
Holiness and Social Justice

by Frank Bateman Stanger

“Holiness” and “Social Justice” — I like the sound of these words together. I have been to many conferences when I heard only one of the terms, to the total exclusion of the other. I remember a day when certain Holiness groups were so preoccupied with an emphasis upon the personal aspects of religion that one was considered in theological error, perhaps even back-slidden, if concern were expressed about society. On the other hand, I have participated in meetings when the thinking and discussions were so dominated by social issues that personal holiness seemed to be the forgotten word.

A Definition of Terms

What do we mean by “holiness” and “social justice”? I am using “holiness” in both an experiential and ethical sense. Recall the words of John Wesley as he described the personal experience of holiness:

This it is to be a perfect man . . . even to have a heart so all-flaming with the love of God . . . as continually to offer up every thought, word, and work, as a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ.

It is to be inwardly and outwardly devoted to God. It is loving God with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies that no wrong temper, none contrary to love remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love.

It is pure love reigning alone in the heart and life.

But Wesley was truly biblical as he went on to say that an

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experience of holiness always manifested itself in the holy life. The holy life is the life filled with Jesus Christ. It is the manifestation of “the fruit of the Spirit” in one’s life. The holy life is the Christian’s daily life lived under the influence of the active ministry of the Holy Spirit. The holy life reaches out in loving relationships to all others.

What is “social justice”? The root idea of “justice” is “rightful,” “lawful,” “impartial.” “Social justice” implies the treating of persons with due appreciation for both their worth and needs. It is the use of authority and power to uphold what is the right.

Social justice is the creation of social conditions which provide every person with the opportunity of fulfilling the potential of one’s personhood and to share in the necessary “good things” of God’s creation. To accomplish this, social justice seeks to eliminate social injustice, all those social evils that threaten the welfare and destiny of God’s creatures.

In the development of the topic, “Holiness and Social Justice,” I propose to make four basic affirmations. Three of these will be dealt with in some detail, but the final affirmation is intended only as a summons and a guidepost to future thinking and acting.

The Evangelical Tradition

Here is the first affirmation: *The evangelical interpretation of the Christian faith, to which the holiness tradition is historically committed, has both understood and insisted upon the dynamic relationship between the personal and social aspects of the gospel.* Let it be quickly said that there are not two Gospels — a personal Gospel and a social Gospel. There is only one Gospel — the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ — which has both personal and social manifestations.

Historically, social concern has characterized the evangelical tradition. We begin our documentation with the Holy Scriptures which are truly the divinely-inspired source of evangelical theology.

We think at once of the Old Testament prophets, such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, and Micah. The fundamental conviction of the prophets which distinguished them from the ordinary religious life of their day, was the conviction that God demands righteousness and justice. Their concern was with the social and political life of their nation. Their sympathy was wholly and passionately with the poor and oppressed. They opposed the complacent optimism of people who were self-satisfied and unconcerned.

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We move into the New Testament. Jesus Christ has been called the “Consummator.” He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. He embodied the prophetic stream of faith and hope. The insistent concerns of social justice appear at the very beginning of His ministry — in the declaration of His purpose in His sermon in His home-town synagogue.

Hear again the text of that sermon:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18).

I think often of what E. Stanley Jones said about these words of Jesus: suppose Jesus was actually referring to those who were poor, broken-hearted, captives, blind and bruised.

Jesus was a champion of the economically depressed. He exalted love for neighbor. He allowed no bias of race or color. He reached out to foreigners. He lifted human life to a new high level. He treated women differently than the custom of the times. He had a deep sympathy for and an unusual understanding of children. He sought freedom for those who were in any kind of bondage.

Jesus evaluated a person’s spiritual life in terms not of religious exercises, but of ethical and social derivatives. He denounced religious leaders who “devoured widows’ houses.” In His parable of the last judgment He emphasized social ministries.

Jesus did all of this as the champion of a new kingdom, the Kingdom of God, whose values were to supplant the standards and structures of the present world. The Kingdom of God is both personal and social. Christ’s teaching the Kingdom was an endeavor to both persuade persons to enter God’s Kingdom of forgiveness and love and to establish a worldwide, ideal human society in which justice and good will shall be realized. But the Kingdom of God always begins within a person; hence all social manifestations have rootage in personal experience.

