salvation Army) in 1877, William Booth made this clear when he said "Holiness to the Lord is to us a fundamental truth; it stands at the forefront of our doctrines."<sup>3</sup> Ever since, The Salvation Army has been an active participant and partner in the holiness movement. Salvationists have long filled the pulpits of the movement and preached Scriptural holiness. A legacy of literature has long existed written by Salvationist authors including Samuel Logan Brengle, Frederick Coutts, Milton Agnew, and Edward Read.<sup>4</sup> More recently, contemporary Salvationist authors, including Donald Burke, David Rightmire, Wayne Pritchett, William Francis, Phil Needham, and Shaw Clifton, are paying scholarly attention to the topic of holiness.<sup>5</sup> While most salvationist authors make reference in their writings to John Wesley, and some far more than others, there remains in Salvationist holiness literature a significant lack of accord on the nature of holiness. In large part we fall into three camps: first – the Brengle camp of holiness as crisis and second work of grace; second – the Coutts camp of holiness as growth in grace; and third – the largest camp of apathy where holiness is not an issue. We will put this third camp aside for the purpose of this discussion.

### **Brengle Holiness**

Commissioner Samuel Logan Brengle understood, preached, and wrote of holiness as a special, distinct second work of grace whereby after God pardons, he then may purify. After saving, he may sanctify. His metaphor of salvation is that of a bridge with two great abutments – forgiveness of sins and purifying of the heart. Both are acts of grace by faith and not received through works. According to Brengle –

"Holiness, for you and for me, is not maturity, but purity: a clean heart in which the Holy Spirit dwells, filling it with pure, tender, and constant love to God and man."<sup>6</sup>

Brengle holiness, then, would embrace an understanding of holiness consistent with the Psalmist who wrote “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” In Brengle, holiness, entire sanctification is God’s great gift given in response to complete, total consecration as a deliberate act of the will resulting in a cleansed heart fit to be a vessel for God’s perfect love. As such it is a second blessing, the first being forgiveness of sins. A contemporary proponent of Brengle holiness may be found in Shaw Clifton as reflected in his book – *Who Are These Salvationist?*<sup>7</sup> Here Clifton makes a clear separation of the two works of grace calling justification by faith and forgiveness of sins “salvation” as distinct from a second work of “sanctification.” A clear, concise, and thorough treatment of Brengle holiness may be found in the writings of David Rightmire.<sup>8</sup> The Salvation Army’s former though recent international leader, John Gowans, reflect the Army’s emerging ambivalence with a Brengle holiness when he said that “God invented The Salvation Army to save souls, grow saints, and serve suffering humanity.” While this reflects a distinct separation of a forensic salvation from holiness, his expression may move The Salvation Army away from identifying with a Brengle view of holiness toward a perspective more in line with Coutts holiness.

### **Coutts Holiness**

The eighth general of The Salvation Army offers us a very different view of holiness. For Coutts, holiness is growth in Christ-likeness. Coutts kept a strong emphasis on the idea of the Holy as grounded in the Jesus of the gospels, not only in Christ’s teachings, but especially in his example. Brengle’s writings emphasize holiness as a crisis experience leading to a purity of heart. Coutts’s holiness writings emphasize a progressive experience of maturity in Christ and to his likeness. In one of his books, *Call to Holiness*, Coutts intended to bring balance to Brengle’s view of a second blessing crisis of sanctification by giving an equal stress on the process of becoming more and more like Christ over time. In Coutts’s thinking, then, the holy life evidences over time the emergence of love, joy, peace, and other fruit of the Spirit that define Christ-likeness.<sup>9</sup>

While both Brengle and Coutts emphasized holiness as “Christ in you” and while both underscored the importance of experience and the role of the will, Coutts’s distinctiveness lies in his emphasis on an ongoing, growing relationship, communion, and fellowship in Christ, and not just a single crisis experience.

### **Crisis or Process**

So which is it? Crisis or process? Who is more right? Brengle or Coutts? Which interpretation will guide the thinking and practice of The Salvation Army and other Wesleyan Holiness faith communities in the future? Is holiness a matter of purity or maturity? We need be guided by more than the advice of that famous theologian, Yogi Berra, who said, “When you come to a fork in the road, take it!”

The central criticism of Brengle holiness is that there are saints who do not testify to experiencing holiness as a crisis experience. There are legions of frustrated saints over time that do testify to seeking a crisis experience, but remain frustrated. And there are those who do testify to a crisis experience, but not a lasting one. There are others, and I am one of them, that give witness to more than one encounter experience in holiness, and not necessarily always a crisis. The criticism of Coutts holiness, and I believe an unfair one, is that it ignores the possibility of a Damascus Road or Pentecost experience for every believer.

