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## *Abstract*

*Philip Stanley Turner*

### *'Relating to God: A Practical Theology of Christian Holiness'*

What does holiness mean to British Methodists in the twenty-first century? This thesis describes holiness from the perspective of a presbyter and over 100 participants from a Methodist church that journeyed together to discover what it means to be holy.

Guided by Theological Action Research, the thesis outlines formal and normative theologies of holiness. 'Relating to God' is presented as a key hermeneutical phrase, showing that holiness begins with God, flows from God and flows through those who are responding to God's love for the world. Yet when this theology was explored with participants diverse forms of welcome and resistance were encountered. These responses are presented and analysed in accounts of espoused and operant theologies. They showed that holiness is pursued in the complexity of real embodiment and everyday relationships. The author therefore argues that holiness is best understood when not generalised but rooted in a time, among a people and in their place.

From a Christian perspective the whole of humanity is called to journey in holiness. This thesis contends that it is Methodism's vocation to highlight this journey in the church and in the world, and concludes with practical suggestions for the Methodist Church of Great Britain.

*Relating to God:*  
*A Practical Theology of Christian Holiness*

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Doctor of Theology and Ministry

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Durham University

2018

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## *Declaration and Statement of Copyright*

None of the material contained in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree in this or any other institution. The thesis is my own work.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

## *Acknowledgements*

Doctoral research is commonly perceived as lonely task. While there has been solitary study, I have not been alone. My wife, Karen, along with our children (then aged four and eight) accompanied me into the unknown world of doctoral research. She supported me with love and, as an able theologian, provided feedback that kept me grounded in both theory and practice. Unwittingly my parents played a huge part, offering my family a gift at an apposite time, alleviating financial worries of a costly commitment. Happily, this was then followed by financial support from the Methodist Church locally and nationally. Although they knew very little about me, I was fortunate that many Stewards of my new Circuit knew enough about ministry to view study as crucial for ongoing development. They remained resolute even when, sometime into the research, others coordinated their criticism. Professor Mike Higton and Dr Calvin Samuel have been patient supervisors, offering wise guidance and sensitive encouragement to continue, especially when I lost my way. I remain moved by the many people at 'Village Road' who took the risk of joining me on a journey to explore holiness. At the end of the process, Paul Green and Sally Whiteman painstakingly read through the text, suggesting much needed improvement to grammar, punctuation and phrasing. Without doubt, I have not been alone: my research was cradled in community and sustained through care. I am deeply grateful.

Finally, I want to say something about God. In academic circles it can be difficult to talk, let alone signal, a desire to trust God. It has not been easy (trusting never is) and there have been some heart-breaking moments, but as someone who has researched faith and seeks to practice faith, I have encountered a loving God. This thesis is one frail attempt to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength and to love my neighbour as myself.

## *Chapter 1*

### *Searching for a Practical Theology of Holiness*

This thesis records my search for a practical theology of holiness. It describes my journey to find out what it means to live as God's holy people in the twenty-first century. It presents the findings of that journey and develops suggestions for renewing the emphasis on holiness in the church, particularly the Methodist Church of Great Britain in which I was ordained as presbyter.

At least four roads converged to both prompt and fuel this research. The first road is my Christian faith and vocation. Prior to beginning this doctoral research, I had completed seven years as a senior minister of a large ecumenical church. About to commence another phase of ministry at a similarly-sized Methodist Church, I wanted to reflect on my performance as a church leader and how I might better enable discipleship within my new context. Doctoral research answered my own need for a more formal way for structuring and supporting ministerial reflection. I did not set out to explore holiness but started with a desire to better enable those within my pastoral responsibility to deeply discover what being a disciple of Jesus means.

It was at the beginning of my second year that my supervisors suggested initial reading on holiness.<sup>1</sup> These books spiritually resonated but also challenged me. Instead of the focal concern being human activity, this reading drew me towards God's activity, and what it means to belong to and relate to God. This is not to say that reflecting on human activity or context is unimportant for Christian ministry. Rowan Williams succinctly notes,

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<sup>1</sup> Initial books included Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), Donna Orsuto, *Holiness: New Century Theology* (London: Continuum, 2006) and John Webster, *Holiness* (London: SCM Press, 2003).



‘the theologian is always beginning in the middle of things’.<sup>2</sup> This is more than simply someone standing within a stream of honed experiences and traditions, but someone with a set of continuing commitments in the context of ever changing relationships. Yet for a Christian minister these commitments are not primarily functions to be performed but more a focus on who God is. This was the challenge presented by my initial reading about holiness: rather than being centred on my own anxiety for better activity, holiness theology directed me to be centred on who God is and what God does. It presents before people Jesus’ command to ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’<sup>3</sup>

The second road is a desire for my research to be both theological and practical. Partly because I was about to commence ministry of a busy church and, in order for the research to be feasible, there had to be some synergy between my academic interests and my daily responsibilities. Yet more importantly I sought an apostolic faith where practice and theory are not independent of each other, but where orthodoxy and orthopraxis are fused together in the crucible of worship and witness.<sup>4</sup> I became inspired by Theological Action Research (TAR) which argues for ‘theology in active mode’, making ‘practice more theological’ and ‘theology more practical’.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, searching for something that was both theological and practical seemed to be a profound expression of God’s nature where, through creation and the incarnation, words and actions are held together. The harmony between words and practice is therefore the calling of those who centre their lives on God.

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<sup>2</sup> Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p.xii.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 12.30. All quotations from the Bible are from *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

<sup>4</sup> Elaine Graham, Heather Walton & Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005), p.1-2. See also Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), p.7

<sup>5</sup> Helen Cameron and others, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), p.13 and 17.

The third road is a search for a greater understanding of what it means to a Methodist. While I have participated in many denominations, I grew up attending Methodist Churches and have been a Methodist Member since I was 19 years old. When at the age of 23 I felt certain as I could of my vocation to be a presbyter, it felt natural that I should offer to serve through the Methodist Church of Great Britain: it felt like home. Yet while I had persuaded various committees of my commitment to Methodist theology and was sent to a Methodist theological college where I developed my understanding, I felt theologically vulnerable: I remained not altogether certain of the distinct contribution of contemporary Methodism within God's continuing ministry to the world. Early in my study I spoke to a past President of the Methodist Conference who suggested there was an ambivalence within the Methodist Church towards holiness, perhaps because the way holiness has been connected to a withdrawal from forms of life enjoyed by others, for example, drinking and gambling. Could this ambivalence be connected to my own theological vulnerability?

The fourth road is desire for transformation. I had completed a phase of ministry at a church that had focused on Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*.<sup>9</sup> Over a three-year period we had explored 12 spiritual disciplines under the theme of 'Growing more like Jesus'. The desire behind that theme remained with me and I wanted to explore what actually enables transformation, and also what might get in the way of it.

In highlighting the convergence of these four roads it will be clear that I have no pretence of neutrality. While I will intend to uphold the highest standards of academic rigour, I am a particular person and I see things in a certain way. I am aware of many reasons why I see in the way I do — for example, my ethnicity, socio-economic status and sexuality — but I do not want to underplay the significance of my relationship with British Methodism.

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<sup>9</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989)

As an ordained Methodist Presbyterian my livelihood, including the livelihood of my family, is in no small way dependent on the Methodist Church of Great Britain. Moreover, it was while I was in theological training that I met my wife and it is in different local Methodist Churches where I have ministered that my children have been baptised and raised. Therefore, not only has the church provided for my material needs but it has also contributed to my emotional and spiritual well-being. Moreover, I care deeply about the Methodist Church and its future trajectory: the church has been a channel of God's grace for me and I would like that channel to be available to others. Passion does not need to be held in contrast to academic process: it is because of my commitment that I was motivated to research. Furthermore, it is because I care that I have been able to gain the trust of people, particularly people of a local Methodist church, who have been willing to join me in my journey of theological discovery and offered rich descriptions of what holiness means for them. Moreover, I will argue throughout this thesis that to discover deeply the nature of holiness requires, by implication, to discover what it means to live in these relationships. Critical thinking and reflexivity will be essential but only as an evaluative tool of the passionate engagement that is an essential element of holiness.

The theology of holiness, then, is entwined in relationships that generate an embodied response. In this thesis I will argue that 'relating to God' is the key hermeneutical phrase for unlocking the meaning of holiness. This is because holiness relates primarily to God: it is God's quintessential nature and points to the inner relationship that exists within Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Here I am not promoting a social trinitarianism but simply recognising in Christian theology that the single divine life is expressed through three persons in a way that cannot be precisely comprehended.<sup>11</sup> As holiness is God, holiness cannot be

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<sup>11</sup> For an argument against social trinitarianism see Stephen R. Holmes, *The Holy Trinity: Understanding God's Life* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012).

understood or communicated apart from God and therefore it is only those who are ‘relating to God’ who have the means to know what holiness is. Yet it is impossible for anyone to be ‘relating to God’ without noticing others who are also seeking a relationship with God. The historic call reiterated in Christ is for those ‘relating to God’ to be relating to each other.<sup>12</sup> However, ‘relating to God’ means being captivated by God’s ongoing relating to the whole of creation. The sum of this relating is not a hierarchy where those exclusively ‘relating to God’ are ‘better’ than those who relate only to God’s people or God’s world. I contend that it is impossible to connect with God without being propelled by God’s love to engage through love with the world. This is the flow of holiness which, we will see, is proposed in scripture and emphasised by Methodist doctrine. This thesis will show that holiness is ‘relating to God’, not in order to diminish relationships within creation but to assert that a relationship with God — who is the source of all holiness — is where the flow of holiness begins before it cascades out into creation. This relating does not need to be an idealised performance but a lived reality of a particular people relating to God at a particular time and in a particular place. These contextual factors provide the canvas on which holiness is worked out and becomes visible. In this way a theology of holiness cannot be anything but a ‘practical theology’.

This thesis has taken methodological inspiration from TAR, particularly ‘theology all the way through’ and the ‘four voices of theology’. Chapter two will explore the theory of TAR and the ensuing chapters will broadly reflect the sequence of my research.<sup>13</sup> This is because not only is holiness itself about relationships, but the process of studying holiness is dependent upon relationship. As well as being doctoral research governed by the conventions of academic rigour it is also the outworking of ongoing worship, mission and

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<sup>12</sup> The call to ‘follow me’ is illustrated in disciples who follow together. For example, see Mark 1.16-20.

<sup>13</sup> Cameron and others, *Talking about God in Practice*, p.51.

pastoral relationships in a particular context. As a consequence, the research methodology has been partly a programme of study and partly responding to opportunities provided in pastoral practice to explore holiness. The apparent linear presentation of this thesis is therefore merely an aid for understanding rather than the precise sequence of events. Moreover, through the exploration of holiness there is a ‘progressive focusing’ whereby ‘each new phase of work takes up and further explores [...] significant parts of what emerged from previous stages’.<sup>14</sup>

Chapter three explores holiness in contemporary theological literature. The focus is deliberate. While previous generations have contributed much to the study of holiness — and many of them will be referenced — I will draw together and articulate theological academic voices that contribute to the conversation about holiness in the early 21st century. There is not enough space to consider writing about holiness from across other academic disciplines. This is not to say, for example, that sociologists and anthropologists have nothing worthwhile to say. Many have written extensively, often preferring the word ‘sacred’ to holy,<sup>15</sup> with others writing from within the discipline of religious studies and spirituality, comparing religions to each other as a way of accessing common spiritual wisdom.<sup>16</sup> Yet the focus of this chapter is theological and, more specifically, Christological because I seek an understanding of holiness in Christian orthodoxy in order to better understand holiness in Christian orthopraxis. The consensus is that holiness is quintessentially who God is and therefore mystery and humility will rightly accompany the conversation. Yet through the use of metaphor we will sketch the contours of holiness as God in relationship with God’s people and God’s world. We will see holiness as numinous; majesty; triangular; a building project;

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<sup>14</sup> Pat Cryer, *The Research Student’s Guide to Success* 3rd edn. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006), p.68.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas J. Davies, ‘The Sociology of Holiness: The Power of Being Good’ in *Holiness Past and Present* ed. by Stephen J. Barton (London: T&T Clark, 2003), pp.48-67 (p.48).

<sup>16</sup> For example, Donald Nicholl, *Holiness* new edn. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1996)

self-emptying; blessing and gift; participating in divine life; active compassion; perfect love; an ordinary life lived; and hospitality.

Having gained a sense of what the academy is saying about holiness we turn to the church, specifically the Methodist Church of Great Britain, as the context for my discipleship and ministry. Chapter four asserts the church's 'doctrinal standards' as its core 'theological authority', and then proceeds to articulate what that authority says about holiness through analysing the wording in the Church's 'deed of union' which includes the two documents authored by John Wesley that the Church regards as normative.<sup>18</sup> We will see that the Methodist Church of Great Britain — unlike other denominations or other Methodist Churches, such as the United Methodist Church in the USA — does not have concisely worded articles of faith. Instead it understands holiness in the context of particular relationships with God, its ministers, church members and other churches. As a protestant denomination, Methodism particularly presents holiness through the lens of scripture and in doing so confirms the theological emphasis of this thesis. I notice the emphasis in the doctrinal standards on transformation – personal, ecclesial and national. This is a Methodist focus, not in a way that suggests that Methodism has a doctrine that is different to the rest of the Christian church. Rather, we shall see, in its Deed of Union, that British Methodism has a particular vocation to 'spread scriptural holiness throughout the land' which it 'ever remembers' and this is Methodism's gift to the wider church and to the whole of creation. We will also see how John Wesley's *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* and *44 Sermons* shows holiness as being reflected in God's nature and image; as dependent upon grace and faith; as rooted in the heart; and leads to 'happiness' and continual growth.<sup>20</sup> I will argue that genuine Methodist spirituality focuses on holiness and therefore starts with who

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<sup>18</sup> For ease of referral, the Deed of Union can be found in the appendix 1.

<sup>20</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (repr. London: Epworth Press, 1976), hereinafter: 'Notes'. Sermons 1-10, 12, 16-19, 21-42, 44-50 in *The Works of John Wesley*, vols 1-2 ed. by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-1985), hereinafter: 'Sermons'.

God is in relation to the church; and then continues to frame a message and the medium for the church to relate God's holiness to the world. I will also argue that there is a divergence apparent between the emphasis on holiness within the Deed of Union and what is asserted by the contemporary church, both nationally and locally.

Christian doctrine is rooted in scripture and Methodist doctrine asserts this rootedness. As a consequence, in chapter five we will explore holiness in Holy Scripture. Yet it is not possible to restrain Biblical exploration to this chapter. We will explore the Bible in the review of contemporary theological literature in chapter three; we will consider its centrality in evaluating Methodist doctrine in chapter four; and we will hear the Bible quoted by many interviewees in chapter six. This is natural: 'It is precisely through engaging with Scripture that we discern what holiness — and living discipleship — actually entails.'<sup>21</sup> In engaging with scripture I will show holiness as wholeness; grace; likeness to God; sovereignty; Jesus; the Christ-ethic; pursuit; and identity.

In chapter six we explore holiness in a contemporary British Methodist congregation where for most of my doctoral research I was the presbyteral minister with pastoral charge. In this chapter we explore people's perceptions of holiness and place those perceptions in dialogue with what we have discovered about holiness through contemporary theological literature, British Methodist doctrine and Holy Scripture. In this chapter I will look for points of connection between academics, those responsible for communicating doctrine and individual Methodists seeking to live as Christians. I will show that, generally speaking, popular perceptions of holiness are often quite different to the perceptions of holiness in the academy and in church doctrine, but also that the ways in which different people respond to exploring holiness are multifaceted and complex. My research will present opportunities for

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<sup>21</sup> Ed Mackenzie, 'Lectio continua and biblical literacy within the Methodist Church' in *Holiness*, 2 (2016), 165-85 (p.168) <<http://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/03-mackenzie.pdf>> [accessed 30 May 2016]

learning when participants and practitioner-researchers share together in a journey of embodied theological engagement.

As I have already remarked, I did not set out to write a thesis on holiness. My interest in holiness derives not from a commitment to that particular topic but from a desire to understand the human vocation. Within the Christian tradition it is not possible to understand human purpose without understanding God, whose nature calls humanity into being and into relationship. Theologically, people find their vocation when they lose their egocentricism and focus on God's vocation. The call to focus on God's vocation is also a call into community. It is both the origin and the purpose of the church to be orientated around God's vocation.

This thesis is unique in that while other studies draw together different voices on the nature of God's holiness, I know of no other published work that draws together different voices about holiness specifically in relation to British Methodism in the twenty-first century. Moreover, I know of no other work that seeks to place in dialogue those voices about holiness with voices within a particular local community exploring what it means to become God's holy people. The fresh presentation of holiness in this thesis shows how theological exploration has the potential to transform thinking and behaving. I am honoured to recount the journey of that congregation and myself as their minister, together with what was learned through this process. I hope that this study will give occasion for Methodism, along with the wider church, to reflect deeply on its vocation and how this vocation can set a trajectory for its life as a national institution and for its local communities.



## Chapter 2

### *Researching Holiness*

#### *2.1. Perspectives and methods*

The previous chapter introduced ‘relating to God’ as a theological description of holiness. In this chapter we will explore the process through which this description emerged. The process followed is theological, both in motivation and in design. Like the disciples Andrew and Philip who, on encountering Jesus, gathered Peter and Nathanael to join with them in discovering Jesus’ message,<sup>1</sup> my doctoral research began with my own personal response to God’s holiness revealed in Jesus, and the desire to invite others to ‘come and see’. The process then is personal: it relates to my own journey as someone seeking to live out being a disciple of Jesus in the 21st century as a Methodist presbyter. The process is the means but also a goal: I do not anticipate obtaining the ultimate answer to the question ‘what is holiness?’ but instead anticipate that through a journey of exploration, alongside others, I will gain deeper wisdom about the holiness of God, and the implications for people who wish to pursue holiness. Therefore, it possible to see ‘relating to God’ as not only as a description of holiness but also as an orientating perspective and goal for doing practical theology.

Holiness emerged as a theme for study in the second year of my doctoral programme. I have been part of church communities for many years that have used a variety of forms of the word ‘holy’ in hymns, Bible readings, sermons and in prayers. If Pete Ward is right that ‘the ongoing life of the church is itself practical theology’,<sup>3</sup> I have been engaging in a practical theology of holiness for over 40 years. Moreover, the participants in my research will have been engaging in practical theology prior to my research commencing. They will

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<sup>1</sup> John 1.35-51.