Constantly through His teachings and activities Jesus was trying to make us understand that one’s social conscience and concern are to be as wide as the love of God. He was a living example of social

ministry in its varied aspects. On the one hand, He took a towel and washed His disciples' feet. Here was revealed His "mercy ministry." But He also took a whip and drove the money changers out of the Temple. Here was His "authority ministry" which, in this case, was an attack upon a practice that was robbing worshippers of their dignity and worship of its reverence.

In both His use of the towel and the whip Jesus revealed that Christians can be "change agents." People and institutions can be changed. There are Christian means to Christian ends.

The New Testament Church was quick to accept its social responsibilities. The Early Church continued what Jesus began. They sought to incorporate into the life and activity of the church "the mind of Christ" toward both persons and society.

Early in the life of the Church officers were selected to supervise ministries to the poor. The leaders of the Church exhorted respect for government and law and in turn admonished political leaders to be just in their dealings with citizens. A study of the social influences of the proclamation of the Gospel in the early Church becomes an amazing revelation of both moral impetus and spiritual power in the direction of the amelioration of evil conditions and the effecting of needed reforms.

A hurried glimpse of the Christian centuries reveals an authentic social concern whenever the Church has been spiritually vital. W.E. Sangster has reminded us that the saints have always been concerned persons. He writes: "Normally — though by no means always — they (the saints in Protestantism) are activists rather than contemplatives. Though they are often world-forsaking in their thought, they are not world-forsaking in fact." (*The Pure In Heart*)

William Temple's significant volume, *Christianity and Social Order*, is based on the thesis that there is an authentic tradition of Christian social teaching.

David H.G. Head writes: "The marks of holiness are the marks of the bread and the wine — the symbols of redemption. They are also the marks of secular things."

John Calvin, a leader in the Protestant Reformation, was tremendously concerned about corporate righteousness. When he went to Geneva he found it to be one of the most depraved cities in Europe. He determined through the preaching and application of the Gospel to make it one of the most wholesome and best-governed cities in Europe. And he succeeded.

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The Evangelical Revival of the 18th and 19th centuries placed evangelicals in the forefront of humanitarian concerns. John Wesley is significantly representative of this. “The Wesleyan Way” was to transform both individuals and social conditions. For us to be discussing “Holiness and Social Justice” is actually a fresh and creative underscoring of our Wesleyan heritage.

Throughout his life and ministry John Wesley made a serious effort to relate the teachings of the Bible to social issues. The Holy Club at Oxford University, of which he was a leader, had two distinct goals: (1) disciplined spiritual growth; and (2) personal involvement in social needs. So, on the one hand the members studied the Greek New Testament, engaged in private devotions and practiced regular fasting. But they also visited the sick, the prisoners, the poor, and instructed neglected children.

It is interesting to note that later these became the same two goals of the class meeting which Wesley established.

Wesley contended that there was no personal holiness without social holiness. He insisted that every Christian must be involved socially to survive spiritually. The Christian ground of all of this was threefold: (1) the lordship of the Trinity; (2) the servanthood of Christians, and (3) the supremacy of love.

Wesley reminded his followers that the Ten Commandments were ethical fundamentals in Christian living and that being a Methodist Christian meant to love one’s neighbor as well as God.

Wesley said that the root of social blessings was the right use of money, and conversely that the root of social evils was the wrong use of money. He worked against the peril of riches and offered a life of Christian stewardship as the only workable antidote.

Truly John Wesley was a knight with a burning heart who rode through English history and by the grace of God changed the moral and spiritual ethos of the British Empire. He won souls to Christ by the thousands, and the power of his influence joined that of others to vanquish human slavery, inspire child labor laws, reform the prison system, establish labor unions and credit unions, and build schools, orphanages, and homes for widows. Fifty years after John Wesley’s death, his evangelistic fervor had swept two continents and his mighty influence was still felt for good in the British parliament.

As my esteemed friend, Gilbert James has written: “Why, as Wesley’s spiritual descendants, have we been so slow to confront the citadels of evil? Why have we left the battle to

the humanist and to the ungodly?”

Carl F.H. Henry raises the same issue with all evangelicals: “If evangelicals shun the realm of politics, economics and social order, then the whole conduct of world affairs will be forfeited to others by the very persons who are called to be the salt of the earth and light of the world.”

Reflecting upon the centuries, evangelicalism rightly perceived has always been concerned about social values, social practice, and social institutions. Major evangelical movements of the past were able to discern the most pressing needs of their day, social as well as spiritual, and to make impressive impacts in both spheres.