The portrayals and criticisms of Brengle’s and Coutts’s positions are often more extreme than warranted. There may be those among us who out-Brengle Brengle and out –Coutts Coutts expressing their positions in the extreme and ignoring that there is an appreciation in Brengle’s writings for process and in Coutts’s writings for crisis. Coutts, for example, very clearly espouses both a crisis and process perspective in his *Call to Holiness* when he says –

“In making holiness my aim on earth, a further truth has to be kept in mind. The question is sometimes debated whether the experience of holiness is gained instantly or gradually. The answer is that the life of holiness is both a crisis and a process . . . They are two sides of a coin. You can not have one without the other.”<sup>10</sup>

Coutts goes on to describe a developmental structure of the ongoing holiness experience:

“First, there must be a beginning. There arises an awareness of personal need, which draws a man in to an act of full surrender. The forgiven soul awakes to the truth that forgiveness is not enough . . . The life that is wholly forgiven must be wholly possessed. And to be fully possessed

requires a full surrender. . . I am bringing empty hands. I am bringing an empty life. God's answer is to grant me of his Spirit according to my capacity to receive. But the capacity grows with receiving . . . A full surrender is the beginning of the life of holy living; the end of the experience I do not – I can not see. – The Experience can neither be explained nor lived without crisis and process.”<sup>11</sup>

In many ways, Coutts's remarks parallel John Wesley's position at the end of his life wherein he speaks more and more about the process of growing in grace and holiness than he did in earlier years. The also remind us of a story told by E. Stanley Jones in his book *The Word Become Flesh* wherein he comments on “pitcher plants” in the South American *selva (jungle)*.<sup>12</sup> The plants have no root systems, yet as it rains, the plants face upward and fill-up with rainwater. . . up to the brim. The rain they encounter and retain helps them to grow. The more rain they encounter, the more they grow. In the ecology of the rain forest, the rain comes down and fills the plants, and the plants continue to grow according to God's divine design. The plants represent a wonderful ecological and developmental metaphor for our understanding of holiness as God seeks to establish us in the Kingdom, and as we seek to find some resolution between Brengle and Coutts regarding crisis and process, purity and maturity.

## The Ecology of Holiness

When the Apostle Paul says “Grow in grace” and uses the little word “in”, we recognize that there is an ecology of grace and holiness. The little word “in” contextualizes holiness as ecological. Ecology is that branch of science that deals with the relationships between organisms and their environment. The key to thinking and speaking ecologically is to acknowledge that every living thing is immersed in a context of environment that has specific characteristics. Our first thoughts about ecology may be of a tadpole in a pristine stream enriched by nutrients and free of toxins, in an ideal environment for growth, survival and reproduction. There is such a stream high in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. When my children and I were younger, we backpacked together, and swam there one afternoon. I have since wondered to what degree we changed the ecology of that stream with our dusty, sweaty bodies as we sought the water's cool comfort after hiking on that hot summer afternoon.

As there are biological ecologies, there are social-spiritual ecologies where individuals are immersed in social-spiritual environments. It is not uncommon for us to be in and out of several

ecologies in one day: for example, home, marriage, work, the supermarket, church, a Bible study and a local community meeting. Among my favorite social ecologies are Christian summer camps. Like the pristine mountain stream teeming with tadpoles, the social-spiritual ecology of Christian summer camps can be nutrient-rich for young people, both campers and staff.. Social ecologies are full of opportunities for growth and development, socially, physically, and spiritually.<sup>13</sup>

However, ecologies can also be toxic. When I was 20 years old, I served on a freighter on the Great Lakes. One evening the ship docked in Cleveland about a half mile up the Cuyahoga River. In 1969 it was a cesspool of industrial waste. A diversity of heavy industry along the river had for years belched the most disgusting and deadly substances into the vaporous, vomitus waters. So polluted was the river that one night a seaman from another ship threw a lit cigarette into the water, and the river caught fire. The fire spread so that a rather large area of the river was a blaze. The flames floated toward Lake Erie, destroying a railroad trestle and doing extensive damage along the way. Today the river is dramatically cleaned-up. Gone are the toxins. A thriving economy of restaurants and tourist sights exists along the banks of the Cuyahoga. This is a marvelous example of ecological restoration.