<sup>3</sup> Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), p.3.

have listened to preachers, teachers and pastoral leaders like me who have been shaped by formal theological thinking and, whether consciously or unconsciously, developed their sense of what it means to be a Christian. Therefore, however complex, tenuous and unintentional it may sometimes seem, all Christians are in the process of continual engagement with holiness themes. Yet, as Kolb suggests, if a process of reflection and conceptualisation is needed in order to learn from experience, my own engagement in the practical theology of holiness had not yet been sufficiently deep or intentional for me to name holiness as a goal for my ongoing Christian discipleship.<sup>4</sup>

The process of my reflection and conceptualisation began through doctoral supervision. I had intended my doctoral research to focus on ways to improve my performance as a Methodist presbyter in the 21st century, yet my supervisors suggested I read a selection of books pertaining to holiness. This reading nourished me spiritually and stimulated me intellectually, primarily through moving me from an anthropocentric to a theocentric research focus on the ‘ministry’ of God in Christ.<sup>5</sup> This is not to denounce my own ministry or the ministry of other Methodist presbyters or to ignore the pressure from within and beyond the Methodist Church to develop ministerial practice. Rather it is to recall the way British Methodism understands the purpose of its local churches ‘to exercise the whole ministry of Christ’.<sup>6</sup> Therefore being church – and a presbyter of the church — requires knowing the ministry of Christ that gathers together people for participating in that continuing ministry in the world.

Christian theology frames knowledge differently from many other contexts and settings. It understands that, as Pete Ward argues, ‘knowledge of God is distinct from other

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<sup>4</sup> David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as a Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1984), p.21.

<sup>5</sup> Here I am drawing on Root’s definition of ministry as ‘divine action’. Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), xii.

<sup>6</sup> Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, p.516.

kinds of knowledge [...it] comes out of relationship that exists for us before we even start to seek understanding.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Christian theology frames knowledge as learning how to live out our human identity with regard to God's identity. This is more than following the example of Jesus as an exemplar but a mystical living 'in Christ'.<sup>8</sup> It is also more than a solitary experience as in the New Testament the word for Christian learners — 'disciple' — appears much more frequently in the plural than in the singular.<sup>9</sup> This leads Heywood to argue that, for Christians, 'transformation is corporate: it is not as individuals but as disciples together that we grow in our likeness to Christ.'<sup>10</sup> Transformation is a natural consequence of journeying with holiness, and to research transformation requires the researcher to partner with others who also wish to grow in their knowledge of, and therefore their relationship with, God.

The pastoral cycle seemed, at first, to be an obvious method to understand holiness within the context of a community of disciples. *Studying Local Churches* presents this method within the discipline of theology,<sup>11</sup> where 'experience' forms a research question; other disciplines are drawn in to enable systematic 'exploration' of the issues involved; there is 'reflection' on the beliefs that surround the issues and the best course of action needed; and then 'action' is taken which, of course, creates more 'experience' and the cycle can begin again.<sup>12</sup>

Yet the pastoral cycle felt inadequate. For example, while Frances Ward rightly states that the 'praxis model of doing theology' sees 'the whole process of research as theological',

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<sup>7</sup> Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, p.6 and 30.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Romans 6.11; 8.1-2; 12.5.

<sup>9</sup> The contrast is particularly striking in Mark's Gospel where the disciples are referenced in the plural 42 times but never in the singular.

<sup>10</sup> David Heywood, *Kingdom Learning: Experiential and Reflective Approached to Christian Formation* (London: SCM Press), p.31.

<sup>11</sup> *Studying Local Churches: A Handbook* ed. by Helen Cameron, Philip Richter, Douglas Davies and Frances Ward (London: SCM Press, 2005), p.12-26.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian thinking in the service of Church and society* 2nd edn. (London: SPCK, 2006), p.85-86.

nevertheless she presents the pastoral cycle drawing in theological resources late in the process, after other disciplines have been consulted, to aid ‘reflection’ upon the issues faced.<sup>13</sup> This fails to take into account that, as I have already indicated, that within church life ‘experience’ occurs within the contexts of theology articulated in preaching, singing, praying, conversation and acts of compassion. The pastoral cycle also tends to emphasise normative theology (i.e. the church’s teaching) for ‘reflection’. Certainly, as Osmer asserts, this as one of the ‘core tasks of practical theological interpretation’,<sup>14</sup> but there is a broader theological tapestry. For example, it was the excitement of studying of theology within the academy — the uncovering of a vision of holiness that hitherto I had not noticed — that commenced my research. To draw in theology at such a late stage — and to limit it to normative theology — would be both unhelpful and disingenuous for a research project that is theologically motivated. Moreover, Pete Ward notes that the pastoral cycle, emerging out of the Marxist social challenge to industrial society, was devised to address problems, yet my interest in holiness did not emerge out of a pastoral crisis but through an ongoing desire to deepen my knowledge of, and my relationship with, God.<sup>15</sup>

As I was considering various other methodological frameworks I was introduced to Theological Action Research (TAR). Its five characteristic features are outlined in *Talking about God in Practice*.<sup>16</sup> First and foremost TAR upholds the fundamental conviction that research is ‘theological all the way through’ where, when concerning faith practices, theology has to be the primary lens through which everything is seen. This does not constrain theology to the academy but asserts that the ‘Practices of faithful Christian people are themselves already bearers of theology; they express the contemporary living tradition of the

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<sup>13</sup> Frances Ward, ‘Methodological Approaches: Practical Theology’ in *Studying Local Churches*, p.23-24.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, p.101.

<sup>16</sup> Cameron and others, *Talking about God in Practice*, p.49-60.

Christian faith.<sup>17</sup> Of course, because of the way TAR respects the voices of all participants, the spirituality included may not be specifically theological, that is, about God.<sup>18</sup> Being consistently practical *and* theological is not easy,<sup>19</sup> yet TAR's commitment to be 'theological all the way through' matched my own aspirations as researcher and a presbyter.

The second characteristic feature is that 'TAR locates itself within a dynamic of distinct but interrelated and overlapping 'voices'.<sup>20</sup> TAR offers the framework of 'theology in four voices' — formal, normative, espoused and operant — which, as we shall see, offers a way to organise the myriad of voices that are at play within faith contexts. There is resonance here with other models, for example Leach's model of 'attentive listening',<sup>21</sup> yet TAR's categories particularly resonate with the arenas of theological encounter. Moreover, rather than a sequence of stages, voices are brought together to achieve what Swinton and Mowat call 'complexifying'.<sup>22</sup> This is welcome because talking about God is complex. As Ward notes, 'Knowing God is participatory in nature' and participation is fluid and involves nuanced relating.<sup>23</sup> This participation yields information, but it also leads the researcher into greater awareness of all that is not known. The formal voice offers information from the academy, where I had discovered a vision of holiness that I now wished to draw into conversation with others. The normative voice is what a practicing group names as its 'theological authority'. The espoused voice is the 'theology embedded within a group's articulation of its beliefs'.<sup>24</sup> The operant voice is the 'theology embedded within the actual

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.51.

<sup>18</sup> See Pete Ward, 'Helen Cameron, "Life in all its fullness" Engagement and Critique: Good News for Society (a Response)', *Practical Theology*, 5 (2012), 27-30 (p.28) and Graham, Walton & Ward, p.1.

<sup>19</sup> See Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, p.28.

<sup>20</sup> Cameron and others, *Talking about God in Practice*, p.53.

<sup>21</sup> Jane Leach, 'Pastoral Theology as Attention', *Contact*, 153 (2007), pp.19-32.

<sup>22</sup> 'To complexify something is to take that which at first glance appears normal and uncomplicated and, through a process of critical reflection at various levels, reveal that it is in fact complex and polyvalent.' John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* 2nd edn. (London: SCM Press, 2016), p.13.

<sup>23</sup> Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, p.6.

<sup>24</sup> Cameron and others, *Talking about God in Practice*, p.54.

practices of a group'<sup>25</sup> and therefore is a 'voice' primarily observed, not heard. It is important to assert that these voices are not discrete entities. Indeed, as Watkins and Shepherd observe, 'through many voices, theology find its real voice.'<sup>26</sup> Therefore the aim is not to achieve 'objectified abstractions with which we can "work", but 'discerning the single voice of God who reveals himself'.<sup>27</sup> 'Theology in four voices' is simply a framework for exploring theology more deeply and completely.<sup>28</sup>

The third characteristic feature of TAR is the assumption that it is 'only in the conversation between voices, carefully attended to, that an authentic practical-theological insight can be disclosed.'<sup>29</sup> This means that not only is the participation of each stakeholder valued, but that dialogue is essential for learning. This makes TAR essentially team driven, specifically through forming an 'outsider' group of researchers and an 'insider' group of practitioners and where there is dialogue within, but also between, these two groups.

The fourth characteristic is that TAR is committed to making a 'real difference', bringing about 'practical transformation'. In this way, TAR reveals its pedigree within action research and organisational studies. The intention is that,

by naming and recognising theological convictions across the four voices, the theological embodiment at the operant level in particular will be renewed as its own authentic message comes to light and is more clearly understood by those living it out.<sup>30</sup>

In this way the practice of research becomes the practice of ministry: the researcher is 'a teacher engaged in personal and community development processes.'<sup>31</sup> This might seem

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>26</sup> Watkins, Clare and Bridget Shepherd, 'The Challenge of "Fresh Expressions" to Ecclesiology - Reflections from the Practice of Messy Church', *Ecclesial Practices*, 1 (2014), 92-110 (p.110).

<sup>27</sup> Clare Watkins, 'An argument for *non-correlational* approaches in a Catholic practical theology', *Cahiers Internationaux de Théologie Pratique. Actes no. 8* (2016), 141-158 (p.153) <[https://www.pastoralis.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/actes/CITP\\_Actes\\_8\\_Groupe\\_Santiago\\_theologie\\_pratiques\\_pastorales\\_I.pdf](https://www.pastoralis.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/actes/CITP_Actes_8_Groupe_Santiago_theologie_pratiques_pastorales_I.pdf)> [accessed 4 October 2018].

<sup>28</sup> Watkins, Clare and Helen Cameron, 'Epiphanic Sacramentality: An Example of Practical Ecclesiology Revisiting Theological Understanding in *Exploration in Ecclesiology and Ethnography* e. by Christian B. Scharen (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), pp.71-89 (p.74).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>31</sup> Margaret Ann Craine and Jack L. Seymour, 'The Ethnographer as Minister: Ethnographic Research in Ministry', *Religious Education*, 91 (1996), 299-315 (p.300).

dangerous, with participants vulnerable to those who wish to assert ‘right’ belief and the unspoken assumption that ‘places of practice are the loci of problems and that the theological tradition is a treasure trove of answers’.<sup>32</sup> This danger is mitigated by the fifth characteristic feature that TAR is committed ‘to enable embodied theology to contribute and shape formal, and even normative, theologies’.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the ‘real difference’ that TAR seeks — by asserting theology as the focus of the conversation; recognising that theology can be voiced differently; and by making conversation essential — is the possibility that everyone and every organisation engaged has the potential to contribute to transformation, and also for themselves be transformed.

These five characteristics fit both my research aspirations but also my approach to ministry. It enables me, as a presbyter, to research the ‘ministry’ of God while acknowledging that knowledge about God is gained through participating and therefore relating. The model allows me to begin where I had already begun, with formal theology, but provides a framework whereby academic theology can be brought into dialogue with other theological ‘voices’. It does not assert one ‘voice’ or role as superior but draws perspectives together for mutual exploration for the purposes of transformative ministry.

This is not to discount the difficulties. First, different Methodists locate normative theology in different places. For example, I have known Methodists to position as authoritative their minister, the hymns of Charles Wesley, the Bible, the Methodist Conference, Wesleyan theology or simply ‘the way we do things here’. As we shall see, I argue that normative theology of the British Methodist Church is most authentically located in its doctrinal standards.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Clare Watkins, ‘Practical Ecclesiology: What Counts as Theology in Studying the Church?’ in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* ed. by Pete Ward (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), pp.167-99 (p.176).

<sup>33</sup> Cameron and others, *Talking about God in Practice*, p.59.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter four.

Second, Graham rightly notes that ‘Christian practice is not simply about the duties of congregational ministry but the entire life and witness of the church’,<sup>35</sup> and the entire life and witness of the church includes when Christians are dispersed going about their daily lives as well as when they are gathered together into activity.<sup>36</sup> This raises the question of how I will gain this operant theology without expending an immense amount of time sharing in the travel, work, recreation and home life of each participant. Moreover, while TAR methodology recognises that the ‘four voices are not discrete [...] We can never hear one voice without there being echoes of the other three’, the espoused and operant voices seem especially entwined.<sup>37</sup> People’s words and actions are entangled in complex ways. I will need a research programme that recognises that I live within the same geographical community as other participants, attending the same meetings and visiting the same shops, but also recognises the real constraints of time and ethics connected with being a researcher-practitioner. However difficult, I need to search for, what Tanner holistically names, an everyday theology.<sup>38</sup>

Third, my role as a practitioner-researcher is ambitious. I am both an ‘insider’, living and ministering among a particular group of people, drawing alongside them in search of a path for discipleship; and an ‘outsider’ belonging to an itinerant Methodist presbyteral ministry with a distinct outlook formed by particular experiences, training and status. Moreover, as a researcher I am working in collaboration with my supervisors along with those offering ethical oversight of my investigation.<sup>39</sup> In addition to being ‘theological all the

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<sup>35</sup> Graham, Walton & Ward, p.6.

<sup>36</sup> Ward uses the term ‘liquid ecclesiology’ — in contrast to ‘solid church’ — as a more considered academic ecclesiology where church takes place ‘both in meetings and outside of them’ because ‘The love of Jesus [...] makes the Church more than a meeting. Liquid Church embraces and is embraced by this love.’ Pete Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology: The Gospel and the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), p.10-11.

<sup>37</sup> Cameron and others, *Talking about God in Practice*, p.54.

<sup>38</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p.80.

<sup>39</sup> My research was overseen by the University of Durham Department of Theology and Religion Departmental Ethics Committee.



way through’, my use of TAR will need to be practical all the way through: I need to attend to the lived experience of all participants, including myself as a presbyter of the church.

Fourth, Methodist Presbyters are commonly situated within an itinerant framework that issues five-year appointments, usually for pastoral responsibility over several churches.<sup>40</sup> I began the doctoral programme and my third appointment at the same time, in my 13th year as a presbyter in the Methodist Church. My own appointment created a time constraint that was tighter than the doctoral programme but also meant that in the long term, a presbyter is not always present (or expected to be present) to see through a vision.

Healy is right to note that, ‘ecclesiology in our period has become highly systematic and theoretical, focused more upon discerning the right things to think about the church rather than orientated to the living, rather messy, confused and confusing body that the church actually is.’<sup>41</sup> Pete Ward concurs that ‘Lived religion is much more likely to be characterized by complexity, apparent inconsistency, heterogeneity, and a basic untidiness’.<sup>42</sup> Yet what can be said about the practice of faith can also be said about the research of faith: a confidently ordered and systematised presentation should make the reader suspicious that a ‘rather messy’ process has been glossed over. The remainder of this chapter will outline the way I draw upon TAR in my own practitioner-researcher context to help me in the complex and nuanced process of more deeply exploring God’s holiness, and what that means for people to pursue it within a 21st century Methodist context.

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<sup>40</sup> There are opportunities to extend this period when the Presbyter is near the end of their initial term of service. ‘The Circuit’ <<http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/structure/the-circuit>> [accessed 25 October 2017].

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.3.

<sup>42</sup> Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, p.58.

## 2.2. Exploring 'the four voices of theology'

Prompted by my supervisors, I had already completed substantial work towards a literature review of formal holiness theology. I continued to read throughout the period of doctoral research, expanding that review to become chapter three in this thesis. I did explore widening the scope of this chapter. After a presentation on holiness at a doctoral summer school both the attending professor and doctoral students conversed in a way that situated holiness entirely as 'numinous'. To understand this response, I began to read primers on anthropology and sociology. These disciplines use earthy, incarnate and challenging of social norms to describe what is profane,<sup>43</sup> whereas theologians (as we shall see) view these words as powerful descriptors of the true nature of holiness. This helped illuminate the differing and often confusing responses to holiness, showing the significant influence of social sciences in both popular speech and academic discourse. It felt important to focus my research on theological enquiry, not only to correct a perceived imbalance, but also to respect the theological vocation of the church.

I began searching for normative theologies through observing prominent Methodist-endorsed activity. During my doctoral research I noticed the topic of 'holiness' appearing with notable frequency, for example, through Presidential addresses,<sup>44</sup> a Methodist festival,<sup>45</sup> the launch of the Methodist Church sponsored academic journal *Holiness* and a publication of the Methodist Roman Catholic International Commission.<sup>46</sup> I noted the prevalence of

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<sup>43</sup> 'Outside the temple' is an original meaning of profane. Philip A. Mellor & Chris Shilling, 'The Religious Habitus: The Embodiment, Religion, and Sociological Theory' in *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* ed. by Bryan S. Turner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), pp.201-20 (p.205-6).

<sup>44</sup> For example, Kenneth Howcroft in 2014. Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 'Back to the Bible, forward to the world: Inaugural address of the Methodist President' <<http://www.methodist.org.uk/news-and-events/news-releases/back-to-the-bible-forward-to-the-world-inaugural-address-of-the-methodist-president>> [accessed 8 June 2016] and Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 'New Methodist President Calls for Holiness' <<http://www.methodist.org.uk/news-and-events/news-releases/new-methodist-president-calls-for-holiness>> [accessed 16 June 2017].

<sup>45</sup> For example, Cliff College Festival in 2016 (Cliff College, 'Festival' <<http://www.cliffcollege.ac.uk/festival/>> [accessed 27 May 2016])

<sup>46</sup> *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory: Report of the Joint International Commission for Dialogue Between The World Methodist Council and The Roman Catholic Church* (2016)

holiness themes in songs ‘authorised’ for singing in Methodist churches,<sup>47</sup> which could be significant if Shier-Jones is right that the structure of a Methodist hymnal offers a framework for Methodist theology.<sup>48</sup> These observations suggested that holiness theology is normative for the church, but the nature of that theology — and whether each assertion of ‘holiness’ harmonised with other assertions — was difficult to ascertain. I then reviewed The Methodist Church Act 1976 that enshrines the purpose of the church as ‘the advancement of [...] the Christian faith in accordance with the doctrinal standards and the discipline of the Methodist Church’.<sup>49</sup> The ‘doctrinal standards’ are contained within nine short paragraphs in Section 2 of The Deed of Union which was adopted at the birth of the Methodist Church of Great Britain in 1932.<sup>50</sup> It is reasonable to assert, if only in legal terms, that the doctrinal standards are normative within the Methodist Church of Great Britain. I look to these ‘doctrinal standards’ as Methodism’s ‘theological authority’ but practical constraints led me to begin with empirical research.