In view of this why did intense social concern suddenly become lacking among evangelicals during the first half of our 20th century? I think that Paul Rees has given us as concise and clear an answer as is needed. He writes:

What came to be known, in an unfortunate phrase, as the ‘Social Gospel’ was not born in the womb of modernism, as many of today’s evangelicals imagine, but sprang from the enlivened spirit and enlightened conscience of evangelicals . . . However, it was the polarizing of the American Christian community around ‘modernism’ and ‘fundamentalism’ that resulted -- largely unwittingly -- in the muting of the evangelical social conscience.

(Article in *The Herald*)

Recent decades have witnessed a dramatic resurgence of interest in social concern on the part of evangelicals. Included in the pronouncement of the Key Bridge III Consultation (1968) were these decisive statements: “We have not made clear the full implications of the love of God for all persons;” “we have been insensitive to the biblical concern for justice and mercy.”

In the same year (1968) the National Association of Evangelicals in their meeting in Philadelphia, adopted the following resolution:

While they are not of the world, Christians live out their lives in the world and therefore it is in the world that they make their witness.

For them to remain aloof from concrete decisions affecting

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social developments in our time would be to suggest that they do not believe God is sovereign in all the affairs of men. For them to withhold their love in any measure from those in need would be to suggest that they do not believe God is love.

On November 23-24, 1973 approximately 50 evangelical leaders met in Chicago to grapple with the dimensions and demands of a theme that had been broadly set out as “Evangelicals and Social Concern.” The group issued “A Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern” which included such declarations as these:

We affirm that God lays total claim upon the lives of his people. . . .

We have not demonstrated the love of God to those suffering social abuses. . . .

We acknowledge that God requires justice. But we have not proclaimed or demonstrated his justice to an unjust American society.

We must attack the materialism of our culture and the maldistribution of the nation’s wealth and services.

We acknowledge our Christian responsibilities of citizenship.

One year later, in November 1974, an enlarged group of evangelical leaders from all parts of the country returned to Chicago to add actions to their words of the previous year. In order to implement the 1973 Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern, a host of specific action proposals were developed and accepted.

The Lausanne Covenant, adopted by the International Congress on World Evangelization in 1974, makes nine assertions in Article 5 about evangelical social action: (1) concern for justice; (2) concern for reconciliation; (3) concern for the liberation of human beings; (4) respect for the dignity of persons; (5) determination not to exploit, but (6) to serve fellow human beings; (7) denunciation of evil and injustice; (8) efforts to exhibit, and (9) to spread the righteousness of Christ’s Kingdom.

When the National Association of Evangelicals met in annual convention in 1977, two of the three adopted resolutions concerned social issues; (1) the use of military force and (2) the violation of human rights in Uganda.

The most recent worldwide evangelical conference was the World Evangelism Consultation at Pattaya in Thailand in 1980. This conference wrestled with defining the relationship between evangelism and social justice. Even though the Gospel apart from social justice was affirmed as the basis of world evangelism, there was a sensitivity to the importance of social justice in its relation to Christian proclamation and behavior in today's world.

It is significant to note that the social justice issue remains so important as an aftermath of the Pattaya Consultation, it has been decided that in 1982 there will be a special consultation on evangelism and social responsibility.

A recent poll among evangelical leaders reveals that social concern has shown the most improvement among evangelicals since the previous poll taken in 1973.

The contemporary insistence upon social concern on the part of evangelicals is deepening all the time. Of particular note is the relentless demand of Third World evangelicals that the Christian gospel not be limited to personal conversion, but that it incorporate also a vigorous demand for social justice that indicts oppressive politico-economic forces.

The Holiness Tradition

So far in our historical overview we have spoken for the most part of evangelical Christianity in general. However, an important chapter in the historical research in relation to Christian social concern is the part played by the Holiness Movement in it all. It is well known to most of us that Timothy Smith, in his monumental volume, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, concludes that the significant social reforms of the 19th century in America were the result of evangelical revivalism. Certainly the Holiness emphasis in early Methodism and the activities of the Holiness Movement after its organization in 1867, played vital roles in such revivalism which had such far-reaching social effects.

Recently I made an interesting discovery concerning Henry Clay Morrison, long-time editor of *The Pentecostal Herald*, and the founder of the theological seminary I serve. In 1906 Dr. Morrison

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proposed a *Pentecostal School of Evangelism*. Teachers were selected, courses were adopted, but the School was never started. The School was to be housed in a *Pentecostal Building* in Louisville, Ky. Such a building would supply the need for school facilities, publishing facilities, and convention facilities.