Several years later, I traveled on business to Korea for the University of Hawai'i. Our gracious Korean hosts took me to a wonderful restaurant in the Korean countryside. It was a famous establishment totally devoted to serving a particularly excellent variety of fish. The chefs strived to cook and serve the fish in wonderful ways. They also raised the fish for its flavor from the day they imported the carefully selected fish eggs from Israel. They established a fish farm placing just the right kind of fish in a nutrient-enriched environment and produced a high quality, tasty fish their restaurant. When Paul says "Grow in grace", he is speaking ecologically. He means for us to mature as we immerse ourselves in nutrient-enriched (appropriate) environments of God's grace, in context of his loving kindness, in his presence, and in our relationships with him and others.

## O Boundless Salvation

The ecology of holiness may be seen in the celebration of God's love in the words of a song by William Booth, "O boundless salvation, deep ocean of love . . ." <sup>14</sup> Booth uses an ecological metaphor of the ocean to speak of God's measureless love. It is powerful imagery that encompasses all the stages of the Christian life as it progresses from beginning to end. As we

stand on the beach, the living waters of God's grace begin to wash up over our feet. We then are confronted with the decision whether to walk deeper into his love, accepting his justifying grace as Saviour and Lord, or to retreat the other way. There is more to the Christian life than seeking to remain ankle deep or even waist deep. There is a boundless salvation and a deep ocean of God's love. There is wading deeper and deeper through reading and meditating upon his Word, by means of a devotional prayer life and through fellowship with other believers. There is a commitment of the whole person as he/she plunges beneath the waters, experiencing God's sanctifying grace as the fullness of God's Holy Spirit in one's life. And there is the joy of swimming, diving, snorkeling, windsurfing and sailing in the deep ocean of God's love, experiencing his glorifying grace.

Booth's song gives us an image of God's love like an ocean available to be experienced by any and all believers. This helps to understand several things about the social ecology of holiness. First, God's intention is that we develop and progress. We move forward in our relationship with Christ and he does a deepening work. Often the work is done in a social/spiritual context of others and always in the context of God's presence. Second, his love is always prevenient. At every stage and every level of our growth and development, his love goes before us. Wave upon wave in ever flowing abundance, he helps us move toward what he has provided – a restoration to his image and likeness. Third, he provides for us a nutrient-enriched (appropriate) environment through “means of grace”, his means of promoting our growth and well-being, often through others. The means of grace include good teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and bread (Acts 2:42), corporate worship, the sacraments, reading and hearing the Word, speaking and hearing testimonies of God's love, confession of sin, fasting, acts of mercy and service to others, artistic expressions, music, moral literature, all the wholesome activities of small group fellowship, and more. A setting that is nutrient-rich (appropriate) in means of grace is an ecology of grace and holiness. It is not difficult to see how the ecology of grace and holiness is social. Samuel Logan Brengle was often heard to echo John Wesley in saying that there is no holiness in the Christian life outside of social holiness. God uses others (home and family, church, work, etc.) to mediate his grace to us. It is the daily emersion in the means of grace that promotes this social ecology of holiness.

We use new language when we say “the social ecology of holiness”, but it really is old imagery. In Jeremiah 13:1-11, God speaks through Jeremiah using an ecological metaphor. To paraphrase, God says to Jeremiah, "Go get a linen belt (no doubt beautifully made and functional) and put it



around your waist and don't get it wet." Jeremiah is obedient. Then after some time God says, "Now take that linen waistband and place it down in the muddy bank of the Euphrates River and leave it there." Jeremiah is obedient. Then after more time God says to Jeremiah, "Now, remember that linen waistband? Go retrieve it from the river bank. See. It is marred, ruined, good-for-nothing. The people of Israel are like this ruined waistband. I intended and desired that, as the waistband clings around your waist, the people of Israel would cling closely to me. Instead they have followed other Gods in the imagination of their minds. I intended them to be so close to me, in my presence, learning from me, growing in my grace so that they would become a people for me – a name, a praise and a glory. But they would not listen!"

The imagery is relational and social ecological. Israel was to be so close to God, in such proximity, that its people would benefit by being in those conditions and become a name (his name), a praise (bringing glory to him) and a people (clearly identified as his). Instead, as a people they placed themselves in the wrong context, under the worst of conditions, in an ecology that was toxic, destructive, and took them away from their destiny and identity. Like the waistband left in the muddy banks of the river for a long time, Israel fell apart immersed in ruinous conditions.

Our lives together represent the threads of a tapestry woven together to be both beautiful and functional for our Lord. We are to be a people who are a name, a praise, and a glory. The one way to be so is to intentionally "Grow in grace", to enter the living waters of God's love, to draw near to God in response to his drawing near to us, and like Brother Lawrence to abide in his presence and to discover the God who is present. In the social ecology of holiness we are to help each other along the way to abide together in Jesus Christ and to be immersed in the ecology of God's grace and holiness.