My pastoral responsibilities changed during the period of the research, but there was one suburban church, of over 250 members, where I was consistently and deeply involved. I decided that rooting my research in this church would achieve a practical synergy between my stipendiary ministerial responsibilities and my research interests. Yet I first needed to think through how I would ‘hear’ the everyday theological ‘voices’ within this church.

I gained permission of the suburban church — hereafter named Village Road — to conduct very short interviews among a sample of 27 participants at a festival the church

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<<http://worldmethodistconference.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Call-to-Holiness-Final-copy-28062016.pdf>> [accessed 12 October 2018].

<sup>47</sup> For example, ‘Purify my heart, cleanse me from within and make me holy’ or ‘Now let me gain perfection’s height, now let me into nothing fall, be less than nothing in your sight, and feel that Christ is all in all’. *Singing the Faith: Music Edition* (London: Published on behalf of the Trustees Methodist Church Purposes by Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2011), number 508 and 498.

<sup>48</sup> Angela Shier-Jones, *A Work in Progress: Methodists Doing Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2005), p.12.

<sup>49</sup> ‘The Methodist Church Act 1976’, Section 4.

<[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukla/1976/30/pdfs/ukla\\_19760030\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukla/1976/30/pdfs/ukla_19760030_en.pdf)> [accessed 10 November 2017]

<sup>50</sup> See appendix 1.

organised. I asked attendees three questions relating to whether they experienced Christians as in some way different; in what way they would like Christians to be different; and what they associate with the word holy. The first two questions came from a desire to explore what people understood as holy without me prompting them to use that term. I thought ‘different’ was a good word,<sup>51</sup> but it clearly confused interviewees so that some answered firmly that Christians were not different, and neither should they be different, because they are not ‘better’ than anyone else. It had not been my intention for ‘Christian’ to be associated with ‘better’, but the fact that this connection was made demonstrated the potential for misunderstanding when seeking quick responses about complex concepts. I became convinced of the importance of an interview context and process that could enable deep conversation about holiness.

Of the six qualitative research methods outlined by Silverman I was drawn to ethnographic observation; interviews; focus groups; and naturally occurring talk.<sup>52</sup> I considered analysing texts: Village Road kept detailed records of songs sung during Sunday morning worship and examining these was a research possibility. However, I had been inspired by a theology of holiness and I wished, in agreement with the opinion of Root, to place ‘my own concrete experience in conversation with others’.<sup>53</sup> Opportunities emerged to enable this conversation through leading youth groups; writing house group notes; participating in house groups; enabling a band meeting; and conducting semi-structured interviews.

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Different’ is used elsewhere to describe holiness. See Simon Ponsonby, *Different: Living the Holy Life* (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 2016)

<sup>52</sup> David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data: A Guide to the Principles of Qualitative Research* 4th edn. (London: Sage, 2011), p.111-348.

<sup>53</sup> Root, p.37.

### 2.3. *Leading youth groups*

My first avenue of exploration was not initiated as a researcher looking to be accompanied by participants but by a participant looking for support from their minister. Alex led a youth group of nine young people aged between 11 and 15.<sup>54</sup> The group had begun in September 2014, had three leaders and met on most Sunday evenings for an hour and a half. The group had used *Participate* but now needed fresh material.<sup>55</sup> I met with the group and explained that I was researching holiness. I offered to join the leadership of the youth group to prepare material for sessions between January and May 2015, using *Hagios*<sup>56</sup> as an overarching title. There was a cautious response, on which I will offer reflections in chapter six, yet they agreed to go ahead.

Young people are popularly presented as uninterested in formal theology and therefore having them as participants in my first piece of substantive research felt particularly important as a gauge to whether my interest in holiness could be shared by others. The topics covered were:

1. ‘Which people are chosen to be holy?’ Holiness as something God bestows.
2. ‘What sort of God is a holy God?’ God alone is holy and in Christ shows holiness through solidarity with creation.
3. ‘For what purpose are people made holy?’ Fulfilment is found in finding purpose that is reflecting God’s love for all with our whole lives.
4. ‘How important is community?’ Love is best reflected when we are in and seen to be part of a loving community.
5. ‘How possible is it to be perfectly holy?’ Reflecting love isn’t about flawless behaviour but about having a perfect goal.

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<sup>54</sup> All personal names have been anonymised to avoid identification.

<sup>55</sup> Meg Prowting, Penny Fuller and Michael Seaton, *Participate! Helping young people explore discipleship and vocation* (Abingdon: Barnabas, 2012)

<sup>56</sup> From the Greek ἅγιος, meaning ‘holy’.

6. 'Is being good the same as being holy?' What distinguishes Christians from other people are not their good deeds but the love that is between them and God.
7. 'Which rules of life are helpful for living a holy life?' There are things Christians can do that help them to love and express their love for God.

There were also monthly services of worship, a sleepover, a session midway through the series enabling young people to 'check-in' on how things were going and a mission activity that included gardening and running a holiday club at a local church. I considered that recording sessions would make secondary-school aged young people self-conscious. Instead, once the young people and their leaders had left but with the session still fresh in my memory, I noted my reflections. For practical reasons the sessions were widely spaced so it was difficult to build momentum.

In addition to *Hagios*, I led part of the youth stream of a District Synod in Spring 2015.<sup>57</sup> Here I worked closely with the planning team, thinking through the overall shape as well as planning my own contribution. We called the day *Holy Shoes*. A local teenager created a logo of a boot with holes worn through and a halo circling the top. It drew young people from those in key stage two to young adults. There were four parts to the session: worship;<sup>58</sup> finding a way through contemporary culture to talk about holiness;<sup>59</sup> reflecting on

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<sup>57</sup> In the Methodist Church of Great Britain a 'synod' is 'the policy-making court of the District' (Standing Order 412). The primary purpose of the 'District' being 'to advance the mission of the Church in a region, by providing opportunities for Circuits to work together' (Standing Order 400A). A 'Circuit' is 'the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience interconnection in the Body of Christ, for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help.' (Standing Order 500) Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, p.425, 420 and 464 respectively.

<sup>58</sup> We used Chris Tomlin & Louie Giglio 'Holy is the Lord' (sixsteps Records/Sparrow Records, 2003) [on CD].

<sup>59</sup> We used a scene from *WALL-E* dir. by Andrew Stanton (Walt Disney Pictures, 2008) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9RhgrwkTFQ>> [accessed 18 April 2015] to help us think through where we had left our 'tracks' that day.

Jesus' life;<sup>60</sup> and preparing to see holiness as being solidly involved in the world.<sup>61</sup> Their operant and espoused theological response showed that they were having fun but also taking the topic seriously, yet it seemed to me uncertain whether this reflected — or would influence — the operant and espoused theology of their daily lives.

#### 2.4. *Writing house group notes*

My second opportunity for exploring holiness emerged in the ongoing need for Village Road to source new material for its house groups. I consulted the church leadership about house groups focusing on holiness between September to December 2015. Reflecting on the cautious response by the *Hagios* leaders and how I had prepared the material for the youth groups, I proposed forming a writing team. The Church Council supported the proposal and, because of key pastoral contacts I had made within the congregation, it was relatively easy to assemble a team of nine writers.<sup>62</sup>

The writing process was not easy and collaboration slowed down the process, yet the group did warmly respond to the view of holiness I had gained in the literature review, including holiness being 'separated for', 'devoted to', being 'one with Christ' 'self-emptying' and being filled with God's love. We agreed that conversation about holiness needed to be conversation about God but that we were more likely to engage people initially if we began with contemporary questions. We decided to root each session in a Bible reading,

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<sup>60</sup> We considered where Jesus had walked. Responses included the water on which Jesus walked; the ground at Gethsemane where he prayed; the graveyard where Lazarus was raised from the dead; the wood and iron of the cross; the stone of the tomb; the palm leaves under the feet of the colt; the tile floor of the temple and the straw of the manger. The event was 13 days after Easter and all the young people were worshippers which is likely to explain the many references to Holy Week and Easter.

<sup>61</sup> We watched the closing scene from *WALL-E* where the spaceship lands and its passengers step into a broken earth in need of healing, put paper footprints inside their shoes, prayed about where we would be walking that day and read Isaiah 52.7.

<sup>62</sup> Resonating with other research, I found that the church wanted to support my studies. See Jennifer H. Smith, 'Mary in the Kitchen, Martha in the Pew: Patterns of Holiness in a Methodist Church' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Birmingham, 2006), p.12-3. See appendix 2 for an account on how the nine co-writers were selected.

articulating a preference voiced within the house groups for studies to explore deeply one Bible passage rather than briskly cover many. We then highlighted possible readings for each week and the programme was confirmed as follows:

1. Holy Me? (Ephesians 1.1-14)
2. Holy God? (Exodus 3.1-18)
3. Holy People (Colossians 3)
4. Holy Us? (I Peter 2.4-12)
5. Holy & Perfect (I John 2.5-6; 4.7-2)
6. Holy Good? (John 21.15-19)
7. Holy Living? (Luke 10.25-28 & Acts 2.43-47)
8. New Beginnings? (Luke 1.67-80)

Each writer produced a draft of their session, with two writers collaborating to produce one session, and we then met again to talk through practical issues such as formatting, consistency in style, ensuring questions were open, typing out Bible passages, referring to the previous session in the opening paragraph and the forthcoming session in the closing paragraph. The process involved conversation about the substance, but that was mixed with questions of style, personality and the complexities of interpersonal relating.

The writing team contributed to the leadership of six of the ten house groups, one of these house groups being from another Methodist church who had heard what we were doing and wanted to be included. We broadened the collaborative exercise by inviting the house group leaders to meet with the writing team. Unprompted, one of the writing team wrote a song and offered it for the house groups to sing. We also sang the song in Sunday worship.

The interpersonal interactions in producing house group notes are not merely evidence of working out TAR's conversation style but illustrate the inherent complexity of exploring theological themes in relationship. This complexity is, as Pete Ward rightly notes,



not ‘a problem to be solved; it is just the way things are.’ However, I would argue further that, in embracing this complexity ‘real difference’ is made possible, deeper and longer lasting. We will explore this further in chapter six.

### *2.5. Participating in house groups*

Evidence suggests that small group material created locally — in contrast to published professionally — has the greatest transformative potential.<sup>63</sup> Having collaborated to produce house group notes — and finding that process valuable in itself — I now wanted to explore whether the finished notes could make a ‘real difference’ and inspire participants to relate more wholeheartedly with the God who is holy.

Village Road had nine house groups comprising of 114 people. At the time the church comprised nearly 270 Church Members. While not all in the house groups were Church Members and not everyone attended each session, it is reasonable that to suggest that about one-third of Church Members participated in this stream of my research. In addition, a neighbouring church where I also had pastoral responsibilities became interested and set up a house group of eight people, so it too could join the exploration.

I was occasionally present at the house groups of Village Road: as a means of exercising pastoral care I sought to attend each house group at least once a year. I shared leadership of the house group at the neighbouring church in order to help establish this new group. My presence in each house group therefore reflected my ministry, but also my research interests. In Gold’s typology this approach most closely approximated ‘participant-as-observer’ where,

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<sup>63</sup> In Litchfield in 1999 those churches running courses that had been produced internally showed a significantly higher proportion of people coming to faith than churches using one of the popular published courses. See Mike Booker and Mark Ireland, *Evangelism - which way now? An evaluation of Alpha, Emmaus, Cell church and other contemporary strategies for evangelism* (London: Church House Publishing, 2003), p.54.

an observer develops relationships with informants through time, and where he is apt to spend more time and energy participating than observing. At times he observes formally, as in scheduled interview situations; and at other times he observes informally — when attending parties, for example.<sup>64</sup>

This typology has two risks. First, there was potential for those who had been in the writing group, who were now also in the house groups, to feel so closely identified with me and the writing process that they would be unable to offer reliable input regarding the effectiveness of the house group notes. Second, there is a risk that, as a Methodist Presbyterian, I would prioritise pastoral engagement and lose my research perspective. Together these risks could contribute to selective perception and a failure to notice significant facets to conversations and observable behaviour.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, as some house groups were particularly relaxed there was a real risk of ‘going native’ with social instincts, rather than the discipline of research, guiding engagement. I also faced the risks associated with the typology ‘observer-as-participant’ where, because of my brief presence in each house group, there was a possibility of superficiality and therefore misunderstanding information and interpersonal interactions between group members perhaps stemming from previous discussions at which I was not present.<sup>66</sup>

These risks would be reduced through interviews and the continuing relationships I had as their minister, yet I remain least confident about my ability to have ‘heard’ all the theology that was spoken and performed in these groups. This doubt results from the realisation that I felt that I need to provide, as their minister, a normative view on holiness. Moreover, my interest in people’s responses to formal theology meant that I was sometimes distracted from paying attention to the way individuals vocalised their initial perspectives. These realisations illustrate the uneven ground of practitioner-research where complex relationship dynamics require reflexivity that can only emerge through maturity.

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<sup>64</sup> Raymond L. Gold, ‘Roles in Sociological Field Observations’, *Social Forces*, 36 (1958), 217-23 (p. 221).

<sup>65</sup> Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide: For small-scale social research projects* 4th edn. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2010), p.198.

<sup>66</sup> Gold, p. 221.

The writing team had designed the last session to include submitting feedback about the series and the way the group felt they had been changed by the exploration of holiness. We wrote this in order to explore any ‘real difference’ that may have been achieved. Yet this last session was near to the Christmas holidays and the series being one session longer than previous studies were possible reasons for just three out of the ten house groups responding. However, it may also illustrate the dissonance between the aspirations of the writing team and house group members. Many in the writing team proactively volunteered to take part as part of their search for ‘real difference’, whereas house group members responded to the material put before them. As Heywood notes,

Learning is an effort and a challenge. It involves the possibility of discovering our own ignorance and, even worse, having it exposed before others. It means facing the possibility of change in ways we may not be able to predict.<sup>67</sup>

House group members simply seeking a friendly evening together may have found the material an unwelcome surprise.

## *2.6. Enabling a Fellowship Band meeting*

I was keen to deepen my exploration with Village Road, pushing beyond espoused theology into operant behaviour. An opportunity emerged that would enable me to join three other men in a journey of deeper exploration. Very early in his ministry John Wesley, a founding father of Methodism, established ‘bands’. Writing on Christmas Day 1738, John Wesley positioned bands as a response to God revealed in Jesus Christ. Those in bands were to meet punctually and weekly; to begin with singing and prayer; to speak ‘freely and plainly the true state of our souls’; and to end in prayer.<sup>68</sup> In 1744, also on Christmas Day, he advised those in bands to ‘carefully abstain from doing evil’; ‘Zealously to maintain good works’; and

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<sup>67</sup> Heywood, p.50.

<sup>68</sup> John Wesley, ‘Rules of the Band Societies’ in *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 9, The Methodist Societies - History, Nature, and Design* ed. by Rupert E. Davies (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), pp.77-9 (p.77).

‘Constantly attend on all the ordinances of God’.<sup>69</sup> These two documents illustrate that bands intentionally established theological conversation for the goal of ‘real difference’, although by the end of the eighteenth century bands were slowly disappearing.<sup>70</sup>

While there are para-church organisations seeking to revive the band model,<sup>71</sup> it was at the *Holiness and Risk* conference that I met the founder of the then Methodist funded *Inspire Movement*, Phil Meadows.<sup>72</sup> It is committed to:

developing the practice of Fellowship Bands, which are life-transforming small groups of three or four people, meeting regularly for mutual support. Members of a fellowship band exercise mutual accountability for the way of life, and group spiritual guidance to help one another discern God's presence and leading.<sup>73</sup>

In continuity with John Wesley, the Inspire Movement recommends single gender groups.<sup>74</sup> My wife formed a *Fellowship Band* with two other married women and I discovered that their husbands, like me, were curious about the opportunity to meet in this way. We met to explore the idea and committed to meet on five further occasions following the framework provided by the *Inspire Movement*.<sup>75</sup> Our second meeting in January 2015 was cancelled: one member no longer wanted to be part of the group. Some months later he described how he had been dealing with depression.

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<sup>69</sup> ‘Directions given to the Band Societies’. Ibid., p.79.

<sup>70</sup> Turner suggests this was because they ‘became too intense, elitist and almost sectarian’ and that ‘Methodism could not remain a holiness group’ because ‘Its constituency became too broad.’ Instinctively, I felt there was a more nuanced picture. John Munsey Turner, *John Wesley: The Evangelical Revival and the Rise of Methodism in England* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2002), p.47.

<sup>71</sup> NewWine has established *Core Groups* which are ‘small numbers (5-6) of senior church leaders who gather together regularly to provide peer-to-peer support and accountability.’ <<https://www.new-wine.org/network/dar>> [accessed 9 June 2016]. Cell UK particularly champions small groups as an essential element for the church. Lawrence Singlehurst, *Small Groups: An Introduction* (Harpenden: Cell UK), p.10-11. <<http://celluk.org.uk/cuk2/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Small-Groups-booklet-first-chapter-for-website.pdf>> [accessd 30 October 2017]

<sup>72</sup> A three-day event led by Martyn Atkins from 6-8 February 2009 at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire.