In his proposal, Dr. Morrison wrote:

We propose to make this Pentecostal Building a bee-hive of practical Christian effort . . . when elections come which involve great moral issues regarding saloons, desecration of the Sabbath, and the barter in young girls, and the devil marshals all his hosts, with God's help, we will go up against them in solid phalanx as one man, with prayers and songs and votes.

What an interesting confirmation of the truth that true holiness is a springboard for social action!

Donald Dayton has reminded us that the Holiness Movement differs from fundamentalism and evangelicalism in that it has always been more oriented to ethics and the spiritual life than to a defense of doctrinal orthodoxy. The Holiness tradition has tended to raise ethics to the status that fundamentalists have accorded doctrine.

In its spiritual genius, the Holiness Movement has been ethically committed to (1) the incalculable worth of the individual; (2) the sanctity of marriage as a divine institution; (3) the right of equal opportunity; (4) freedom of religion; (5) priority of moral values over the material; and (6) social obligation and responsibility of every able person.

Through the years the "Holiness Churches" have been concerned about the abolition of slavery, the role of women and women's suffrage, ministry to the poor and oppressed, peace in the world, labor reforms, urban ministries, and community based on spiritual unity in Christ.

Perhaps the Salvation Army has been the most consistent and dramatic corporate spiritual manifestation of the Gospel in both its personal and social aspects that the Wesleyan world has witnessed since the days of the Wesleyan Revival. The Army has not been content merely to sing gospel songs, clap hands and beat tambourines, and to parade with bands and banners. Salvationists have trod every known path of human need, sought out haunts of

human wretchedness, and hurried to the side of hurting people everywhere.

As Commissioner Arthur R. Pitcher has said so definitively: “The Salvation Army has combined a theology of cleansing and a theology of caring.”

Such social concern and activity are as alive in the Salvation Army today as they have ever been. In his letter of invitation to me, Lt. Co. William H. Roberts, Program Chairman, wrote:

Can holiness people ignore the reality of the situation, as far as our system of justice, the poverty stricken and lack of good education are concerned? Can we sit by while some have sub-standard housing — unemployment — unequal application of our judicial system? What is the challenge to us of “He went about doing good?”

It is highly significant to note the existence and activity of the present Christian Holiness Association Commission on Social Action. The purpose of this commission is to keep the holiness movement aware of contemporary social problems and to stimulate effective programming and action in assisting with solutions.

Recent research confirms what we have been concluding historically concerning evangelical Christians and social action. George Gallup, the well-known research pollster, has observed that evangelicals are twice as likely as non-evangelicals to be involved in social service on a person-to-person level.

Two sociologists, Thomas Campbell and Yoshio Fukuyama, have co-authored the volume *The Fragmented Layman*. Even they admit their surprise in their discovery that “religious piety” or “devotionalism,” instead of diminishing interest in social issues, actually increases concern for social issues. So they conclude that “people with a significantly pious attitude, by daily prayer and devotional activities, scored substantially higher than others in their willingness to accept minority representatives as neighbors and in their support for social justice.”

Theological Affirmations

Let me move now to a second major affirmation in support of my thesis: *The biblical theology which undergirds the holiness emphasis provides a sound polemic for the inevitable relationship between*

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holiness and social justice. I propose in merely bold strokes to delineate what I consider to be the various components of such a theological polemic.

1. *The Fact of Divine Creation.* Persons, created in the image of God, are seen in their dignity, tragedy, and destiny. Such Divine creation establishes the rights of persons, but always on the basis of faith in God. Actually a person's worth is what one is worth to God. The fact of Divine creation affirms supreme worth to persons.

Faith in God expresses itself in concern for the rights and needs of persons. Unconcern for others is self-will and this is the essence of sin. William Temple wrote: "Of the forms of self-will, complete indifference to other people in the world is the worst." To love God with all one's heart, all one's mind, all one's soul, all one's strength, is also to love one's neighbor as one's self. In a very real sense the integrity of one's relationship to God depends on one's relationship to others.

2. *God's Gift of the Good Earth to His Creatures.* God gave the earth and all its beauty and resources to His creatures. God gave persons dominion over the earth. Mankind even after the Fall is responsible for subduing the earth. We are stewards of what the earth contains. Such stewardship to God requires the use of earth's resources for the good of all of God's creatures.