### **Social Holiness: A Social-Ecological, Developmental Perspective**

In the words of the Apostle Paul, we can explore "a more excellent way" to think about holiness beyond crisis or process, purity or maturity, and beyond an individualistic understanding. Consider this proposition: An enhanced understanding of holiness depends on how well we can hold together and integrate an appreciation for three distinct aspects of holiness:

- 1) The ecological context in which holiness takes place;
- 2) The developmental process in which it unfolds; and
- 3) The events, which give holiness its distinct nature (Christ's character and likeness).

Regarding the ecological process – like the pitcher plant in the rain forest, life does not automatically unfold, nor is it experienced in a vacuum. There is no individual, personal holiness outside of social holiness. Holiness must be grounded in the social context of our relationship with God and others. That is how we are created and re-created in God’s image. God’s very essence is social. It is trinity in unity, in perfect, intimate communion. So our essence is designed to be social, relational, in unity and community. As we understand that there are “three distinct persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” so are we created in God’s image as social beings seeking and enjoying relationships with the trinity and with each other. Like God, we have distinct personalities, yet we are also created to give and receive from the social ecological context of relationship with him and others, and more poignantly with God through others.

John Wesley acquired a good understanding of this last point. He appreciated that God influences, shapes, molds, and continues to do a work on us and in us through others. God employs human agency to continue his re-creation and restoration of us. He works to restore that which he originally intended from the beginning – that we be like him in holiness – in maturity and purity. Human agency is one of his most effective and preferred means of grace. The social context of holiness is our life together as the Body of Christ (communal life together, public prayer and scripture reading, singing, testimonies, preaching, fellowship, service, music, theatre, art, family devotional life, Bible study, etc.). It is life together in worship, work, and in witness. God uses all these means, his means, to increase our awareness of his abiding presence, and to expand our understanding that he is who he is. God uses human agency to communicate his presence and his identity. This was true in Wesley’s day in and through his class meetings, bands, and other forms of small, intimate social groups. It was true in the early church as well.<sup>15</sup>

We read in Acts 2:42 that the church grew as together they continually devoted themselves to participation in a social ecology of grace and holiness. This ecology of holiness is characterized by the means by which God may be experience as present, and the means by which Jesus reveals himself for who he truly is. The four means of grace mentions in Acts 2:42 are:

- 1) Good teaching
- 2) Fellowship
- 3) The breaking of bread, and
- 4) Prayer.

Wesley was clear to say that God's uses an abundance of means by which to bring grace into our lives. Some means are personal and private, while many are public and social. Some are conventionally "sacred" and others found in more secular contexts. Some means of grace, like prayer, help us experience God's presence. Others, like preaching, teaching, public scripture readings, and testimonies help increase our understanding of his identity – which it is that is present. Together, the mix of means of grace daily combines to form an ecology of grace and holiness. They work together to provide a context for maturity and purity. To the extent that we are receptive to God's use of us and others (human agency) in parting these means of grace, we may speak of a social ecology of holiness. There is no development of holiness outside of the social context of holiness.

Ecologically, the means of grace in the socially spiritual context of life together, in fellowship, worship, work and witness together, are like the balance nutrients of a mountain lake from which the wild life of fish, fowl, and other animals draw sustenance and life. When we read the words of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians (4:19) – "My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus" – we know that he is speaking ecologically. All life exists in an ecology. God's provision is complete, all encompassing, and balanced. His promises are sure. His plan for our redemption and restoration is perfect. His follow-through is certain. Our Lord is faithful. As Psalm 85:10 and 11 states –

"Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven."

This brief passage communicates the interactive, dynamic relationship that characterizes our relationship with God in Christ Jesus and with each other as we participate in life with God together. It reflects an ongoing dynamic of both consecration and sanctification. In participating in the means of grace, we continually consecrate our lives, and our way of living together, to God, who in return continues to sanctify, bless, reveal, disclose, cleanse, illumine, edify, equip, deliver, transform, restore, make holy, and use us for his service. In short, in the social ecology of holiness, our Lord continues to restore and develop us in holiness and Christ-likeness. He continues to complete that which he intended from the beginning. We understand Paul's words to the Philippians (1:6) when he says "May he who has begun a good work in you complete it . . ." and when he also admonishes them (Philippians 2:12) with the words "continue to work out your salvation, with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to do

according to his good purpose.” His good purpose is a salvation beyond redemption to a restoration to holiness and consecrated, sanctified usefulness. His means are social, ecological, and developmental.