<sup>73</sup> Inspire Movement, ‘Vision’ <<http://inspiremovement.org/network/vision>> [accessed 12 May 2016]

<sup>74</sup> Inspire Movement, ‘FAQ: The Dynamics of a Band Meeting’ <<https://inspiremovement.org/download/the-dynamics-of-band-meeting-faq/>> [accessed 7 June 2018]

<sup>75</sup> ‘the way into inspire: session #1 seeking growth’ <<https://inspiremovement.org/download/way-into-inspire-session-1/>>; ‘the way into inspire: session #2 using disciplines’ <<https://inspiremovement.org/download/way-into-inspire-session-2/>>; ‘the way into inspire: session #3 sharing fellowship’ <<https://inspiremovement.org/download/way-into-inspire-session-3/>>; and ‘the way into inspire: session #4 engaging mission’ <<https://inspiremovement.org/download/way-into-inspire-session-4/>> [accessed on 7 June 2018]

I met with the two remaining Band members and approached two additional people who responded positively to being part of *Fellowship Band*. Due to other commitments our first meeting was in May 2015. We looked through the resource *Meeting as a Fellowship Band*<sup>76</sup> and, in conversation, we each revealed how we sought ‘real difference’. We talked about the pattern of a *Fellowship Band* meeting: an act of centring, for example, using prayer or music; the first person sharing in relation to a question on the sheet for five minutes, followed those listening responding for 15 minutes; the second, third and fourth person share; and conclude the session with each person, in the light of all that has been said, making a commitment. We arranged four dates for subsequent fellowship band meetings and a final date as a review meeting. We all felt that fellowship bands were unique: nothing else provided such an opportunity for in-depth sharing and support.

### 2.7. *Semi-structured interviews*

Deep conversations had already occurred through leading the youth groups, collaborating to produce house group material, participating in house groups and being part of a *Fellowship Band*; yet many questions remained. Some questions were specific. Precisely why had the youth group leaders responded cautiously? In the writing group, why did Paula seem uncomfortable with the holiness theme? Other questions were broader. Away from group dynamics, how would people talk about holiness? Is there anything about their life story that affects the way people engage with the exploration of holiness? What would people say about the process offered to them for exploring holiness? While widening the cohort of participants might have been interesting, my real concern was go deeper with those who had

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<sup>76</sup> Inspire Movement, ‘Meeting as a Fellowship Band’ <<https://inspiremovement.org/download/quick-guide-to-meeting-as-a-band/>> [accessed 7 June 2018]

joined with me on a journey of exploration. I wanted a research tool that would help me gain a deeper understanding of the journey.

Rubin and Rubin offer in-depth qualitative interviewing where ‘researchers talk to those who have knowledge of or experience with the problem of interest’. It ‘helps reconstruct events the researchers have never experienced’; ‘helps portray ongoing social processes’; ‘allows the researcher to explore complex, contradictory, or counterintuitive matters’; ‘is the tool of choice for exploring personal and sensitive issues’; and is ‘especially important where the processes being studied are nearly invisible’.<sup>77</sup> I invited 24 people to be interviewed who joined me in at least one stream of exploring holiness. Of those who I approached 58 percent had received formal theological training through preparation for ministry; had read theology at university; or had trained, or were being trained, to be commissioned Worship Leaders or accredited Local Preachers in the Methodist Church. It is possible that Village Road, as a larger Methodist Church, draws those with learning and skills. Had Village Road been a small Methodist Church the pool of theologically able people may have been smaller. However, given the strong encouragement within Methodism to consider worship leading or preaching as a vocation, and how the church is organised to depend on those people, it is possible that any sample of Methodists will include people who are theologically trained. Using Astley’s definition of ‘ordinary theology’ as the ‘God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education’<sup>78</sup> suggests that Village Road — and perhaps all Methodist congregations — are not ‘ordinary’,<sup>79</sup> but comprise of a significant number who have been exposed to formal theological education.

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<sup>77</sup> Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* 2nd edn (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2012), pp.3-5.

<sup>78</sup> Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p.1

<sup>79</sup> In addition, ‘Ordinary theology’ feels valued laden, suggesting ‘extraordinary’ theology lies elsewhere.

42 percent were youth group leaders or parents with young people in a youth group exploring holiness; 42 percent were house group facilitators; 30 percent were co-writers of the house group material; and 13 percent were *Fellowship Band* members. Many participants fitted into more than one category. 38 percent were men, 54 percent were women and 21 percent were retired. Of the two people who declined to be interviewed, one seemed to be experiencing pressure at work and the other had medically diagnosed anxiety.

In my interviewing I wanted to reflect that the interviewer and the interviewee were on a journey of exploration. Therefore, I designed a semi-structured interview, avoiding the need to proceed coldly through a set of questions pretending that we had no prior relationship or no desire to develop a continuing pastoral relationship. While I, as interviewer, had organised the interview and had principal responsibility for maintaining the boundaries of the conversation, I sought to cede control to the interviewee over how issues were explored in way that respected the unfolding story of their experience. On many occasions trust was built and it did feel like the interviewee and interviewer were searching together for answers, as Rubin and Rubin indicate might be possible with in-depth interviewing.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, I learnt through the process of interviewing that some of the follow up and probing questions were gaining interesting responses and I experimented with including them in the list of main questions asked while also remaining faithful to the ‘responsive interview’ style illustrating that I was listening, respecting their story and also probing for fuller understanding. On occasions I would briefly share parts of my story, not to divert the focus away from their story, but to communicate empathy. The schedule of questions I developed was as follows:

1. Tell me a little about your journey of faith?
2. I know we all fail at this and don’t live out our life of faith as we would like, but I wonder what sort of ways you try to express, practice or live out your faith?

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<sup>80</sup> Rubin, p.36.

3. I wonder whether you can identify for me someone you have really looked up to?
4. What would you say is the goal of Christian life?
5. In what way has holiness played a part in your vision of Christian life?
6. What would you say helps someone who is seeking to be a Christian today?
7. What would you say are the biggest obstacles to being a Christian today?
8. You've been involved in *Hagios/Fellowship Band*/writing team/house group. What have you liked most about that? What would you say has been the more difficult or challenging aspects?
9. In what way does the word 'holy' help or hinder your thinking about your journey of faith?
10. What kind of teaching or learning about holiness have you had in the past?
11. In what way has your thinking about holiness evolved because of your participation in *Hagios/Fellowship Band*/writing team/house group?
12. If you were to offer a definition of holiness, what would you say?

I was aware that I might be perceived, as minister-researcher, to hold a certain power and meeting in their home sought to redress that issue, enabling the interviewee, as far as possible, to feel a measure of control. To enable accuracy, and help with credibility, I recorded and personally transcribed each interview. A recording device was on a table beside each interviewee so to make it obvious that they were being interviewed, again, encouraging them to be in control of what they said and how they said it. To enable anonymity, I gave each person a different name and removed all personal references in the transcript (for example, to their spouse or career) that may enable someone to identify the interviewee.

Being a minister undoubtedly affected the nature of the conversation. I was not forming a relationship for the purposes of research, but the interview occurred in the context of an ongoing relationship. People may have withheld information thinking that the



information they had is not what I wanted to hear, though I sought to reduce this risk through verbal and non-verbal positive feedback throughout the interview. Others may have been eager to convey information in an attempt to shock the minister with the raw edge of life. Again, I sought to minimise this risk through continuing to demonstrate my genuine interest in all their experiences. The context of an ongoing relationship did add an informal ethical safeguard to the interviewing process: a negative experience would be detrimental to my continuing pastoral ministry. The interviews provided, in most cases, deeper responses to holiness but also enabled me to explore and search for evidence for real difference in the interviewee's operant theology. Interviewing became an expression of pastoral care and, as a consequence, the interview expressed my own pursuit for holiness.

### *2.8. Preliminary conclusions*

This chapter outlines my journey as a research-practitioner in drawing together methodological approaches learnt as a researcher in the academy and as a pastoral practitioner in the field. It is in the context of practicing ministry that I explored, with academic rigour, the meaning of holiness. I evaluated different models for undertaking this research and became inspired by the characteristics of Theological Action Research as most suitable for a theological research of holiness. Circumstances forced the sequence of research so that after a preliminary focus on formal theology, I attended to the espoused and 'operant theologies' before exploring normative theologies. Participants of the research were not strictly representative of the whole church but were those who responded to the invitation to join with me in a journey of exploration to find out more about what holiness means. Leading a youth group, collaboratively writing house group notes, participating in house group meetings, setting up a *Fellowship Band* and through in-depth interviewing illuminated how those in a suburban Methodist Church in north-east England had engaged

with the theme of holiness. The results of this research, as we shall see in chapter six, present an unfamiliarity with holiness being defined as a dynamic relationship with God. This does not mean that participants thought that the definition was wrong, but rather it was difficult, sometimes uncomfortable, and often led towards mystery. This was welcome for some and unwelcome for others and, in chapter six, we will explore some of the factors. However, before this, in the next chapter, we must return to how my doctoral research began -- with a review of how holiness is described in the academy.

## Chapter 3

### *Contemporary Theological Literature*

#### *3.1. Introduction*

It is not possible to explore holiness without realising that to describe holiness is to describe God, and to describe God risks preventing God from being God and instead make the describer God. Theologians therefore resort to metaphors, ‘that figure of speech whereby we speak of one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another’,<sup>1</sup> not to contain but allow the holiness of God to be viewed from different vantage points. In this chapter holiness will be viewed variously as ‘numinous’, majesty, a building project, a triangle, electricity, crucifixion, being a government minister, a contagion, a bleaching agent, a perfect shot, something hidden and good hospitality. Each metaphor illuminates dimensions of holiness and serves as a signpost along the road of discovery. In this chapter I will argue, as already indicated, that holiness is ‘relating to God’, in that holiness is both about God and about the relationship God has with God’s people and God’s world, and I will discuss these themes in contemporary theological literature.

#### *3.2. Holiness as numinous*

While not contemporary or, as we shall argue, deeply theological, it is important to give voice to one author simply because his writing casts a persistent shadow over much academic and ministerial conversation about holiness. As Raphael rightly asserts,

The twentieth-century history of the concept of holiness is largely unintelligible without reference to that advanced by Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy*. For nearly eighty years this text has been used as a yardstick against which subsequent studies of holiness have declared and defined their own position.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p.15.

<sup>2</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.1.

*The Idea of the Holy* perceives holiness as quintessentially beyond rational thought. Otto famously coined the word ‘numinous’ to describe a ‘specific element’ or ‘moment’, which sets it apart from ‘the rational’, something which cannot be taught, only ‘evoked, awakened in the mind’.<sup>3</sup> He introduces a litany of concepts especially *mysterium* as ‘being in the presence of a mystery inexpressible and above all creatures’; *tremendum* as ‘the feeling of one’s own submergence, of being but “dust and ashes” and nothingness’; and *fascinans* as something urgent, ‘uniquely attractive and fascinating’.<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Grahame’s *Wind in the Willows* popularly portrays holiness described by Otto where, in ‘The Piper at the Gates of Dawn’, there is terror, trembling, silence, love and worship.<sup>5</sup>

Through the duration of my research theologians located in the academy and the practice of ministry have drawn on Otto to present their understanding of holiness. Yet there are at least four fundamental difficulties with Otto’s portrayal of holiness. First, Otto derives a description of holiness from anthropocentric feelings rather than from the being and activity of God,<sup>6</sup> and ‘*The Idea of the Holy* never gets as far as explicit theology’.<sup>7</sup> Human experience is important yet if holiness is truly ‘other’, as Otto contends, then an understanding of holiness must amount to more than the sum total of human experience. Second, if we only focus on the presence of experience then we cannot learn from the absence of experience. Reflecting on scripture, Andrew Louth notes that ‘God seems to reveal himself to Moses, and yet at the same time to deny that revelation’, paradoxically signifying the felt absence of God as integral to the revelation of God’s holiness.<sup>8</sup> Thirdly,

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<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Enquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. trans. John W. Harvey (London: OUP, 1950), pp.5-7

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.13, 20 and 31.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), chapter 7  
<<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/27805/27805-h/27805-h.htm#VII>> [accessed 16 June 2014].

<sup>6</sup> For an exploration, see Colin Crowder, ‘Rudolf Otto’s “The Idea of the Holy” Revisited’ in *Holiness* ed. by Barton, pp.22-47.

<sup>7</sup> Raphael, p.18.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Louth, ‘Holiness and the Vision of God in the Eastern Fathers’ in *Holiness* ed. by Barton, pp.217-38 (p.220).

Otto's approach does not do justice to the moral element of holiness. In particular, Otto's description does not respect the way holiness has been translated from the Hebrew to the Greek in the Septuagint. The Greek word that equates to Otto's description of holiness as 'numinous' is *heiros*, which means 'filled with divine (supernatural) power', yet *heiros* is rarely found in the Septuagint. The Greek word that is overwhelmingly used in the New Testament is *hagios*, yet *hagios* includes a moral significance that is absent in Otto's portrayal of the numinous.<sup>9</sup> Fourthly, in a post-holocaust, nuclear age that is threatened by climate change, it is not altogether helpful or pastorally sensitive to link holiness with 'dust and ashes' and feelings of 'submergence'.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Otto's presentation of holiness is not as useful as the frequent references to his work in corridors and conferences of colleges and churches suggest.

### 3.3. *Holiness as pure majesty in relation*

To describe holiness John Webster looks to dogmatic theology rather than anthropocentric feelings. He contends that 'phenomenologies have contributed little to constructive Christian dogmatics'.<sup>11</sup> He perceives the current human context to be more like living as exiles in Babylon rather than as Paul in Athens.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, phrases such as 'the holy' are best avoided and instead theologians need to focus on 'the Holy One' revealed in Holy Scripture,<sup>13</sup> for it is here that Christian theology 'finds its content, its norm and its limit'.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, 'theological thinking *about* holiness is itself an exercise *of* holiness', but not through interrogating scripture because 'reason is summoned before the presence of God.'<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997), p.45-6. See also See Raphael, *Rudolf Otto*, p.117-8.

<sup>10</sup> Raphael, p.203.

<sup>11</sup> John Webster, *Holiness* (London: SCM Press, 2003), p.18.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.8 and 17.

Theology, and therefore understanding holiness, ‘is impossible unless God makes it possible’ and therefore the route to understanding is through ‘exegetical and dogmatic tasks’.<sup>16</sup>

Benjamin Leslie notes that Webster’s style might appear ‘naïve or authoritarian to those who presuppose a greater role for the analysis of experience or the phenomena of spirituality and religious sensibilities in the exposition of Christian understanding’.<sup>17</sup>

Certainly Webster allows no room for the ‘Four Voices of Theology’ from Theological Action Research: normative theology, specifically in his approach to the Bible, is the whole theological task. While Webster’s approach is a refreshing counterbalance to Otto, Webster seems to limit both the sovereignty and condescension of God that he keenly advocates.

Neither operant or espoused theology is oxymoronic: we look to the practice and speech of the church because of what Holy Scripture says about the church. As Webster asserts, the church is ‘the body of Christ’,<sup>18</sup> but it is an embodied witness that it offers.<sup>19</sup> The church is human and is therefore frail and fails, yet it is also a community in which Jesus is present, through the Holy Spirit. Webster is right to highlight normative theology as requiring our full attention, but we must also attend to the espoused and operant voices of the theology. To do otherwise is to risk being deaf to the entirety of God’s ‘speech’.

It is no surprise that Webster argues that ‘God is holy, and therefore holiness characterizes all God’s ways [...] and can no more not be holy than he can not be God’.<sup>20</sup> God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and holiness describes both the relational character of the holy Trinity and God’s turning towards humanity. Holiness is therefore ‘pure majesty in relation’, where God does not set aside majesty in order to relate to us, but through grace brings us into relation to his majesty.<sup>21</sup> Yet for Webster to say ‘holy’ is not the same as

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp.18 and 27.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin C. Leslie, ‘Holiness’, *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 32 (2005), 467-73 (p.472).

<sup>18</sup> Webster, p.73. Romans 12.5; I Corinthians 10.12-27; and Ephesians 3.6; 4.12.

<sup>19</sup> See Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> Webster, p.42.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.41.

saying ‘God’: ‘holy’ is not God’s name but an attribute that speaks of God’s relating.<sup>22</sup>

However, the distinction between God’s relating and God’s being feels thin particularly, if, as Webster claims, ‘God is what God does’.<sup>23</sup> Yet his affirmation of God’s holiness of not only being about relationship, but the act itself of relating, is illuminating. Webster argues it is ‘difficult to over stress the importance of the relational character’: holiness articulates ‘the origin, manner and goal of the relation in which God stands to his creation.’<sup>24</sup> Holiness cannot be, as those who look to Otto seem to infer, what keeps God distant and other. Rather, holiness is known in the act of God who ‘bends down to us in mercy’: holiness is known through transcendence and also through condescension.<sup>25</sup> This is not to say that holiness easily associates with people engaged in unholy behaviour, but rather that holiness is not primarily about moral purity but God’s saving action. ‘God is essentially, to the depths of his triune being, God for us and God with us’.<sup>26</sup>

Webster offers a soteriological description of the Holy Trinity as God the Father who elects and ‘wills a people for himself’; God the Son who establishes the ‘work of rescuing those whom the Father wills’; and God the Holy Spirit who ‘completes this work [...] perfecting the creature by binding the creature’s life into that of Christ’.<sup>27</sup> Holiness as God’s movement towards humanity leads Webster’s thinking towards the church, because ‘a doctrine of God which is *only* a doctrine of God is not a Christian doctrine of God.’<sup>28</sup> Yet Webster is careful in speaking about the church’s holiness. The church is not God and therefore does not possess holiness. It is therefore an ‘alien sanctity’ that describes the church’s holiness.<sup>29</sup> That is, the church’s holiness is entirely contingent upon the mercy of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp.44-45.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.53.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp.51-52.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.53.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.56.

God. He affirms, then, the relational aspect of holiness: the church is only holy insofar as it remains in relationship with God which is, in turn, contingent on God's continued calling and the church's continued obedience. Holiness is not self-sufficiency but a decision to relate to God and the choice to be dependent on that relationship.<sup>30</sup> A non-holy church would be an oxymoron,<sup>31</sup> but Webster's conceptualisation leaves room for the Church's relationship with God to cease, which therefore must lead to the church ceasing to be the church. However, Webster refuses to use 'the language of participation' to describe holiness and, while Webster argues powerfully for God's grace, it is notable that he does not speak in a sustained way about love<sup>32</sup> or deeply engage with the mystical union intended between Christ and Christ's church.<sup>33</sup>

With regards to the church's relationship with the world, Webster asserts that the holiness of the church is not about it keeping distant from what is 'impure' — the holiness of the church is established through Christ — but it does set out a 'social form', 'ending alienation' between God and humanity and within humanity.<sup>34</sup> The holiness present in the church is visible through the church hearing the gospel, confessing sin, witnessing to the world, and praying.<sup>35</sup> While holiness is imperative as well as indicative,<sup>36</sup> Webster's language implies that holiness unseen is not necessarily holiness absent. In stark terms Webster asserts, 'realised moral excellence does not necessarily constitute holiness and may contradict it.'<sup>37</sup> There is, then, a passivity on the part of humans which is essential to

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.89.