3. *God's Sovereignty Over All of Life.* God's sovereignty over all of life is expressed through the Lordship of Christ. Such lordship involves socio-cultural obligations. Christian mission is the declaration of God's intent in respect to all the issues of life. In this regard Carl F.H. Henry writes:

Christian evangelism must do far more than speak only to the emotional vacuums in the lives of men; it must also help shape the intellectual mood of the day, deal with cultural idolatries and national priorities, confront the problems which erode a sense of human worth and dignity, cope with the moral paralysis that emboldens multitudes to shameless vices, uncover all the subtle and alluring masks that man wears in an age which believed itself at the gates of paradise only to discover a desolation and a waste. (*article in Christian Michigan Advocate*)

4. *The Natural Order and Justice.* Such Christian thinkers as

William Temple, Reinhold Niebuhr and Carl F.H. Henry are persistent in their claim of the Natural Order's insistence upon justice. The demand for justice is inherent in the order of created things. The Christian Faith did not discover justice, but the Spiritual Order supports this prior claim of the Natural Order for justice. Christianity insists upon the practice of justice. How tragic that spokesmen for the Church have often talked a great deal too much about love and freedom and not nearly enough about law and justice.

The New Testament enunciates the political responsibility of Christians. Government is ordained of God. Government and jurisprudence are strategic realms of vocational service to humanity. Government exists for the good of all citizens, not simply for certain favored groups.

5. *Christ's Doctrine of the Kingdom.* The Kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus has both personal and social dimensions. James S. Stewart makes this clear in these words:

Clearly there were two main lines along which all His thoughts of the Kingdom ran. On the one hand, Jesus thought of it as the rule of God in the heart. On the other hand, He thought of it as the rule of God in the world.

If the Kingdom is the rule of God in the heart, it follows, first, that the Kingdom of God is moral, not nationalistic; second, that the Kingdom of God is spiritual, not material; third, that the Kingdom of God is actual, not ideal.

If the Kingdom is the rule of God in the world, it follows, first, that the Kingdom of God is social, not individualistic; second, that the Kingdom is universal, not local; third, that the Kingdom of God is awaiting a final consummation and not yet fully complete. (*The Life And Teaching of Jesus Christ*)

6. *The Experience of Repentance.* Both the call to repentance and its actuality have social dimensions. Repentance is a turning from sin to God, not only in the individual's subjective consciousness, but in the world. Without ethics there is no real repentance. Repentance ethics is more than generalizations — it has to do with specific acts of self-sacrifice in concrete situations. Salvation is man's return to God,

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but it is at the same time also man's return to his neighbor.

Repentance is much more than a private affair between the individual and God. It is the complete reorientation of life in the world — among persons — in response to the work of God in Jesus Christ. When evangelism does not take repentance seriously, it is because it does not take the world seriously, and when it does not take the world seriously, it does not take God seriously.

The New Testament concept of personal spiritual experience is that which finds expression in social relationships. E. Stanley Jones says: "A religion that does not start with the individual, does not start. But a religion that stops with the individual, stops."

Repentance makes Christians citizens of two worlds. As citizens of two worlds, there must be both the preaching of the Gospel and the promotion of social justice. Even though we are not of the world, we are in the world. As long as we are in the world our concern is with the people of the world.

7. *The Purpose of the Church.* The Church is the gift of Christ to the world. There are but three alternatives for the Church in relation to the world: (1) try to flee from it; (2) tolerate it and conform to it; (3) condemn it and seek to change it.

Because the Church is the Christ-Spirit incarnate, it must pursue the third alternative: condemn the world and seek to change it. As the incarnation of the Christ-Spirit on earth, the Church is to be the organized conscience of Christendom. It should be swiftest to awaken to every undeserved suffering, bravest to speak against every wrong, strongest to rally the moral forces of the community against everything that threatens the better life among persons.

Rene Padilla writes:

The church is not another worldly religious club that organizes forays into the world in order to gain followers through persuasive techniques. It is the sign of the Kingdom of God; it lives and proclaims the Gospel here and now, *among men*, and waits for the consummation of God's plan to place all things under the rule of Christ. It has been freed *from* the world, but it is *in* the world; it has been sent by Christ into the world *just as Christ* was sent by the Father (Jn. 17:11-18). In other words, it has been given a mission oriented toward the building of a new humanity in which God's plan for man is accomplished, a mission that can be

performed only through sacrifice. Its highest ambition cannot and should not be to achieve the success that leads to triumphalism, but rather faithfulness to its Lord. (*address at Lausanne Congress, 1974*)

Thus, I have attempted to delineate a sound biblical theology of social involvement. But such theology must be more than theory; it must become theology-in-action. In a world in which the language of faith has lost meaning for lack of translation into life, the acting out of God's kind of sharing announces as no words can, the Good News of Christ to humankind. Is it consistent for the Christian community to cry over the crucifixion of Christ — and fail to be moved by the human conditions which make Christ cry?