## Social Holiness – Shared Journeys, Exposures and Encounters

When we speak of the means of grace, they are together the daily exposures that make-up the Christian way of life, the way of holiness. As exposures to God’s grace, the socially derived means of grace promote an awareness of God’s presence and identity. These grace exposures provoke growth and give meaning to the journey. They are essential to the promotion of spiritual health and development of the saints along the way. They are fundamental to holiness as maturity in Christ. So far, however, we have only reviewed half the entities that give holiness its character of Christ-likeness. In additions to exposures, there are encounters along the journey to holiness and usefulness. These encounters are Emmaus Road and Damascus Road experiences. They are upper room encounters. Scripture is rife with this imagery of journeys and encounters. Abraham, David, Gideon, the disciples, Paul, and so many others’ lives speak to the universality of encounters with the Lord in the midst of the journey. We need not come to the fork in the road and have to choose holiness as crisis or process. We do not have to choose between purity and maturity. When we come to the fork in the road, we may gain a more circumspect view from above. It is all the same journey and the Lord not only exposes us to his grace, but also encounters us each day and throughout the day. He stands at the heart’s door and invites us out into his life to encounter us sometimes as crisis and deeper cleansing, sometimes as having our heart strangely warmed with deeper appreciation and thanksgiving. Sometimes he encounters us in the hunger, poverty, and desperation of others and moves us to a holiness characterized by a deeper, Christ-like compassion. We then say with The Salvation Army poet and song writer, Albert Orsborn, “Unless I am moved with compassion, how dwelleth thy Spirit in me.”<sup>16</sup>

When we look at the lives and witnesses of other saints and reflect deeply on our own collective experiences with a kind of Wesleyan empiricism, we may come to view holiness as not a matter of either crisis or process. Rather, we see God’s provision of opportunity for us to journey with him and others, and encounter him as together we abide and are immersed in his presence (John 15). It is in his presence that we immerse ourselves in a social ecology of grace and holiness and he promotes our growth and development. But herein God also does a work of cleansing, equipping, empowering, sensitizing, edifying, and so on. Together, we pursue the journey with Christ, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit as a community of believers. In the shared

journey we come to know that we will encounter Christ many times, and in many ways, with many diverse and qualitatively different outcomes. And we come to realize that, in all of these varied encounters, Christ is forming us together into his likeness throughout our time on earth.

Social holiness, then, is both process and crisis facilitated by the Holy Spirit working within a social context of others (each other) who instrumentally bring God's grace to the believer. It is the shared process of an ongoing journey together as we walk and talk with Christ throughout each day. Along the way, we help each other encounter Christ in many and varied ways with each encounter a crisis. Some encounters are more intense than others. Some call for the exercise of faith the will. The greater the faithfulness to continue the journey with Christ each day, and the deeper the life we share together in Christ, the more frequent and more profound the encounters. This may be what the Apostle Paul refers to when he says that we go "from glory to glory" and "from strength to strength." As we journey together, we mature together, and at the same time become pure. The divine-human context is the ecological essence of holiness. God is holiest. As we are immersed in his presence, filled with his Spirit, and discover more intimately Christ's identity, the promise of the journey is that each day we become individually and collectively more and more like him.

## Social Holiness in Community

We do not journey alone. Our lives were never intended to be an existence in solitude. As God is a social being, so are we by his design. As people living together in obedience to God's commands, we progress together in the journey. His commands anticipate responses which are social in nature: Love the Lord . . . a social, interactive act of the will; love your neighbor . . . a social, interactive act as well; make disciples . . . again, this requires social interaction; love mercy, do justly and walk humbly with your God . . . all require social interaction with God and others in community.

The closest one comes in Salvation Army literature to a concept of social holiness may be found in the writing of Roger Green who looks at the early Patristic writings and makes a distinction between personal holiness, institutional holiness, and relational holiness.<sup>17</sup> Relational holiness as a collective expression of personal holiness in the early faith communities comes close to the perspective presented here of a social-developmental ecology of holiness.