<sup>31</sup> In the Septuagint ἐκκλησία (the Greek word usually translated 'church') is used for the assembly of Israel, especially those within the covenant. See Deuteronomy. 23.3 and Nehemiah 13.1. 'Church' in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 3rd edn. ed. by Frank Leslie Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.343-46.

<sup>32</sup> There are brief mentions, for example, 'I am consecrated for works of love'. Webster, pp.62 and 96.

<sup>33</sup> The Song of Songs has been commonly interpreted as an allegory of God's relationship with Israel and then the church. John G. Snaith, *The Song of Songs* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1993), p.4. See also Revelation 18.23; 19.7; 21.2,9; 22,17.

<sup>34</sup> Webster, pp.60-62.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp.72-75.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.87.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp.73-4.



holiness: the agent of holiness is not human decision or action but God's decision and action in the gift of Christ. Moreover, holiness is not a civil virtue defined by civil institutions,<sup>38</sup> but the reaching-out of a triune God to the world. Therefore, a description of holiness can be offered only from the vantage point of God's action.

### *3.4. Holiness as triangular*

Morna Hooker gives the idea of holiness as God in relation a specific Biblical mooring and a compelling diagrammatic model. She gains the title for her chapter on holiness from Leviticus 11.44-45: 'Be Holy as I am Holy'<sup>39</sup>, a Biblical motif that we will explore later in 5.4. Like Webster, Hooker sees the holiness of people rooted in — and dependent upon — the Lord being their God. The desire to be holy is a response to God who in grace chose Israel. Holiness here is defined in cultic and ethical terms as Israel seeks to respond with devotion, purity and separation.<sup>40</sup> The understanding of the relationship with God is developed in Nehemiah and Ezra and then in the prophets, most notably in Isaiah.

Hooker presents Isaiah as explicitly presenting the holiness of a people, objects and places as entirely derived from belonging to God. Yet perhaps what makes Isaiah stand out most is the way the prophet explicitly highlights the relationship of God, Israel and the Gentiles:

I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.<sup>41</sup>

Isaiah therefore develops the ethical imperative beyond Israel merely behaving well in the eyes of her God but behaving in a way that reveals her God to the nations. Holiness is highlighted as right relationships and is mapped through Israel's participation in God's

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.101.

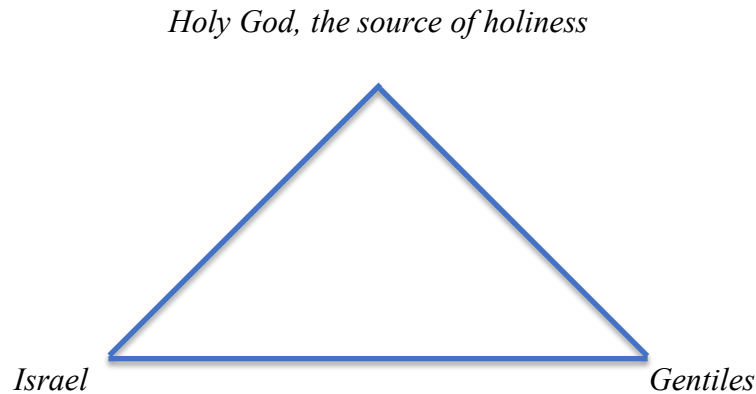
<sup>39</sup> See also Leviticus 19.2; 20.26; 21.8 and 1 Peter 1.15.

<sup>40</sup> For example, Deuteronomy 7.1-6.

<sup>41</sup> Isaiah 42.6-7.

reaching out to the Gentiles and draws people to a place of safety where nations will gather and worship.<sup>42</sup>

*Figure 1: Holiness triangle*



Drawing on Hooker's treatment of Leviticus and Isaiah, we see holiness neither solely about God, nor a straight line connecting God with Israel, but a triangle (see figure 1) where God, Israel and the Gentiles are at the points.<sup>43</sup> Holiness has inward and purifying aspects but, being relational, it also is outward-going and missional in nature.<sup>44</sup> Hooker contends this nature is present in Jesus of Nazareth, but also present in the establishment of Israel as a nation and its mission, clarified in Isaiah, as being to the Gentiles. However, I contend that the relational dynamic of holiness goes back further to the story of creation where the root word for holiness first appears.<sup>45</sup> This resonates with Janet Soskice who argues that the story of creation is, 'concerned not so much with where the world came from as with who it came from' and where 'reverence for and right relation with God entail reverence for and right relation with other people made in the image of God, and furthermore right relation with the

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<sup>42</sup> Isaiah 56.6-7 & 60.1-7.

<sup>43</sup> Morna Hooker, 'Be Holy as I am Holy' in *Holiness and Mission: Learning from the Early Church about Mission in the City* by Morna Hooker and Frances Young (London: SCM Press, 2010), pp.4-19 (p.6). Hooker describes the diagram, but Bailey-Wells draws it, putting at the points 'God', 'Israel' and 'Others'. Jo Bailey Wells, *God's Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p.50.

<sup>44</sup> A point persuasively argued in the recent Methodist and Roman Catholic report. See *The Call to Holiness*, para. 3 and 70.

<sup>45</sup> Genesis 2.3. See also Exodus 16.23; 16.25; 20.8-11 and Leviticus 23.3.

rest of the created order.’<sup>46</sup> I will address my contention directly in 5.2 but here I note that humanity is set aside with the image and likeness of God, to be in relationship with God and to relate to the world in a manner that reflects God’s delight in creation.<sup>47</sup>

Hooker summarises: ‘Israel is called to act as God’s representative on earth [...] He is a loving God, just but merciful, who brings salvation and healing, and the nation’s task is to be and to do the same.’<sup>48</sup> As God choosing Israel began with Adam so it continues with Jesus. Echoing and developing Isaiah’s message, in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus encourages his disciples to let their ‘light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.’<sup>49</sup> As Tom Wright argues in relation to that passage, ‘Jesus is calling the Israel of his day to *be* Israel indeed, now he is there.’<sup>50</sup> There is, then, the suggestion that it is not only Israel’s relationship with God that makes it holy but Israel is holy because it is also in relation with creation. As Johnson contends, ‘God’s primary means of [...] making us holy, is via our participation in, and our witness to, the *Missio Dei*.’<sup>51</sup> Yet, as we shall see, Jesus’ confidence in God’s holiness draws conflict with his contemporaries.

Following Hooker’s chapter, ‘Be Holy’, Francis Young outlines how early Christians were different from the Roman Empire that surrounded them in that they offered practical support the vulnerable, expressed a ‘contempt for death’, abstained from festivals that involved worship of Roman gods and kept a strict sexual ethic.<sup>52</sup> For those early Christians holiness meant embodying a new way of life so that Christianity’s eventual success ‘not only displaced other religious practices but also modified forever the understanding of what

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<sup>46</sup> Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp.60 and 64. See also Calvin T. Samuel, *MORE>Distinct: Reclaiming holiness for the world today* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), p.111-20.

<sup>47</sup> Genesis 1.26 & 28.

<sup>48</sup> Hooker, ‘Be Holy as I am Holy’, p.8

<sup>49</sup> Matthew 5.14-16

<sup>50</sup> Tom Wright, *Matthew for Everyone: Part 1* (London: SPCK, 2002), p.40.

<sup>51</sup> Andy Johnson, *Holiness and the Missio Dei* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2016), p.185.

<sup>52</sup> Francis Young, ‘Being Holy in the Cities of the Roman Empire’ in *Holiness and Mission* by Hooker and Young, pp.37-62.

religion is'.<sup>53</sup> It beckons us to re-examine what God's holiness means for God's people in God's world today. While Hooker's triangle is persuasive as a conceptual framework, we will need to look elsewhere to explore the trigonometry: what God relating to creation means in practice and how this affects the identity and behaviour of those who God calls 'holy'.

### *3.5. Holiness as a building project*

Donna Orsuto comes to our aid through portraying holiness as a 'building project', where the 'foundation' is the Bible, each 'mansion' is a community of vocation, ongoing 'maintenance' is the received spiritual practices, the 'floor plan' is the contemporary outworking of a holy life and plans for a home 'extension' relates to a vision for future living.<sup>54</sup> It is visually compelling, rooted in scripture<sup>55</sup> and presents holiness less as a task and more as a space to inhabit.

In 'laying the foundations' Orsuto thoroughly reviews the scriptural basis, echoing our earlier focus in calling Isaiah 'the prophet of holiness', highlighting holiness as central to Isaiah's call.<sup>56</sup> She makes a distinctive contribution in how she highlights two dimensions of holiness: 'Holiness means that some people or things are separated *from* the common to be consecrated *for* the divine.'<sup>57</sup> Therefore, Orsuto asserts, 'holiness is about being possessed by God and responding to this call through offering all that one (whether individually or communally) is to God.'<sup>59</sup>

It is perhaps 'separated for' and 'devoted to' that help us to understand holiness in the Old Testament. Norman Snaith reflects that God 'was never thought of by the Hebrews as apart from the world, away in splendid isolation [...] Jehovah is always active, always

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.40.

<sup>54</sup> Donna Orsuto, *Holiness: New Century Theology* (London: Continuum, 2006)

<sup>55</sup> 'let yourself be built into a spiritual house' (1 Peter 2.5). See also Luke 6.48-49 and 1 Corinthians 3.9-17

<sup>56</sup> Orsuto, p.19.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.11. See also p.17.

<sup>59</sup> Orsuto, p.11.

dynamically here, in the world.’<sup>60</sup> Therefore, what we see in the New Testament is not, as expressed by Stephen Barton, a ‘holiness of a different kind’,<sup>61</sup> but a fuller and more urgent picture of a holy God who has already been revealed as dynamically involved in the world. In Jesus God is ‘separated’ not for disengagement or for exerting power over the world. Jesus expressed through his life and death a vulnerability, which, as we have already noticed about holiness, many people can perceive as a threat. While Barton asserts that in Jesus ‘Holiness as separation [...] is displaced by holiness as solidarity’,<sup>62</sup> a deep sweep of Biblical revelation shows ‘solidarity’ less as a new development in holiness and more in continuity with the original trajectory. Holiness is to be separated for God — to be ‘solid’ with God — in God’s commitment to creation.

Orsuto’s longest chapter, ‘many mansions’, can be seen as ‘a modern day hagiography’<sup>63</sup> where, taking a chronological approach, she reviews martyrdom, the desert fathers, monasticism, mendicants, marriage, the cloister, serving the urban poor, an exploration of Simone Weill and Mary the Mother of God. Orsuto assumes that certain people are holy without arguing the case, yet the inclusion of this chapter introduces an important aspect to holiness. Unlike Webster, who sees no need to look at holiness in the way it touches and is lived out in the lives of people in different cultural contexts, Orsuto makes the point that holiness has an earthy reality and that in exploring the lives of people seeking to be holy we learn more about God of holiness.

Half of her third chapter, ‘ordinary maintenance’, is given to surveying Roman Catholicism’s seven sacraments which are ‘an encounter between the person in need, Christ, and the Church, with the Holy Spirit effecting the transforming grace.’<sup>64</sup> She then continues

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<sup>60</sup> Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, p.47-48.

<sup>61</sup> Stephen C. Barton, ‘Dislocating and Relocating Holiness: A New Testament Study’ in *Holiness* ed. by Barton, pp.193-213 (p.198).

<sup>62</sup> Barton, ‘Dislocating and Relocating Holiness’, p.206.

<sup>63</sup> David Vincent Meconi, ‘Holiness’, *Heythrop Journal*, 49 (2008), pp.536–7 (p.536).

<sup>64</sup> Orsuto, p.115.

with prayer which ‘places us before the Holy One’;<sup>65</sup> almsgiving which resonates with the way Hebrew prophets insisted holiness relates to justice; fasting ‘recognizing that our lives and resources belong to Another’;<sup>66</sup> popular piety; embracing the theological virtues of faith, hope and love and the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance; and stewardship where ‘to be holy, one must first ‘be’’.<sup>67</sup>

In ‘beyond basic floor plans’ Orsuto expounds Acts 2.42-47 and then, to discover what holiness means today, refers the Second Vatican Council before exploring ‘lay sanctity’.<sup>68</sup> Then in ‘the expansion project’ Orsuto addresses holiness in the 21st century where different lifestyle choices are considered. These are living more simply, generously sharing, changing our political commitments, feeding the physically and spiritually hungry, recognising holiness that is in other religions and having a right relationship with the environment. We may sympathise with Armson who wonders ‘would that the author had covered less, more deeply!’ yearning for an exploration of holiness that is ‘much more practical and engaged’.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, the metaphor of a building project compellingly asserts holiness as something active, multi-sensory and arises out of devotion.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.130.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.134.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.137.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp.151-179.

<sup>69</sup> John Armson, ‘A view of holiness not taken far enough’ in *Church Times* (2 October 2007) <<http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2007/5-october/reviews/book-reviews/a-view-of-holiness-not-taken-far-enough>> [accessed 7 July 2014].



the second rendering persuasive. This leads Gorman to argue that ‘Paul’s understanding of God’s kenotic character is inseparable from the revelations of that character in Christ’s cross [...] especially voluntary rejection of power/privilege and humble self-giving.’<sup>73</sup> Therefore, Christ on the cross does not contrast with other revelations of God’s holiness but gives precision to the character of God’s relational holiness. Furthermore, Gorman sees God’s relational commitments as revealing the ‘counterintuitive, countercultural, and counter-imperial’ truth about the divinity of a holy God is one of power-in-weakness.<sup>74</sup> This does not constrain God to act only through a particular form of Roman punishment, however ‘the cross is not just one theophany among many; it is the *definitive* theophany’.<sup>75</sup> Philippians 2.5-11 is where ‘Jesus’ self-emptying and self-humbling as the display of true divinity [...] makes the worship of Jesus as Lord [...] perfectly appropriate.’<sup>77</sup>

Gorman’s argument is not as complete as the sweep of his rhetoric might suggest. Gorman himself acknowledges that while cruciformity ‘does in fact express the divine identity, it does not exhaust it. God still maintains the right to judge and even to condemn and destroy all divine enemies’.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, God retains the power associated with holiness and apparent in many encounters with God.<sup>79</sup> We may call to mind Moses and Aaron when they entered and then came out of the tent of meeting, ‘fire came out from the Lord and consumed the burnt offering [...] and when the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.’<sup>80</sup> Or, after being struck with tumours, the people of Bethshemesh said, ‘Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?’<sup>81</sup> Then, when Ananias was discovered to have lied to the Holy Spirit, ‘he fell down and died’.<sup>82</sup> Johnson helpfully likens holiness to electricity,

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<sup>73</sup> Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, p.28.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.122-123.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>77</sup> Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, p.30.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.158.

<sup>79</sup> Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament Volume 1* (London: SCM, 1961), pp.270-1.

<sup>80</sup> Leviticus 9.23-24.

<sup>81</sup> 1 Samuel 6.20.

<sup>82</sup> Acts 5.5.



‘a force generating all sorts of good things like light and heat, as long as it is properly cordoned off in a wiring system that prevents direct contact with it.’<sup>83</sup> Yet rather than an impersonal surging voltage, God has been ultimately revealed in the person of Jesus who on the cross is self-emptied.

Expressing holiness as cruciform communicates the power of holiness that God is giving to God’s people. Jesus as a model of holiness makes it clear that holiness within the human frame cannot mean ultimate and supernatural power, as reading Otto might infer. To make the point, Johnson notes in the New Testament ‘the holy people of God are never depicted as a channel through which God destroys others to bring about God’s restoring mission’.<sup>85</sup> Preaching on how humanity achieves holiness, Rowan Williams argues, ‘A human being is holy not because he or she triumphs by will-power over chaos [...] but because that life shows the victory of God’s faithfulness *in the midst* of disorder of imperfection.’<sup>86</sup>

Genesis portrays God as creator and therefore wielding unimaginable power. This act of God must be a facet of holiness, yet the supreme expression of God’s holiness is the Christ in whom God’s holiness is embodied. Here the power of God’s holiness is expressed through Christ willingly dying for the world. Holiness may be safely channelled through an ‘electrical system’, as Johnson contends, yet cruciformity shows holiness as much more than turning on of a light. Cruciformity is an electrical shock, a defibrillator to the heart of humanity, arresting human lives in order that we may begin again. Moreover, it is no impersonal voltage but the electrical charge of love: the self-emptying vulnerability of God.

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<sup>83</sup> Johnson, p.28. Samuel makes a similar point when reflecting on the story of exodus where, for their safety, ‘there was needed a *cordon saitaire* between the holy and dangerous God and the sinful people he chose to dwell among.’ Samuel, *MORE>Distinct*, p.37.

<sup>85</sup> Johnson, p.18.

<sup>86</sup> Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgement: Sermons and Addresses* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1994), p.136. Also, ‘Holiness is [...] being open in all the brokenness and giftedness of human life to God’s transforming grace’. *The Call to Holiness*, para. 111.

It had been revealed through Jacob's dream<sup>87</sup> when for the first time in Bible history there is God's assurance 'I am with you';<sup>88</sup> in the burning bush where for the first time God is revealed as holy and among his people;<sup>89</sup> in God travelling alongside God's people as 'a pillar of cloud by day [...and] a pillar of fire by night';<sup>90</sup> and in the continuing narrative stretching into exile and back.

Like Orsuto, towards the end of his book Gorman considers what it might mean for people to live as the people of a holy God, but through the model of holiness as cruciformity his attempt feels more rigorously and authentically engaged. Through the eyes of Paul, Gorman sees the purpose of God's holiness to 'call out a people into Christ [...] and also to form them into a people that see holiness as its mandate and its goal, or telos'.<sup>91</sup> Believers are those who respond to this call and participate in the faithfulness and love of God which is a process of deification or theosis, which Gorman identifies as 'the process of becoming like God revealed in the cross'.<sup>92</sup> This understanding widens our understanding of justification as a once-for-all act of God in Jesus on the cross into what Gorman calls 'co-crucifixion': participation in the death and resurrection experience of Christ;<sup>93</sup> which is grace enabled rather than assumed through privilege or human initiative;<sup>94</sup> and which means new and eternal life.<sup>95</sup> Gorman opts for the expanded phrase 'cruciform theosis' to describe the process of people participating in the holiness of God which Blackwell modifies to

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<sup>87</sup> Genesis 28.10-17

<sup>88</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 2: Genesis 16-50* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994), p.225.