There is a practical concern in all of these theological insights. Nothing seems to have more effect upon human minds and lives than social circumstances. William Temple reminds us:

More potent than school or even than home, as a moral influence, is the whole structure of society, and especially its economic structure. This fixes for all their place in the general scheme; and the way in which they gain and keep that place of necessity determines a great deal of their conduct and profoundly influences their outlook upon life. (*Daily Readings from William Temple*)

Faith in God not only creates a certain kind of climate, but, likewise, the maintenance of such faith is dependent upon the climate it creates. The only way to confront current naturalistic views of persons and the world is with the equally radical alternative of the Biblical revelation of the will of God.

Holiness Offers Relevant Insights and Approaches

In the light of these historical and theological backgrounds, let us now converge upon the heart of our topic and seek to discover the distinctive relationship of holiness to social justice. Here, then, is my third major affirmation: *The theological, experiential, and ethical emphases of the holiness tradition support and contribute to the achievement of social justice.* When this is understood, holiness is readily viewed as an answer to injustice.

Perhaps there are some myths to be dispelled at the outset. We

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have already tried to deal with one of these myths, that there are two gospels, diametrically opposed to one another, a personal gospel and a social gospel. The teachings of Jesus indicate clearly that there is but one Gospel which has both personal and social manifestations.

A second myth seems to imply that holiness has fulfilled its social obligation when it has influenced a person's life-style. For illustration, a sanctified person may be content to say that since "I don't smoke," or "drink" or "go to nightclubs," holiness has had its wholesome effect upon me socially. However, social involvement means far more than a personal life-style; it relates to evil and unjust social structures which help to determine personal life styles.

There is a third myth: "God never intended Christians to get involved in worldly affairs." To believe this is to bypass the implications of the fundamental doctrines of Divine creation and sovereignty. God is sovereign of all things. He is seeking to reconcile the world unto Himself. If Christians are not to be involved in worldly affairs, why did Jesus speak of us as "the light of the world," and "the salt of the earth?" Why are we told to let our lights shine? to make friends with mammon?

How often we have heard the fourth myth: Get a person right with God and inevitably he or she will change society; get enough converts and society will be redeemed. How wonderful if this were true, but it just doesn't automatically happen this way.

Society is made up of individuals, but it is also made up of inherited customs and attitudes which have become a part of the social structure and which exist apart from the will of the individual. Even the change of the individual leaves entirely intact this inherited social structure. For illustration, to change individual slave owners did not get rid of the slave system. It took a wide-scale frontal attack of legislation to oust slavery.

We must also disabuse our minds of thinking that evangelism and social action are synonymous. It is easy for some to think that since holiness churches are evangelistic, that's the social action that God intends for the church.

Evangelism and social action are distinct spiritual activities. Evangelism is persuading persons to accept Christ as Savior and Lord. It creates new churches, new centers of life, new parts of Christ's Body, which in turn plant other churches.

On the other hand, social action is the activity of existing churches in rectifying the social order.

Finally, there are those who believe that since the task of changing society is so complex and staggering we can never hope to accomplish it, why then, begin it, when nothing but disappointment and frustration lie ahead?

If we took this attitude, we would stop preaching and teaching, cease evangelizing, and never again be concerned about sending missionaries. The task of world evangelization is just as overwhelming and frustrating as that of social action, but we keep on doing it in faithfulness to our Lord's commission. We must have the same dedication and faithfulness in relation to taking the Gospel into all the world of social relations and structures.

Three Critical Distinctions

So much for myths. As we proceed, let us keep in mind three critical distinctions. Social *concern* is inherent in regeneration. A born-again Christian cares about the hurts and needs of others. Christians are people who care.

Social *ministry* is doing something about alleviating the sufferings and needs of others. Social ministry has been spoken of as evangelical humanitarianism.

Social *action* is doing something about the structures of society which are the source of injustice and oppression and are the cause of the hurts and needs of people.

Certainly each of these is a legitimate spiritual activity.