Phil Needham, in his article “Integrating Holiness and Community”, critiques the *status quo* in regard to both The Salvation Army doctrine of holiness and its emerging thought about its ecclesiology.<sup>18</sup> One of the most central ideas he discusses is that of our need to move away from an orientation to holiness which is exclusively individualistic, to a strong sense of being a people, a church, part of the Church universal, and in so doing to become a holy community. Needham calls us to integrate holiness and community, not so much by adding-up the parts to becoming some holy whole, but rather to pursue the kind of community life together in which holiness as a people emerges. In his own words, he is making a plea for us to be a people immersed in the ecology of holiness such that we each bring ourselves and Christ in us to the social ecology of a collectively consecrated and sanctified community. We may interpret Needham to mean that, in the social ecology of a sanctified community, we meet each other and discover that each one encounters Christ and brings Christ with them in their journey. This requires a collective commitment to shift from living out a narcissistic theology of private, personal interests to a theology which celebrates 1) God’s grace available to all, 2) the complementary gifts of the Spirit to every community member such that all people bringing grace to the whole, 3) all members of the community belonging to Christ and therefore to each other, 4) a collective agenda of participating in and contributing to Christ’s grand, divine project of creation’s restoration, and 5) the collective pursuit of shalom and human flourishing in the Kingdom of God.<sup>19</sup> Together as community in Christ, social holiness means we become a pilgrim people journeying together and encountering our Lord together in holiness.

## Implications of Social Holiness

The original assignment for this paper was to write on “The social implications of holiness.”

I chose to write first on the nature of social holiness before talking about its implications. To speak of the social implications of holiness is to risk the conversation remaining trapped in smaller, individualistic framing of an understanding of holiness and to miss the rich insights of a more social-ecological, developmental perspective. Within this perspective, it is possible to underscore several implications of social holiness, but suffice it to reflect on four:

(1) Fidelity to the Great Commission; (2) the inclusiveness of social holiness particularly with (not just for) people who are otherwise marginalized, stigmatized, and excluded from the benefits of community; (3) its implications for integrated mission and ministry with a preferential option with (not just for) the poor; (4) and finally the broad implications of social holiness for societal stability and the progress of nations.

(1) Fidelity to the Great Commision. Social holiness faithfully fulfills the Great Commision. If social holiness involves the collective expression of the gifts God has provided throughout the faith community, their collective exposures to God's means of grace, their practicing God's presence, their daily learning more and more of the God who is present, and their growing in faith and identity in the likeness of Christ (maturity and purity), then they are further strengthened (empowered and equipped) to faithfully carry-out the Great Commision. Fidelity to the Great Commision is realized when a faith community is continually committed to establishing all people in the faith and in the Kingdom. To be established is to go beyond the starting point (redemption) and journey well along the path of maturity and purity in Christ. The Lord's Great Commision was to "make disciples of all nations." This is all inclusive, expansive, and compelling in its expectation that the faith community will be instrumental in the grand restoration work of the Kingdom, establishing well all peoples in the journey. It anticipates that the faith community will fully function toward the fulfillment of God's great forensic and therapeutic plan of salvation: redemption and restoration in holiness as a people to whom the Kingdom has already come.

(2) Inclusiveness. The organizational psychologist, Kurt Lewin, is known for having said "There is nothing as practical as good theory." A theological paraphrasing of Lewin would be to say "There is nothing so practical as good theology." A practical Wesleyan theology would insist then that social holiness necessarily be integrated with ministry and mission so that its orthodoxy informs and is informed by its orthopraxy. In practice, then, social holiness by its very nature celebrates the inclusiveness of community. There is no room for a disposition of exclusion that says "Us four, no more." Social holiness would say that grace is for all and lived out with all. "For God so love the world that whosoever . . ." The inclusiveness of social holiness would resonate with a free and full salvation which emphasizes a holistic restoration of body, soul, and spirit carried out in the context of a consecrated, sanctified community and the potential for all, no matter how deeply immersed in sin and degradation, to progress in their faith journey with Christ and with each member of the faith community.

(3) Integrated Mission. Social holiness is a collective reality characterizing the maturity and purity of an identifiable people. It is necessary to integrated mission. Integrated mission includes the integration of a multiply gifted community where each one, regardless of and possibly through personal history or life circumstances, brings gifts and contributions into the whole of a

faith community's ministry and mission with (not just to) a needy, suffering world in Christ's name. Social holiness is made visible when the authentic love of Christ compels a consecrated, sanctified faith community into ministry, mission, and sacrificial service, and when their love is collectively expressed in what John Wesley called "the preferential option for the poor." It is made real when the faith community actively expresses Christ's love by actively reaching out to and actively identifying with the marginalized, dispossessed, oppressed, vulnerable, and powerless. Social holiness moves us to pursue options not so much for the poor as with the poor. It is completed in Christ when a people, in a working partnership with Christ, deliberately seek-out, care for, and care with the lost and least of humanity.