<sup>89</sup> Exodus 3. Gordon J. Thomas, 'A Holy God Among a Holy People in a Holy Place: The Enduring Eschatological Hope' in *Eschatology in Bible & Theology: Evangelical Essays at the Dawn of a New Millennium* ed. by Kent E. Brower and Mark W. Elliott (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997), pp.53-69 (p.56)

<sup>90</sup> Exodus 13.21-22; 14.19,24; 33.9-10; Numbers 12.5; 14.14; Deuteronomy 31.12; Nehemiah 9.12,19; Psalms 99.7

<sup>91</sup> Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, p.108.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.91.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.85.

‘christosis’ as an attempt at further clarity.<sup>96</sup> Therefore Gorman anticipates human sharing in divine life where Webster seems to hold back from such an assertion. Yet in doing so Gorman asserts more compellingly the communal and self-giving nature of holiness, enabling him to show with greater precision what it is like for holiness to be made visible. So Gorman argues that sex must never be in exchange for payment; domination must never be a feature of personal, public or political life; and human holiness must have the end of violence in view. Modelled on God in Christ the human outworking of holiness must be centred on self-less relating. Yet holiness as cruciform inevitably maps out a road of suffering, death and even the paradoxical sensation that at the point when we feel most empty we will be most filled with God’s holiness.<sup>97</sup>

### 3.7. *Holiness as blessing and gift*

Presenting holiness as self-emptying and self-giving risks reducing holiness to an activity.

David Peterson addresses the tension between holiness as a task but also a gift. He introduces his book, *Possessed by God*, arguing that ‘definitive sanctification is a more important theme in the New Testament than has generally been acknowledged.’<sup>98</sup> More stridently he asserts ‘The call to ‘be holy’ can so easily degenerate into a moralistic and perfectionistic programme for believers to pursue.’<sup>99</sup> Certainly books such as *The Pursuit of Holiness* emphasises effort and Bebbington conveys how for Calvinists in the nineteenth century ‘a round of ceaseless activity was the crucial test of spiritual health’, along with Methodists who ‘threw themselves into a full round of meetings.’<sup>100</sup> Clearly, activity is not

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<sup>96</sup> Ben C. Blackwell, *Christosis: Pauline soteriology in light of deification in Irenaeus and Cyril of Alexandria* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011)

<sup>97</sup> Recall Jesus on the cross quoting Psalm 22.1, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Matthew 27.46; Mark 15.34)

<sup>98</sup> David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Nottingham: Apollos, 1995), p.14.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.137.

<sup>100</sup> Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (New Malden: The Navpress, 1985) and David Bebbington, *Holiness in the Nineteen-Century* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2000), pp.40 and 57.

wrong but, as Webster implied, activity does not equal holiness: holiness is more absolute status than a continuum with different levels of achievement.<sup>101</sup>

Peterson's definition of holiness covers familiar territory. He explores the root meaning of the word as separation, distinctness or otherness; with holiness being particularly associated with the majesty, sovereignty and awesome power of God who is transcendent, exalted and different from everything he has made, pointing towards moral purity and perfection.<sup>102</sup> God alone is holy and the only source of true holiness. Holiness can never be simply acquired by human effort but can only be 'a status or condition which God imparts.'<sup>103</sup> The role of human effort resides in the responsibility to be connected with God, but it is God alone who grants the status of being 'holy'. He clarifies,

No Christian should doubt the need to give practical, everyday expression to the holiness that is our status and calling in Christ. Only those who trust in his sanctifying work on the cross, and take seriously the warning to 'pursue holiness', will 'see the Lord'.<sup>104</sup>

Peterson only briefly attends to the Gospels, arguing 'Jesus offers very little direct teaching on the theme of holiness and sanctification.'<sup>105</sup> He focuses attention on the New Testament epistles where the occurrences of holiness words are prevalent. He shows that II Corinthians — though written to address moral failure including church division, sexual immorality and poor generosity — begins 'To the church of God [...] to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints'.<sup>106</sup> Hence, Peterson resists a common perception of sanctification as a process of moral and spiritual transformation after conversion, to present it as 'God's way of taking possession of us in Christ, setting us apart to belong to him and to fulfil his purpose for us.'<sup>107</sup> Though humans have a part to play in the

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<sup>101</sup> See also 'The holiness the Church is not the product of Christian endeavour, but rather a free gift of God, which calls for gratitude, humility, and a desire to share this gift with all.' *The Call to Holiness*, para. 101.

<sup>102</sup> Peterson, *Possessed by God*, p.17.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.91.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27. I will dispute this common assertion in 5.6.

<sup>106</sup> II Corinthians 1.2.

<sup>107</sup> Peterson, *Possessed by God*, p.27.

process of sanctification they do so only because of God's saving work in Christ continuing to outwork through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Or we might phrase it more succinctly: holy status naturally leads to holy living, but holy-like living does not equal holy status.<sup>108</sup> Peterson contends, 'our essential identity as Christians is formed by Christ and the gospel, not by our personalities, backgrounds or achievements [...] our standing with him does not depend upon the degree to which we live up to his expectations.'<sup>109</sup>

Peterson works to understand the nature of those passages in the New Testament that urge people to strive after holiness. Paul's injunction in Romans 12.2 to 'present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God' is interpreted by Peterson as meaning that 'the Spirit who is holy enables God's people to live in a way that is pleasing to God'.<sup>110</sup> In Hebrews 12.14 the encouragement to 'Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord', leads Peterson to contend that because 'We cannot add anything to the holiness God offers us in Christ' God's people must pursue 'practical expressions of the holiness or sanctification that is ours in Christ'.<sup>111</sup> He interprets the injunction of 'making holiness perfect' in II Corinthians 7.1 as rooted in the participle meaning 'discharging' or 'putting into operation', which therefore leads to the interpretation that believers are to 'keep on exercising our (quantity of) sanctity (or, keep on doing the works of sanctity)'.<sup>112</sup> Presenting, pursuing and perfecting holiness is therefore a response to God's holiness, which people can only do because they are enabled by God's holiness. Hence, Peterson neatly keeps holiness as a quality belonging to God alone and received by people as a gift. Such uniformity is attractive, but the full Biblical account of holiness is complex. The Bible, for example Leviticus 11.44, speaks of God's people as having the

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<sup>108</sup> See Matthew 7.21-23.

<sup>109</sup> Peterson, *Possessed by God*, pp.47-48.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p.88.

power to confer holiness in addition to God. Johnson goes further to suggest that a ‘holy pattern of human life — made possible by the Christ-shaped, poured out Spirit — corroborates the verbal witness to Jesus’ resurrection [...] displays God’s own holiness before the eyes of others, and thereby sanctifies or hallows his name/reputation.’<sup>113</sup> The extraordinary feature of God’s holiness, therefore, is that it desires the participation of others in the holy-making endeavour, not because they are worthy but because they are chosen. While Peterson is right to exalt God as the source of all holiness, he does not take seriously enough the choice God makes to be vulnerable among people that Gorman identifies as cruciform holiness.

Peterson draws our attention to sanctification not only enabled by Christ and continued in the Spirit, but also as something in the future. It is here that Peterson pictures ‘entire sanctification’, or ‘glorification’. It is not so much about individual effort. Peterson argues, ‘It describes God’s goal for his people collectively [...] the complete expression in their lives together of what it means to be the holy people of God.’<sup>114</sup> Peterson sees entire sanctification as connected with sharing in Christ’s resurrection and the likeness of Christ’s glory, and therefore it lies in the future, and until then believers live in the tension between belonging to the one raised from dead and the continuing struggle with sin and flesh.<sup>115</sup>

Regarding the process of reflecting more of God’s holiness, Peterson argues that ‘Instead of speaking in terms of progressive sanctification, the New Testament more regularly employs the language of renewal, transformation and growth, to describe what God is doing with us here and now.’<sup>116</sup> Therefore, against common usage, Peterson sees sanctification as another way of talking about turning to and remaining in Christ. ‘Sanctification is thus primarily the work of Christ on the cross and of the Holy Spirit

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<sup>113</sup> Johnson, pp.114-115. See also 1 Peter 3.14: ‘in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord’.

<sup>114</sup> Peterson, *Possessed by God*, p.66.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p.113.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p.136.

through the word of the gospel, bringing us into an exclusive and dedicated relationship with God, as the holy people of the New Covenant.’<sup>117</sup>

The distinction Peterson is making is subtle but important. God alone is holy and through God’s holiness in us — that is, the Holy Spirit — we are able to live lives that reflect that holiness. Perhaps, then, the dichotomy between gift and task is false. The gift of holiness results in a task of letting holiness shine through our lives. As Peterson argues, ‘Human effort is required, but not apart from, nor distinct from the activity of God’s Spirit, who subdues the flesh as we mortify it in his power, and as we set our minds upon the things of the Spirit.’<sup>118</sup> Perhaps also the divide between absolute and relative holiness is misleading. God’s holy people are holy, yet the extent to which their holiness is visible will be dependent on how much the believer, in the context of a believing community, is open and responsive to the Holy Spirit. The title of Peterson’s book is instructive. The people who are *Possessed by God* show God’s holiness in them not because it is a burden to bear, but in the way they have been blessed; not because they are slaves, but because what possesses them is love. Peterson makes a generalised link, ‘holiness abounds when love abounds’,<sup>119</sup> but it is an assertion that he does not develop, though I will later. Certainly, as Alan Bartlett notes, inhumanity is less likely when, instead of a task-focused pursuit of holiness, love is in focus.<sup>120</sup> We have seen that this love has a particular shape: it is cruciform. So it is possible to see Peterson (with Gorman) developing the triangular nature of holiness (see figure 3): the vision of holiness is of belonging to God alone; those who respond to the invitation to be in a relationship with

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.136.

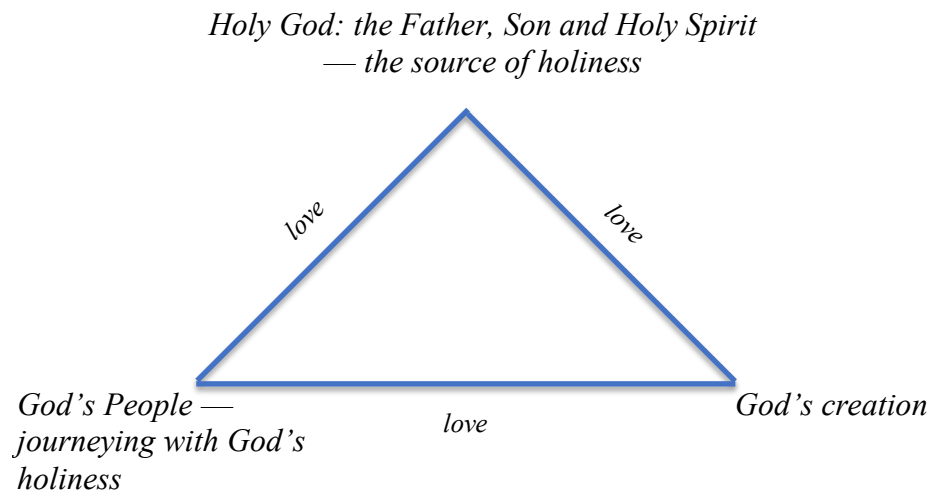
<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p.113.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p.81.

<sup>120</sup> Alan Bartlett, *Humane Christianity: Arguing with the classic Christian spiritual disciplines in the light of Jesus of Nazareth* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), p.156

God embark on a journey with God’s holiness; and share in God’s self-emptying love for God’s world.<sup>121</sup> Apart from God we cannot love like God, or therefore be holy.

*Figure 3 - Holiness triangle developed by Peterson and Gorman*



### *3.8. Holiness as participating in divine life*

Earlier we saw Gorman introduce the term ‘deification’ into this discussion. The core of deification is the ‘formula of exchange’ developed by Irenaeus: ‘he who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving adoption, might become the son of God.’<sup>122</sup> Hooker phrases it more lyrically, ‘He who is Son of God was born of a woman in order that those who are born of woman might become sons of God’.<sup>123</sup> Daniel Keating claims that there are a number of witnesses who see this formula not as merely summarising a doctrine but ‘summing up the Christian faith’.<sup>124</sup> He begins with the Biblical basis, each passage giving a different nuance to the meaning of the exchange. So, Christ embracing our poverty means that we can embrace his riches (II Corinthians 8.9);

<sup>121</sup> The metaphor of journey has deep resonance. For example, ‘The holiness of the Church is that of a people on the road, on pilgrimage’. *The Call to Holiness*, para. 96.

<sup>122</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book III, Chapter XIX <<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus-book3.html>> [accessed 3 May 2017]

<sup>123</sup> Morna D. Hooker, *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p.16.

<sup>124</sup> Daniel A. Keating, *Deification and Grace* (Naples: Sepieta Press, 2007), p.12.



Christ born of a woman under the law that we might be born of God under the Spirit (Galatians 4.4-6); we suffer with Christ so that we may be glorified with Christ (Romans 8.14-17, 29); and we are God's children and that when we see God we will be like God (I John 3.1-2). He also cites other supplementary texts.<sup>125</sup>

Contrary to Keating, Ben Drewery argues that 'the true pedigree of 'participation in the divine nature' is to be sought, not in the biblical revelation, but in Greek philosophy.<sup>126</sup> While we cannot be precise regarding how early Christians developed the idea of deification, scripture portrays Jesus' earliest disciples as working to clarify what it meant to be 'in Christ' and the idea of theosis or deification took firm root in that soil. Yet rigour becomes necessary when discussing who is God, God's people and God's world and what it is that distinguishes each. Keating states, 'We plainly do not become "God" in any kind of strict identity. As deified, we remain creatures who depend entirely on God for our being and our life.'<sup>127</sup> Keating clarifies: 'we share in his being in that he gives us our created being by bringing us into existence. He has it essentially; we have it derivatively and by participation.'<sup>128</sup> Keating likens deification to a first minister who has authority because the King has given it. Similarly, the Holy Spirit enters a person but that person does not cease to be a creature and instead become the Holy Spirit. Rather the person partakes, genuinely, in the Spirit.

There is much nuance in this doctrine. Perhaps Hooker achieves greater clarity in replacing 'exchange' with 'interchange'. Commenting on Galatians 3.13 she argues that Christ 'enters into our experience, and we then enter into his [...] Christ does not cease to be the Son of God, and we receive the Spirit of the Son.'<sup>129</sup> Moreover, deification is less a loss

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<sup>125</sup> Romans 5.12-21; 1 Corinthians 15.44-49; 2 Corinthians 3.18; Ephesians 1.10; and Psalm 82.6.

<sup>126</sup> Ben Drewery, 'Deification' in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp* ed. by Peter Brooks (SCM Press, 1975), pp.33-62 (p.54).

<sup>127</sup> Keating, p.96.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97.

<sup>129</sup> Hooker, *From Adam to Christ*, p.16.

of human identity than regaining it: ‘in Christ men become what they were intended to be from the creation’.<sup>130</sup> Resonating with the link between creation and relation I emphasised in 3.4 that Keating argues, ‘deification is the transformation and glorification of our nature, so that it can be what God intended it to be: a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.’<sup>131</sup>

Nevertheless, these ways of framing deification illuminate the desire within God and humanity to be in relationship with each other, thereby deepening further our understanding of holiness as being primarily relational.

Drawing on the church Fathers, Keating asserts that deification can only be initiated by God. God alone ‘can properly sanctify and deify’ but yet also ‘requires our full response and cooperation’.<sup>132</sup> Keating sees the principal door by which holiness touches human lives is baptism and Eucharist, and with baptism confirmation is included. Pope John Paul II makes this point: ‘Baptism is the true entry into the holiness of God [...] To ask catechumens: ‘Do you wish to receive Baptism?’ means at the same time to ask them: ‘Do you wish to become holy?’<sup>133</sup> Yet the ritual alone is not enough: ‘baptism must be accompanied by a living faith’ and the Eucharist must not be approached unworthily.<sup>134</sup> Keating continues to explore what it might mean for holiness to permeate through the whole house of our lives, to be transformed into the image of Christ and the call to perfection which is not flawlessness or attainable only in the life to come but is obtainable now as we become ‘sons and daughters of God conformed to the image of Christ’<sup>135</sup> It is achieved through asceticism (the ‘putting off’ and ‘putting on’), through prayer, particularly its mystical communion and also through the path of suffering. In this sense, ‘Baptism and the Eucharist

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<sup>130</sup> Hooker, *From Adam to Christ*, p.22

<sup>131</sup> Keating, p.110.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp.39-40.

<sup>133</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* (Vatican City: Libreria editrice Vaticana, 2000), p.31 cited in Orsuto, p.113. Also, ‘holiness consists in living into one’s baptismal identity.’ *The Call to Holiness*, para. 37.

<sup>134</sup> Keating, p.46.

<sup>135</sup> II Corinthians 3.18; Romans 8.29 and Keating, p.77.

not only are the gate of entry for the deified life, but they also provide the shape that the deified life in Christ will follow.’<sup>136</sup> It opens the question of what is meant for those outside the sacramental tradition of the church, like those of the Society of Friends and the Salvation Army. Can they still access or embody holiness? It is not an insignificant question given that both traditions have arisen through a thirst for holiness. Moreover, given that baptism and the Eucharist as sacraments that the ordained particularly (if not exclusively) administer, does it mean that those specifically ordained to word and sacrament are the gatekeepers for God’s holiness and have a determining place in a Christian community’s understanding and access of God’s holiness? I will return to these questions in 4.1.

### *3.9. Holiness as active compassion*

Kent Brower, in harmony with other authors, highlights that ‘all Christian holiness is derived in relation to God, the Holy One.’<sup>137</sup> Moreover, ‘humans, places, or objects were only holy insofar as they were related to the source of holiness.’<sup>138</sup> More specifically Brower argues that ‘holiness is an incarnational issue [...] we see the holiness of God most clearly in the incarnation of Christ.’<sup>139</sup> In terms of Hooker’s triangle, there is an implicit invitation for God’s holy people to meditate upon the example of God’s holiness in Christ as a model for how they may live out God’s holiness that is within them.

Drawing on Wright and Marcus Borg,<sup>140</sup> Bower describes how Pharisees were an important holiness movement within second Temple Judaism. They believed that ‘If the holy God were to dwell with His people again, they would need to be holy’<sup>141</sup>. They took the

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<sup>136</sup> Keating, p.84.