Holiness has a contemporary relevance to social justice. Holiness confronts the moral crises of our times with its ethical ideals, ethical teachings, ethical influence, and ethical models.

The Ideal of Holiness

Holiness is related to social justice because of its core ideal. Holiness seeks the mind of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. God wills wholeness for all of life — mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, relational, societal. God is a God of justice. Holy persons therefore seek justice.

Because of its core ideal, holiness creates a certain kind of person who seeks to be God-like and Christ-like. Such persons are sensitive, compassionate, caring, actively benevolent.

The Ethic of Holiness

Holiness is likewise related to social justice because of its inherent

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ethic. The call to Christian sanctity is a summons to Christian ethics. Holiness, if not ethically practical, is really not holiness at all.

The ethical content of sanctity revolves around six strategic foci: (1) perfect love for God and others; (2) seeking in the scriptures for the mind of Christ as it relates to the issues of life; (3) satisfying ethical motivation — being and acting as holy persons for the sake of God, others, and one's highest self; (4) respect for the funded experience of the saints of the ages concerning both personal and social issues; (5) resolving the inevitable tension between justice and love; (6) awareness of the contemporary situation in which holiness must be lived and applied.

The Power of Holiness

Moreover, holiness is related to social justice because of its infused power. The experience of holiness makes possible a distinctive kind of spiritual power within one's life. It is at once the power of illumination. There is not merely an awareness of what is wrong, but a sensitivity to wrong, and spiritually inspired insights as to both the basic causes of the evil and possible avenues of solution.

The infused power is, moreover, that of personal transformation. Transformed persons are the necessary initiating and implementing agents in any hoped-for social transformation. No social theory, however good in itself, can be effective fully apart from good persons working it. Sociology has no formula for creating good persons to work their good systems. But the Holy Spirit can make sinners into good persons, who in turn become good citizens who are concerned about good social systems. Such good citizens are motivated by love to God and others in their concern for social justice and in their concerted attack upon evil social structures.

Effective social action is grounded always in personal transformation. There must be a "journey inward" before there can be a "journey outward."

James S. Stewart writes:

All the social reform in the world, taken by itself, will never bring in the Kingdom. . . .

There is a primary and essential work of God's grace in the inner man for which no amount of amelioration of his outward circumstances can possibly act as a substitute. . . .

You will never make a Utopia out of regenerate conditions but unregenerate hearts, nor build the City of God out of men who have never been converted and redeemed. . . .

Get the spiritual side of things right and you will assuredly be helping to put the material side right. (*The Life And Teaching of Jesus Christ*)

Bruce Kendrick, writing of life in crowded East Harlem makes the same point:

Words alone were not enough; but neither were deeds. Social action was only first aid; it did not reach down to the roots of life. The point of the gospel was not just to patch up society's wounds; it was to grapple with the wills of the men who inflicted those wounds. The gospel had to get beneath the skin and there renew the springs of life where society begins. (from article in *United Church Observer*)

The process of authentic social change is clear. It begins with new creatures who have become new beings and consequently experience new thinking and feeling and willing. But the new creatures reach out for a new creation in which all of life, both personal and social, has also become new.

The power which holiness infuses is also courageous and persistent. A saint gets up immediately when he stumbles and keeps going. The holy community never gives up the struggle until the strongholds are thrown down. Spiritual forces are continually impelled by an apostolic optimism. There is the persistent belief that under the leadership of King Jesus and in the power of the Spirit, it can be done, the world can be turned upside down for Christ.

The Community Concept in Holiness

Furthermore, holiness is relevant to social justice because of its idiom of community. In a real sense, those whom the Spirit fills become the Body of Christ, a holy people, created for good works. Whenever the Body of Christ is pictured in the Scriptures in its Divinely-intended nature, it is seen as a community bound together in mutual respect and loving relationships; a community in which each of the many members is doing what God intended; a community

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in which all are members one of another.

In contemporary society there is the ever-present possibility of tension between individuals, between the individual and the group, and between groups. One of the functions of community is to resolve such tensions. Such tensions can be resolved only by the insistence upon love and justice.

Is not the holiness emphasis upon perfect love able to make a significant contribution at this point? If humility is demanded for majorities to deal with minorities, does not holiness insure it?

So, the experiential insights and ethical influence of holiness are added to the historical understanding and theological undergirding of the relevance of holiness to social justice. The ideal, the ethics, the spiritual energies, the creation of community — these are indispensable in the achievement of all that is involved in justice and the good life.