John Stott, in his younger years, once wrote that the church may be divided into two groups: churches who proclaim and churches who identify. That is 1) those on the one hand who preach the Gospel of Christ, but do nothing to serve the needy, suffering of the world who Christ loves and for whom he died, and 2) those on the other hand who identify with and act on behalf of a suffering world promote social justice, but never mercifully mention the love of Christ or the name of Christ to those on whose behalf they act.<sup>20</sup> In short, many churches have two faces with each one pursuing only half of the Kingdom mission. Stott's observation was a critique of the fragmented, less effectual state of the church and a call for integrated mission. What he did not underscore at the time is that integrated mission necessarily derives from faith communities characterized by social holiness. Such faith communities succeed in the pursuit of the great commission to make disciples. Successful discipleship matures into faith communities whose members are compelled by the love of Christ into effective ministry and mission beyond the boundaries of a particular faith community in ways that are inclusive and appropriate to the time, and to the multi-cultural, complex societal context. The implications of social holiness is achievement by a faith community of a balanced, integrated mission and ministries wherein evangelism and social justice are a seamless whole.

(4) Societal Stability and Progress. Rarely do social contexts of holiness spontaneously generate. Social holiness is not inclined to spring forth unaided by intentional human agency although its impact upon society may not have been intended and foreseen. Social contexts must be intentionally designed, established, and cared for. Someone pays attention to them and provides the structure which carries the social processes resulting in the intended outcomes. It is the responsibility and stewardship of leaders to occasion opportunities for the emergence of social holiness among a people. This is what leaders do. They create the social-ecological-



developmental contexts for people to grow, mature, and be cleansed in personal and social holiness. This was the case with John Wesley and the implications of the social holiness seen in the many types of small groups (class meetings, bands, penitent groups, etc.) that comprised the Methodist societies of his day. The thousands of small group expressions of social holiness resulted in an enormous ethical impact and some might say a spiritual transformation at best and political stability at least of British society during and after the life time of John Wesley. This is especially poignant in contrast to the violence of the French revolution during the same period. The same has been said for the impact of The Salvation Army upon British society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in contrast to the rise of communism elsewhere. The extensive work of The Salvation Army among the poor and the working class of England in the early twentieth century is credited with a social stability that precluded a British embrace of communism.<sup>21</sup> A similar observation may be made for the impact upon Canadian society made by “prairie social reform” movements provoked by Spirit led Christians leaders from prairie provinces in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their faith convictions about Canadian society were acted upon through their election to Parliament and the propagation of provincial and national legislation (social policy) that transformed Canadian society and values to the present day.

Finally, further reflection on the implications of social holiness may be made in two areas of inquiry: 1) the universality of social holiness within and across time and cultures, 2) the role of social holiness in workings of the Kingdom of God now and in the future. In the former, the core idea of social holiness may be juxtaposed with the ideas of such culture focussed writers as H. Richard Niebuhr<sup>22</sup> and T.S. Elliot.<sup>23</sup> On the later, a new look at the writing of E. Stanley Jones may serve to illumine how social holiness functions in the perfusion of Kingdom living.<sup>24</sup>

## Finding the Words

Every generation must find their own words to communicate the life of holiness to which we are called as individuals and as members of faith communities. Each generation must find the appropriate paradigms and frameworks with which to appreciate what Christ continues to do among his people. And each generation must workout the implications of social holiness in the context of the issues and challenges of their particular time. This generation is no exception. It must discover the wonderous things to which Joshua spoke when he said (Joshua 3:5), “consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow God will do amazing things among you.”

Brengle, Coutts, and many other Nazarene, Methodist, Wesleyan, and Salvationist authors, along with other branches of the Wesleyan Holiness movement, have given us a rich tradition of writing and thinking on matters of holiness. The Wesleyan Holiness Study Group project helps us to reflect on their contributions, to hopefully extend their thinking, to open ourselves to the Spirit's further guidance, and to engage in enriching dialogue which transforms us as integrated faith communities of social holiness. As we continue to take steps in the journey, I pray that our increasingly frequent and deep encounters with the living Christ, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, will continue to transform and restore us as a people to the marvelous idea of Christ's which he has held from the very beginning. I pray we may always sing together the song "To be like Jesus, this hope possesses me. In every word and deed, this is my aim, my plea. . ."

As a holiness community on a journey of exposures and encounters, may it be so!

JSR

## END NOTES

After several years of reading, reflection and writing, it is difficult to say precisely who, what and when were the primary and secondary sources of influence shaping my understanding of Wesleyan theology and holiness, but it is important that I acknowledge especially the writings of several authors in addition to the sermons and works of John Wesley including, but not limited to the writings of the following: Albert Outler, Kenneth Collins, Theodore Runyon, Howard Snyder, Richard Heitzenrater, Henry Rack, Henry Knight, Randy Maddox, and others.