<sup>137</sup> Kent E. Brower, *Holiness in the Gospels* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2005), p.15.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>140</sup> Nicholas Thomas Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992) and Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* rev. edn. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1998).

<sup>141</sup> Brower, *Holiness in the Gospels*, p.28.

standards laid down for priests and, in the light of Exodus 19.6 ('you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation'), applied those standards to the whole of Israel and the whole land. Brower notes, 'True allegiance to the covenant demanded this intensification of holiness' in three ways: food rules, Sabbath observance and tithing.<sup>142</sup> Much effort was given to how food was prepared together with who it was eaten with; ensuring that the Sabbath was without work; and financial giving. It is with the first two areas in particular that we see a sharp difference between the thirst for holiness expressed by the Pharisees and the thirst for holiness expressed by Jesus. The Pharisees' goal was holiness, their means was Torah observance and their understanding of holiness was separation from all that defiles. Jesus' goal was holiness, but his authority and understanding were different. Like the Pharisees, Jesus thought table fellowship was important but unlike the Pharisees Jesus saw the meals as 'a prophetic representative act [...] restoring the marginalized to the people of God.'<sup>143</sup> Drawing on Borg, Brower concludes that for Jesus 'holiness had nothing to do with separation from external sources of defilement'<sup>144</sup> and 'compassion trumped strict observance'<sup>145</sup> shown through Jesus' reaching out to those excluded from accepted table fellowship and offering healing on the Sabbath. 'No longer was holiness understood to need protection, but as an active force which overcame uncleanness.'<sup>146</sup> The Pharisees unwittingly advocated a fragile holiness but Jesus' holiness is robust. Jesus appears fearless in the face of potential impurity, whether through contracting physical disease or a slur on his reputation. Instead Jesus sees holiness as the contagion and we can see his ministry releasing this contagion into Palestine.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., pp.30-1.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>144</sup> Borg, p.112.

<sup>145</sup> Brower, *Holiness in the Gospels*, p.40.

<sup>146</sup> Borg, p.112.

Brower's argument is powerful but contains a number of difficulties. Firstly, he contends that 'Jesus' understanding of holiness [...] involved a radical redefinition' yet this overlooks, as I have already argued, how Jesus stood in continuity with holiness expressed in God's relating to humanity that stretches back to the Garden of Eden. Secondly, highlighting compassion as the signature feature of holiness does not do justice to the power of the relationship between God and God's world. 'Love' is intuitively more compelling than compassion, suggesting a close and involved relationship. Hence, when Calvin Samuel counts the number of times 'mercy' and 'love' are with recorded in Jesus' speech he concludes that 'holiness finds its ultimate expression in [...] loving action', using a laundry metaphor to argue that holiness is less a 'clean white garment' and more a 'bleaching agent'.<sup>147</sup> With contemporary ecological concern — for example, about coral reefs — Samuel's metaphor is not ideal,<sup>148</sup> but his contention of love as an active agent is helpful and Brower's later writing suggests that he too has moved towards love as a superior description of holiness.<sup>149</sup> Thirdly, we need to guard against presenting holiness as an impersonal force, contagion or even Jesus' activity and teaching juxtaposed with his conflict with the Pharisees.<sup>150</sup> God's holiness is revealed as a person, Jesus Christ, who is the 'Holy One of God' and in continuity with God's desire to be in a relationship with humanity.<sup>151</sup>

Whereas Brower concentrates on God's action in Christ, Craig Blomberg also focuses on the action required by those whom Christ encounters. So, Jesus reaches out to those deemed as 'traitorous' and 'corrupt' in his society but 'does not condone their sinful lifestyles

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<sup>147</sup> Calvin T. Samuel, *Jesus, Holiness & Conflict in the Gospel Tradition: The Words, Acts & Mission of Jesus* (Durham: Wesley Study Centre, 2013), pp.15 and 26.

<sup>148</sup> National Ocean Service, 'What is coral bleaching?' <[https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/coral\\_bleach.html](https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/coral_bleach.html)> [accessed 6 May 2018]

<sup>149</sup> Kent E. Brower, *Living as God's Holy People: Holiness and Community in Paul* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2010), p.103.

<sup>150</sup> Samuel's later work makes this point especially well. See Samuel, *MORE>Distinct*, p.21, 28 and 114-5.

<sup>151</sup> Mark 1.24; Luke 4.34; and John 6.69. I will explore this phrase in 5.6.

but calls them to repentance, transformation and discipleship.<sup>152</sup> And again, ‘If they would have an ongoing relationship with [Jesus], they must respond to him proactively with repentance and faith.’<sup>153</sup> Here Blomberg seeks to emphasise the task in addition to the gift, seeing holiness being a gift only if it is actively received. Yet, receiving the gift is contingent on the Spirit working in human lives. As Brower notes in his review of Paul’s letters, our love for God cannot be self-generated affection but instead ‘the Spirit places and releases God’s active and seeking love in our hearts.’<sup>154</sup> Therefore a sign of holiness in a person is the presence of God’s grace-empowered holy love working towards God, but not only towards God. ‘the Spirit-controlled [...] life is none other than the life of God’s love lived out in relationships within the community.’<sup>155</sup> Yet the nature of the Spirit, as is the nature of Christ-defined love, is that while relationships find their bearings in the community of Christ, holiness is a relationship that must include God’s creation. ‘God’s holy people, his new creation, are not simply reconciled to God; they are to be agents of reconciliation in the world.’<sup>156</sup>

### 3.10. Holiness as perfect love

Moving from knowing to loving, and from loving to sanctification Thomas Noble argues, ‘Real Christian experience is quite simply falling in love with God [...] It is objective experience of the real and living God that results in the subjective inner and outward change we call “sanctification”’.<sup>157</sup> Noble sees that Jesus’ lost and found parables of Luke’s Gospel ‘vividly portray compassionate love as the heart of the holiness of God’.<sup>158</sup> In commenting

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<sup>152</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus’ Meals with Sinners* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), p.102.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p.122.

<sup>154</sup> Brower, *Living as God’s Holy People*, p.28.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p.92.

<sup>157</sup> Thomas Arthur Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People: The Historic Doctrine of Christian Perfecting* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2013), p.17.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

on I Thessalonians Noble claims, ‘holistic sanctification is the filling of their hearts with the love of God’.<sup>159</sup> In concluding his survey of scripture, Noble claims

at the heart of the holiness of the people of God is loving God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love of neighbor [...] Christian holiness is understood as discipleship [...] a pure heart, being filled with outgoing, inclusive compassion<sup>160</sup>

Noble lists Nyssen, Augustine, Bernard and Aquinas as all agreeing with him (and Wesley) that Christian holiness is a ‘theology of love’, with sanctification being a means to an end which is to ‘be filled with the love of God’.<sup>161</sup> Furthermore not only is love a description of holiness but there is nothing outside of love that holiness can include. Noble quotes Wesley:

if you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way [...] from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love described in the thirteenth chapter of Corinthians. You can go no higher than this<sup>162</sup>.

Yet while love is the aim, ultimately love is a gift: ‘we are never holy in ourselves. We can only become genuinely holy people filled with God’s love [...] because we are “in Christ” and indwelt by his Spirit.’<sup>163</sup>

Noble addresses perfection, noting that John Wesley realised the word was problematical but insisted on using it because it was biblical, though its biblical meaning is easily lost. Contrary to common perceptions of perfection as ‘zero defects’, Noble’s analysis of scripture reveals that the Greek words behind the English rendering ‘perfect’ in the New Testament can also be translated ‘mature’. The Greek words can also be translated ‘end’ or ‘goal’, but with ‘a dynamic sense of movement’ indicating less arrival but more being on course, in the way that sportsman can hit a perfect shot from the moment of setting the ball

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p.42.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p.86. ‘sanctification is a process that leads to perfect love’. *The Call to Holiness*, para. 73.

<sup>162</sup> Wesley, ‘A Plain Account of Christian Perfection’, p.90.

<sup>163</sup> Noble, p.94.

heading towards its destination.<sup>164</sup> The third part of Noble's exegesis reveals that perfection includes the idea of wholeness. Noble argues,

Being filled with the Spirit of Christ the Son [...] and loving the Father whole-heartedly, the Spirit-filled Christian daily works at the business of reconciling every other desire and motive to the one dominating, over-riding, all-embracing passion of life, to serve God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength.<sup>165</sup>

In commenting on John's Gospel and the First letter of John, Noble states 'God's love is "perfected" with us as we abide in God and he in us'.<sup>166</sup> Though this does not mean a life filled with heaven is separated from earth's raw realities. Rather for John Wesley perfection meant being 'immersed in the practicalities of living and [...] filled with love for their neighbor, that they developed an integrity and maturity of character.'<sup>167</sup>

Perhaps more than any other author reviewed Noble asserts that God's holiness is God's love, that holiness is in us when we consent to be filled with God's love and, in being filled, become 'perfect in love'. Triangular holiness is on full display here because perfect love is love for God, but it is also love for God's world. Noble also points towards cruciform theosis when he says,

Wherever we may encounter the reality of a genuinely holy Christian, a genuinely selfless person whose life is centred on God and so lives with compassion for others, then that is because that person has learned what it means in his or her own experience to die with Christ to self-centred living.<sup>168</sup>

Here we can see the holiness triangle develop to emphasise how God's people have their place within the triangular relationship of love only because they are in Christ (figure 4).

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p.196.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p.38.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p.180.





### 3.11. Holiness as everyday faithfulness

So far in this chapter our search for an understanding of holiness has led us towards God whose nature is holy and who is most fully revealed in Christ. The human response to this revelation has been prescriptive or, at the very least, a goal for sharing in God's holiness through the Holy Spirit. Yet the very style of such conversation risks, if we are not careful, being contrary to very nature of holiness. The holiness of God as revealed through the incarnation of Christ is not distant, above or at a tangent from everyday life, but has come close and is embodied in the lived life of a human, who is Jesus Christ. Therefore, a conversation about holiness cannot be kept in the realm of theoretical engagement, however compelling and well exemplified by Hooker, Webster, Brower, Keating and Noble. Nor can it kept in a generalised conversation of what holiness means for human living, like Orsuto and Gorman begin to offer. A way must be found for sound academic engagement with specific lives as they encounter, and are altered by that encounter, with holiness. As a Catholic Priest once noted, 'Faith, prayer [...] these do not really exist in the abstract. There are only *people* who believe, *people* who pray.'<sup>172</sup>

In his trilogy of books on holiness Michael Plekon roots his understanding of holiness in a way consistent with other definitions.<sup>173</sup> He confirms that holiness is 'very much like [...] God'<sup>174</sup>, 'living out the of the gospel'<sup>175</sup>, and also 'a gift' and 'the task' because 'We are all called to be saints'.<sup>176</sup> He upholds sanctity as not a 'moral achievement but more like a

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<sup>172</sup> Michael Plekon, *Hidden Holiness* (Indiana, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), p.14. This resonates with Noble's critique of Richard Hooker's delineation of scripture, reason and tradition which, when includes experience, Methodists paint as the Wesleyan theological quadrilateral. Noble stridently states, 'there are no such entities. There are simply people, persons who know God'. Noble, p.14. Also, 'Holiness [...] is not an abstract theoretical, doctrinal concept. It is a lived experience of the grace of God.' Samuel, *MORE>Distinct*, p.20.

<sup>173</sup> Michael Plekon, *Living Icons: Persons of Faith in the Eastern Church* (Indiana, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2002); Plekon, *Hidden Holiness*; Michael Plekon, *Saints As They Really Are: Voices of Holiness in our Time* (Indiana, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2012).

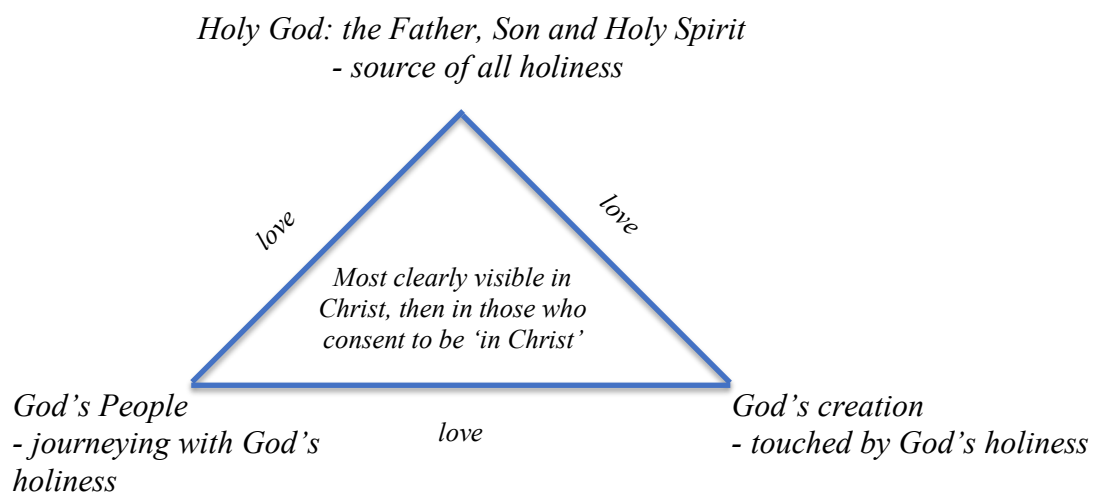
<sup>174</sup> Plekon, *Living Icons*, pp.19 and 28.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p.257.

<sup>176</sup> Plekon, *Hidden Holiness*, p.164.

seal, a stamp, being marked and set apart as God’s own.’<sup>177</sup> He endorses holiness as relational (‘There is no such thing as a solitary Christian’<sup>178</sup>) and as being ‘grasped by love’<sup>179</sup>. Nevertheless, Plekon’s framework is different. Unlike Keating who hears the formula of exchange where ‘the eternal Son of God became what we are so that we could become what he is’ and focuses holiness on what it might mean to become ‘what he is’; Plekon focuses holiness on the fundamental precursor — God has ‘become what we are’. While human divinisation is extraordinarily significant, much more profound is divine humanisation. This humanisation is the revelation of God in the incarnation of Christ but also, Plekon claims, ‘The very act of creation is also one of sanctification.’<sup>180</sup> This is not to deny there is a call upon humans to remain in God’s image and grow towards the likeness of God, but rather to assert that through the holiness of God — the Holy Spirit — God formed, even breathed, holiness into our humanity. We can develop the holiness triangle to make this point explicit (see figure five).

*Figure 5: Holiness triangle including the holiness of creation*



<sup>177</sup> Plekon, *Saints As They Really Are*, p.196.

<sup>178</sup> Plekon, *Living Icons*, p.3. See also p.212.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57. See also pp.79, 83-84, 87, 91, 93,

<sup>180</sup> Plekon, *Hidden Holiness*, p.45.

The gift and task of holiness enables us ‘to find God anywhere, everywhere, no matter who we are’.<sup>181</sup> There seems to be at least five implications. Firstly, holiness for Plekon is not for a narrowly drawn group but a call upon the whole of humanity — all who have been made in God’s image. For Plekon humanity was made for holiness, and therefore the message of holiness is as much about evangelism and justification as it is about discipleship and sanctification.

Secondly, that holiness does not require the absence of sin but rather ‘is a struggle with the baggage of human existence, all the elements that make us who we are’ with holiness being ‘the accumulation of many mistakes and inadequacies, numerous eccentricities and imperfections, all shaped, transformed, by God’.<sup>182</sup> Drawing on Bulgakov, the Russian Orthodox theologian, Plekon clarifies: ‘Holiness [...] is not the absence of weakness or the obliteration of all failings, but rather the triumph of Christ’.<sup>183</sup> Holiness is the reality of Christ being and proclaimed Lord in a person’s life, regardless of their past, present or future.

Thirdly, Plekon wishes to untangle holiness from the church institution. He asserts, ‘Religious leaders can demand more of us than God, equate growth in membership and giving with authentic discipleship’ and with candid honesty outlines his own difficult and often painful encounters with church authority, particularly as a Carmelite.<sup>184</sup>

Fourthly, drawing on Evdokimov, an Orthodox lay theologian, Plekon sees ‘married women and men, parents, teachers and lawyers, medical professionals and social activists, and even clergy and religious’ as being called to live holy lives ‘firmly set in the homes, offices, schools, streets, and towns of our era.’<sup>185</sup> This focus on ordinary people draws the search for holiness away from looking at celebrated saints who Plekon suggests are presented

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p.185.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p.42 and Plekon, *Living Icons*, p.185.

<sup>183</sup> Plekon, *Hidden Holiness*, p.44. This resonates with Rowan Williams — See 3.6.

<sup>184</sup> Plekon, *Saints As They Really Are*, pp.29 and 105-49.

<sup>185</sup> Plekon, *Hidden Holiness*, pp.13 and 143.

as being ‘beyond human’.<sup>186</sup> It is an earthly holiness, not the ‘heroic style of the desert, the monastery’,<sup>187</sup> that is the resonate contemporary call. It also means, to quote Kallistos Ware, ‘holiness does not have merely a single voice or an identical face.’<sup>188</sup>

Fifthly, resonating with Gorman’s presentation of kenosis and that being emptied means losing all right and desire for significance, Plekon considers most illustrations of holiness as being unnoticed. He quotes Rowan Williams who preached that holiness ‘is not a place of power or influence; it changes the world not by force but by patient endurance, by making room for the truth of God’s alarming compassion to be there in the midst of everything.’<sup>189</sup> It is Evdokimov who coined the idea of a ‘hidden holiness’<sup>190</sup> which is the title and energy of Plekon’s second book.

By making holiness ordinary and ‘hidden’ it thereby becomes difficult to notice and define. Plekon offers portraits of people he considers to be holy. In *Living Icons* he outlines people within the Orthodox tradition. In *Hidden Holiness* he opens up his enquiry to include Ety Hillesum from a Dutch Jewish family dying in Auschwitz; Olga Arsamquq Michael from Alaska; Simone Weil a French teacher and political activist; and Sara Miles who received communion then felt compelled to ensure that all had food to eat. These holy people are not so much ‘hidden’ from view because they are known within the orthodox tradition.<sup>191</sup> Yet Plekon speaks of those that are known in order to draw attention to the ordinary facets of their lives. He argues that holy people are people who have ‘an extraordinary life, lived in a most ordinary way’ and ‘deeply assimilated their faith and then gone about their lives’;<sup>192</sup> ‘a

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>187</sup> Plekon, *Living Icons*, p.278.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p.287.