Purposefully, this message has been general in its approach to the relationship between holiness and social justice. We have sought to discover dynamics — historical, theological, experiential, ethical — which make holiness and social involvement relevant to each other. Since we believe we have discovered such dynamics, the next logical stage in the treatment of the topic could be to focus on specific contemporary social issues and seek the relevance of holiness to the solution of each. However, anyone who has any understanding at all of the multiplicity and intricacy of contemporary problems knows that to deal with each such social issue adequately would require an almost “ad infinitum” freedom of time. Certainly this is not our luxury. Rather, it must be a continuing process in our concerned reflection and dedicated acting in the days and years ahead.

Holiness People Must Be Involved In Seeking Solutions

But I do want to make a fourth major affirmation as a sort of summary: *In the final analysis, to discover Christian solutions to contemporary social problems will require the concerted thinking, praying and activity of spiritually concerned people everywhere.* Actually this will demand a spiritual unity among evangelicals in general and holiness people in particular heretofore unrealized.

Think of the enormity of the social issues that confront us today:

In the area of *Social and Economic Justice* — Such issues as legal discrimination, institutional sexism and racism, sexual harrassment, ethnic minorities, ageism, retirement, children’s rights, financial

exploitation, consumer advocacy, collective bargaining, distribution of wealth.

In the area of *Secuality and Life Styles* — Such issues as sexism, ERA, homosexuality, marriage and family, cohabitation, divorce, abortion, communes, the single life style.

In the area of *Environmental Justice and Survival* — Such issues as impact of technology, agricultural and rural life, hunger, responsible consumption, urbanization, world resources, ecology, pollution, energy, poverty.

In the area of *Human Welfare* — Such issues as health and disease, mental health, drugs and alcohol, pornography, health care delivery, genetic engineering, cloning, biogenetics, recreation, euthanasia, handicapping conditions, population control, housing.

In the area of *Political and Human Rights* — Such issues as basic human freedom, education, law and order, use and abuse of power, criminal justice, rights of religious minorities, capital punishment, gambling, church-state relations, civil liberties, voting, extremism, repression, crime, delinquency, mass media and communications, dishonest computerization.

In the area of *Peace and World Order* — Such issues as nuclear war, UN affairs, disarmament, conscription, conscientious objectors, U.S. foreign and military policy, oppression, world community.

In our search for solutions to social problems, certain imperatives are indispensable:

(1) There must be a re-birth of concern about human beings.

(2) There must be a rediscovery of basic Biblical principles underlying our faith.

(3) There must be the conviction that the church is capable of being a “change agent” and of participating significantly in “social engineering.” Surveys reveal that the intensely religious can be extensively influential. For illustration, research shows that the Moral Majority in 1980 was really a minority movement. But this minority comprised the talkers and the doers, and they extended their influence far beyond that which their numerical strength alone would suggest.

(4) There must be the recognition that in the attack upon social evils we are actually warring against “principalities and powers,” “spiritual wickedness in high places;” and so we must be supported by spiritual powers greater than our mere human efforts.

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(5) The eschatological issue must always be kept in full view. When we have given our most and done our best, all that needs to be done in the rectifying of society will not be fully achieved. Ultimately it will take God Himself to perfect the Kingdom.

Holiness, a key to social justice, the answer to injustice? Theologically, it has the right to be. Historically, it has been. Experientially and ethically, it is equipped to be.

But will it be in our day? It all depends upon us.

Grant us the will to fashion as we feel,
Grant us the strength to labour as we know,
Grant us the purpose, ribbed and edged with steel,
To strike the blow.

Knowledge we ask not — knowledge Thou has lent;
But Lord, the will — there lies our bitter need,
Give us to build above the deep intent
The deed, the deed.

(John Drinkwater)

Let us pray — — —

O God, our Father, we pray for Thy Church, which is set today amid the perplexities of a changing order and face to face with demanding personal and social responsibilities. Baptize her afresh in the life-giving spirit of Jesus! Bestow upon her a greater responsiveness to duty, a swifter compassion with suffering, and a deepening loyalty to the will of God. Help her to proclaim boldly the reality of the kingdom of God. Put upon her lips the ancient Gospel of her Lord. fill her with the prophets' scorn of tyranny, and with a Christlike tenderness for the heavy-laden and downtrodden. Bid her cease from seeking her own life, lest she lose it. Make her valiant to give up her life to humanity, that, like her crucified Lord, she may mount by the path of the cross to a higher glory; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN. ■