<sup>2</sup>

This statement was made in the inaugural editorial written by Jonathan S. Raymond and Roger J. Green, the co-editors of the new journal, *Word & Deed, A Journal of Salvation Army Theology and Ministry*, Volume 1, Issue 1, Fall, 1998, p.12. The first two issues of the new journal were devoted to a discussion of The Salvation Army doctrine of holiness.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan S. Raymond and Roger J. Green, Editorial, *Word & Deed, A Journal of Salvation Army Theology and Ministry*, Vol. 1., Issue 1., 1998, p. 12.

S.L. Brengle, *The Way of Holiness*, (London: Salvationist Publishing & Supplies, Ltd., 1966 (fifth printing). Frederick Coutts, *The Call to Holiness*, (London: Salvationist Publishing & Supplies, Ltd., 1957). Milton S. Agnew, *Transformed Christians*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1974) and *The Holy Spirit: Friend and Counselor* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1980). Edward Read, *In the hands of Another - Memoirs of Edward Read*, (Toronto: The Salvation Army Supplies and Purchasing, 2002).

<sup>4</sup>

<sup>5</sup> These authors' writings on the topic of holiness may be found in the issues of *Word & Deed* from 1998 to 2004. In addition, see Shaw Clifton's discussion in *Who Are These Salvationists?*, (Arlington, Virginia: Crest Books, 1999), p. 120, the entirety of David Rightmire's work in his book, *Sanctified Sanity*, (Arlington, Virginia: Crest Books, 2003), and Chick Yuill's book in its entirety, *We Need Saints: A Fresh Look At Christian Holiness*, (London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> S.L. Brengle, *Wait on the Lord: Selections from the writings of S.L. Brengle*, ed. by John Waldron, (New York: The Salvation Army, 1960), p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Shaw Clifton, *Who Are These Salvationists?*, p. 120.

<sup>8</sup> David Rightmire, *Sanctified Sanity: The life and teaching of Samuel Logan Brengle*, (Alexandria, Virginia: Crest Books, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Frederick Coutts, *The Splendor of Holiness*, (London: Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, Ltd., 1983).

<sup>10</sup> Frederick Coutts, *The Call To Holiness* (London, England: Salvationist and Publishing Supplies, Ltd., First published 1957; Re-printed 1951, 1953, 1956, 1969).

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Coutts, *The Splendor of Holiness* (London: Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, 1983). For a more complete discussion of Frederick Coutts's writings on holiness, see Wayne Pritchett's article, "General Frederick Coutts and the Doctrine of Holiness", *Word & Deed*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 1998, pp. 49-64.

<sup>12</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *The Word Become Flesh*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1963).

<sup>13</sup> For a fundamental, classic understanding of social ecology and its relationship to human development, see Urie Bronfenbrenner's *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> Commonly known as "The Founder's Song", O Boundless Salvation has become an anthem of sorts of The Salvation Army. For a more elaborated discussion of the relevance of The Founder's Song, see John D. Waldron's book, *O Boundless Salvation* (Oakville, Ontario: The Triumph Press, 1982) written to commemorate the centenary celebration of The Salvation Army in Canada.

<sup>15</sup> For a full discussion of the role of the means of grace in the Christian life, see Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*, (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Albert Orsborn, Song #478 – The Saviour of Men, *The Salvation Army Song Book*, (New York: The Salvation Army Supplies, Printing, and Publishing Dept., 1954).

<sup>17</sup> See Roger Green, "References To Holiness Teachings in The Patristic Writings", *Heritage of Holiness: A compilation of papers on the historical background of holiness teaching*, New York: The Salvation Army, 1977, pp. 19-31.

<sup>18</sup> Phil Needham, "Integrating Holiness and Community: The task of an evolving Salvation Army", *Word & Deed: A Journal of Salvation Army Theology and Ministry*, Vol. 3., No. 1, Fall 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Walterstorff, *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education*, Ed. by Clarence W Joldersma and Gloria Goris Stronks (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Erdsmans Publishing Company, 2002), p. 142.

<sup>20</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Our Guilty Silence: The Church, the Gospel, and the World*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Erdsmans Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 64 65.

<sup>21</sup> Personal Communication with Professor Raymond Everett Cattell, University of Hawaii, 1983.

<sup>22</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

<sup>23</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture*, (London: Harcourt, Inc., 1948).

<sup>24</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *The unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972). The word *perfusion* is deliberately used here as a medical metaphor as in the life giving exchange of oxygen into blood in physiological inspiration through the lung's aviole. Herein, the functioning of social holiness similarly achieves a perfusion of the Holy Spirit into the life of the Body of Christ, the many who make-up the Kingdom of God.