<sup>189</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘Dietrich Bonhoeffer Centenary Service - Sermon at St Matthaues Church, Berlin’ (Sunday 5th February 2006) <<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1603/dietrich-bonhoeffer-centenary-service-sermon-at-st-matthaues-church-berlin>> [accessed 10 March 2017].

<sup>190</sup> Plekon, *Hidden Holiness*, pp.6, 22 and 131.

<sup>191</sup> From conversations with a member of the Convent of Saint John of Kronstadt, Bath.

<sup>192</sup> Plekon, *Hidden Holiness*, p.95.

singularity of intent to live ‘the mystery of Nazareth, the hidden holiness of Jesus’;<sup>193</sup> ‘a life seeking goodness, the Goodness implanted in us’;<sup>194</sup> ‘the task of revealing [... the sharing in God’s life] to others, to the world, to be living icons of God’;<sup>195</sup> and those who ‘Practice resurrection’.<sup>196</sup> In broadening the scope, Plekon risks losing a Christian mooring of holiness. He increases this risk in his second book through asserting, drawing on Bulgakov and Evdokimov, holiness is ‘goodness’.<sup>197</sup> This moves holiness more towards a sociological definition of ‘moral meaning’.<sup>198</sup> Plekon takes this further in his third book where his illustrations of holiness are drawn from outside Christianity. ‘This vision of sainthood is expansive to say the least’ notes one reviewer,<sup>199</sup> yet Plekon seems to recognise the risk he is taking. He quotes Alexander Men to remind the reader that, ‘In contrast to other traditions, Christianity is not simply based on a system of the views and legacies of its founder, but on the experiences of a continuous living communion with him’.<sup>200</sup> Therefore holiness, for Plekon, seems to be the relationship between God and humanity, illustrated in Jesus and empowered through the Holy Spirit.

Plekon’s critique of how holiness can be presented is likely to ring clearer in Orthodox and Roman Catholic circles which emphasise hagiography and processes for canonisation. It chimes less clearly in Methodist circles, but no Christian community — including Methodists — are immune to Plekon’s critique.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p.153.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p.172.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p.164.

<sup>196</sup> Plekon, *Saints As They Really Are*, p. 55.

<sup>197</sup> See Plekon, *Hidden Holiness*, pp.2, 44

<sup>198</sup> See Davies, ‘The Sociology of Holiness’, p.66.

<sup>199</sup> Jon M. Sweeney, ‘Saints as They Really Are: Voices of Holiness in Our Time’ *The Christian Century*, 129, 37-8 (p.38).

<sup>200</sup> Archpriest Alexander Men, *Orthodox Worship: Sacrament, Word and Image* trans. by Colin Masica (Crestwood, New York: Oakwood/SVSP, 1999), p.3 cited in Plekon, *Living Icons*, p.257. This finds resonance in Samuel’s persuasive assessment of Job as an exemplar in relating to God, yet being outside of Israel. See Samuel, *MORE>Distinct*, pp.65-75.

<sup>201</sup> John Wesley is often exalted with little exploration of his weaknesses and the ongoing exploration of the lives of early Methodists (for example, through the work of the Wesley Historical Society, can unwittingly idealize a prior age. See The Wesley Historical Society, ‘Publications’ <<http://wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk/publications.html>> [accessed 10 March 2017].

### 3.12. Holiness as hospitality

At first sight, apart from the attractive alliteration, it is odd that the word ‘holiness’ appears in the title of Luke Bretherton’s book, ‘Hospitality as Holiness’. For example, the word ‘holy’ or its cognates are absent in the first half of his book and only occasionally present in the second half. Yet while it is true that Bretherton at no point intentionally defines holiness or positions gaining an understanding of holiness as an aim, the book does intersect with the triangular relationship which, I argue, is at the heart of holiness, and he does so in a way that helps navigate journeying with God’s holiness in a multi-cultural and a faith-faith world.

Bretherton’s stated aim is to develop ‘a constructive account of how the practice of hospitality constitutes the way in which Christians should respond to moral disputes in a context of deep diversity’.<sup>202</sup> Whether through theoretical engagement with strident atheism, responding to global religious extremism or the interface between a person’s faith and where they work, the twenty-first century has shown that this plurality can create conflict. The book can be said to answer the question, “how does the holiness of God revealed in Christ prompt those who put their faith in Christ to relate to those who do not?” in a rigorous way.

The first half of the book engages with three Christian responses to plurality from the perspective of philosophical theology. Alasdair MacIntyre presents morality as existing within, and therefore defined by, particular communities. Therefore, ‘rival traditions [...] are at root “incommensurable”’,<sup>203</sup> though MacIntyre does offer a process for enabling rational debate between incommensurable traditions.<sup>204</sup> Yet because Christianity is more than tradition Bretherton disputes whether those outside the church can fully appreciate its stance.

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<sup>202</sup> Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p.5.

<sup>203</sup> Bretherton, p.27.

<sup>204</sup> He presents learning the language of our rival’s traditions; giving an account of our rival’s tradition in terms defined by them; and then ‘each tradition evaluating itself in the light of its rival and judging whether its own account of the truth is inferior to that offered by its rival’. *Ibid.*, pp.28-9.

Germain Grisez argues that humans have access to practical reason regardless of their religion and therefore shared moral values grounded in practical reason are possible. Yet Bretherton contests, ‘there are specifically Christian insights into moral issues which non-Christians accept (for a variety of reasons) but cannot access by reason alone.’<sup>205</sup> Oliver O’Donovan holds that there is a wedge between liberalism which denies the Christ event and Christian ethics which is rooted in the resurrected Jesus. The wedge is that, for Christians, morality does not lie in the teachings of Christ in itself, ‘but in the nature of the teacher’ who did not simply live in the past but through his resurrection and ascension won a future reality which influences the present.<sup>206</sup> Taking O’Donovan’s lead Bretherton finds a foothold for his own ethical philosophy, arguing that ‘for the Christian tradition Jesus Christ is the only secure way of knowing the good’<sup>207</sup>. While ‘the Spirit guides all moral action, including that of non-Christians’, and that there can be a convergence between Christians and non-Christians in social practice, for Bretherton the framing of moral decisions and actions of Christians remain distinct because they are framed by an intentional looking forward to the time when they shall ‘participate fully in the presence of God’.<sup>208</sup>

Though Bretherton does not address holiness explicitly, he does seem to centre his ethics by holiness that is defined by relationship rather than the practice of particular virtues. However, while Gorman, Brower and Borg focus on holiness of God as revealed in Jesus Christ in first century Palestine; Bretherton asserts the holiness of God as revealed in Jesus Christ risen, ascended and glorified, together with inauguration of a new age through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Therefore, ‘the nature of the difference between the church and its neighbours is only properly understood eschatologically.’<sup>209</sup> That

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p.55.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p.73.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p.87.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., pp.87-8.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p.106.



difference is embodied in the church which is more than an institution but, with John Zizioulas, 'a mode of existence' which, according to O'Donovan, 'recapitulates the Christ-event in itself, and so proclaims the Christ-event to the world'.<sup>210</sup> It is therefore not primarily what the church does but 'how God is present to and within the church' that distinguishes the church from other communities.<sup>211</sup> This distinction does not turn the church away from the culture from which it is constituted but rather, with the Spirit of Christ present to and within the church, the church is turned towards the culture that surrounds it.

Bretherton contrasts tolerance with hospitality as a more holy way of being. While tolerance has become popular, even a foundational virtue through the America's First Amendment,<sup>212</sup> hospitality has deeper Biblical and theological resonance. Moreover, Christianity asserts a specific form of hospitality, noting with Wright that Jesus' table fellowship with 'sinners' was 'one of the most characteristic and striking marks of Jesus' regular activity.'<sup>213</sup> This is in continuity with the Hebrew Bible but also in discontinuity, at least in terms of application. For example, whereas in the Old Testament Israel distanced itself from those who were unclean, Jesus draws close. And it is at page 130 that Bretherton first uses the term 'holiness', arguing that 'hospitality becomes the means of holiness.'<sup>214</sup> While Bretherton does not diagrammatically draw holiness, we may see the triangulation of hospitality as holiness through God in Christ offering hospitality and forming those guests into the church, and they in turn offer hospitality to others in hope that they too will be guests at the eschatological feast. Moreover, while it is hoped that the world will encounter Christ in the church as a recapitulation of the life and death of Christ, it is also assumed that the

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<sup>210</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p.15 and Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.174.

<sup>211</sup> Bretherton, p.108.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p.147.

<sup>213</sup> Nicholas Thomas Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), p.431.

<sup>214</sup> Bretherton, p.130.

church will encounter Christ through its engagement in the world.<sup>215</sup> Therefore, the participation of the church in this process of invitation is a profound expression of its holiness. Bretherton notes, ‘Openness to the stranger requires constant remembrance of our strangeness to God and God’s hospitality of us [...] it is a mark of the truthful disclosure of God’s nature by a people who themselves are guests of God.’<sup>216</sup> This openness is Christian when it remains part of God’s ongoing story of hospitality towards and within God’s world.

### *3.13. Preliminary Conclusions*

The thesis began with the research that led to the writing of this chapter. The discovery that holiness is fundamentally relational — ‘relating to God’ — set me on a journey of exploration. In a single chapter it is not possible to review everything that has been written on holiness. Out of necessity I have focused on contemporary authors who offer a theological and Christological perspective on holiness for the purposes of informing and empowering the practice of Christian ministry.

Through this chapter a diagram of holiness has emerged that is a three-fold triangular dynamic between God, God’s people and God’s creation. At the apex is God who is the source of all holiness. God is triune and therefore God’s identity as Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is an expression of relationship. Relationship is who God is and how God is revealed. Beginning with the story of Adam, through to Abram and Joseph to the formation of Israel as a holy nation, then the many seers and prophets calling Israel back to its purposes until God is revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, God chose the world for relationship. This last revelation is the fullest and reveals holiness as not only God reaching out to the world but also God’s personal and intimate presence among people. The way Jesus accepted death shows holiness most vividly. It shows holiness as cruciform and therefore points to God’s

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<sup>215</sup> Matthew 25.31-46. See also Hebrews 13.2.

<sup>216</sup> Bretherton, p.138.

holy actions as being kenotic, a self-emptying process for expressing the importance of God's relationship with creation and God's love for humanity. Therefore holiness is not an impersonal force but the action of a loving God. Moreover, the triune God is worthy of worship not primarily because of the visibility of God's creative power, but because of God's commitment to be in relationship expressing itself in Jesus Christ who 'emptied himself, taking the form of a slave [...and] became obedient to the point of death'.<sup>217</sup>

The second point of the triangle is God's holy people. This is manifest in at least six ways. First, at different times God has chosen particular people to be in a relationship with God. Those relationships are never for the benefit of an individual alone but for the benefit of the whole of creation. Second, people cannot be holy apart from a relationship with God. Third, they are to be in relationship with each other because apart from the community of God's holy people no person can share in God's holiness. Fourth, God's holy people can be identified by their vulnerable self-emptying engagement with God and God's world. This 'cruciform' approach will inevitably mean embracing pain and the paradoxical feeling of God's distance or even absence. Fifth, while ethical activity is a mark of the outworking of holiness it is not the means by which holiness is achieved or earned. Holiness belongs to God alone and only by God's grace do people share in God's holiness. Sixth, relationship is so central to holiness that God's people are empowered by God's Spirit to share in God's sanctifying work. Therefore, any Christian community seeking to centre itself on God's holiness will seek to allow the love of God, which is the ministry of Jesus, to work through their lives reflecting that love back to God, within the Christian community and out towards the world.

The third point of the triangle is God's creation, and this has at least five implications. First, the movement of holiness is as much as towards the whole of creation as it is to God's

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<sup>217</sup> Philippians 2.7-8.

people: the call for God's people to be holy is not an exclusive call but the whole of humanity is called to be holy. Second, God's people are called to participate in articulating — through word, action and their being — God's call for the whole world to participate in God's holiness. Third, the locus of this participating is in being God's people which includes when they are gathered together but also when they are dispersed. In parenting, studying, as employees and when retired, God's people can articulate the call for the whole world to be holy. Fourth, God's people participate with humility, recognising that they are not superior but are, like everyone else, in receipt of God's invitation. Fifth, God's people have accepted the invitation to become guests. Such guests are not passive but participate in extending the invitation to creation.

Stanley Hauerwas argues that 'Wesley was right to hold that the peculiar contribution of Methodists to the church universal lies in our struggle to recover the centrality of holiness as integral to the Christian life.'<sup>218</sup> Yet it is within Methodism that Gorman concedes 'holiness has not always been healthily or fully understood'.<sup>219</sup> Having seen — and been inspired by — holiness through a relational lens I now wish to see how the Methodist Church in which I minister engages with holiness as 'relating to God'. In the next chapter we will explore the normative theology of the Methodist Church of Great Britain. This is important not least because, in writing this chapter, it has become apparent that there are relatively few contemporary British Methodists offering a sustained reflection on holiness.<sup>220</sup> I need to review normative theology to uncover a 'British Methodist' understanding of holiness and establish the degree to which it resonates with 'relating to God' as a definition and practice of holiness.

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<sup>218</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1998), p.124.

<sup>219</sup> Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, p.125.

<sup>220</sup> In this chapter I have reviewed Hooker, Samuel and Young.

## Chapter 4

### *Methodist Doctrine*

#### *4.1. Signposts to holiness*

Following ‘The Four Voices of Theology’ typology of Theological Action Research, in the previous chapter I explored formal theologies of holiness. In this chapter, I search for a normative theology of holiness within my own church, the Methodist Church of Great Britain. To hear this theology, I first need to locate the source of its voice, the ‘authority which may even stand to correct, as well as to inform, operant and espoused theologies’.<sup>1</sup>

The Methodist Church Act 1976 enshrines the purpose of the Methodist Church as ‘the advancement of [...] the Christian faith in accordance with the doctrinal standards and the discipline of the Methodist Church’.<sup>2</sup> Those doctrinal standards are set out in Section 2 of the Deed of Union.<sup>3</sup> While the average Methodist may not frequently refer to the nine paragraphs that constitute the doctrinal standards — or even know that they exist — it is reasonable to assume that they are the church’s normative theology as they form the legal basis on which the Methodist Church of Great Britain continues. Yet, as it will become clear, the doctrinal standards do not so much contain static theology as erect signposts whereby Methodists may discover what is normative for their church.

The first signpost points to the importance of a relationship with the whole Christian church. The doctrinal standards begin, ‘The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ.’<sup>4</sup> It is not insignificant that relationships are placed first, suggesting that it is in the company of Christians — presumably

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<sup>1</sup> Cameron and others, *Talking about God in Practice*, p.54.

<sup>2</sup> Methodist Church Act 1976 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, repr. 1977), p.7.  
<[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukla/1976/30/pdfs/ukla\\_19760030\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukla/1976/30/pdfs/ukla_19760030_en.pdf)> [accessed 8 May 2018]

<sup>3</sup> Presented in full in the appendix 1.

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 1.

from around the world and from a breadth of backgrounds — that a British Methodist theology may be discovered. This discovery provides some justification for the way I began my research with a survey of current formal theologies of holiness. In chapter three, I drew on academics from Europe, Australia, America and Russia from ecclesiastical traditions such as Lutheran, Orthodox, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist and the Church of the Nazarene. The doctrinal standards seem to endorse this starting point, urging a continuing dialogue that broadens out to include all Christian traditions from every continent. Moreover, the way the second sentence asserts that Methodism ‘rejoices in the inheritance of the apostolic faith’ points to the importance of relating with historical Christian voices.<sup>5</sup>

Scripture is the second and perhaps most significant signpost for discovering a normative theology of holiness. The second sentence in the doctrinal standards continues to state that Methodism ‘loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation.’<sup>6</sup> The protestant reformation was complex, heterogeneous and with an agenda ‘that went far beyond the reform of the doctrine of the church’.<sup>7</sup> Yet the way the following sentences in the doctrinal standards describe Methodism as ‘raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith’; that the ‘doctrines of the evangelical faith which Methodism has held [...] are based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures’; and that this revelation is the ‘supreme rule of faith and practice’ suggests that British Methodism relates to the reformation through the way it prioritises the theological authority of scripture.<sup>8</sup> This is affirmed by John Wesley — Methodism’s key founding father — who described himself as ‘a man of one book’,<sup>9</sup> a

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Alistair E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), p.62.

<sup>8</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>9</sup> *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 1, ed. by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), p.105.

Methodist as ‘one who lives according to the method laid down in the Bible’ and the Methodist Church as deriving its mission from a detailed study of the scriptures.<sup>10</sup>

The continuing sentences in the doctrinal standards affirm the significance of the Bible in stating that Methodism’s ‘evangelical doctrines [...] are contained in Wesley’s Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his sermons.’<sup>11</sup> I will explore these books in depth later in this chapter, yet here it is important to note that Wesley’s Sermons are ‘soaked in scripture’<sup>12</sup> and that the Notes challenge parts of the church that, with eighteenth century eyes, Wesley perceives as operating in an unscriptural way.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the presence of Wesley’s Notes and Sermons in Methodism’s doctrinal standards continues the assertion of scripture as a signpost for discovering a British Methodist theology of holiness.

Of course, to say that British Methodist normative theology is found in scripture does not make Methodism unique: across Christian churches, scripture is authoritative.<sup>14</sup> It also does not mean that Methodists should refrain from all other reading: Wesley read widely to engage with the whole of God’s world.<sup>15</sup> What it does mean is that understanding scripture — and in particular ‘scriptural holiness’ — is Methodism’s first priority in at least two ways. Firstly, it requires the greatest effort. This had the extraordinary consequence of Wesley refusing to rely on the quality of the King James Version of the Bible but instead offered in

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<sup>10</sup> Hooker, ‘Scriptural Holiness’, pp.11 and 24.

<sup>11</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>12</sup> Hooker, ‘Scriptural Holiness’, p.7. Though there is an obvious bias towards the New Testament.

<sup>13</sup> In a number of places, mostly in his comments on Revelation, Wesley takes considerable opportunity to write against the papacy, linking the Pope in Revelation 13.1 to ‘the wild beast’. *Notes*, p.1000-7. See also Wesley’s comments on 2 Thessalonians 2.3-4 (*Notes*, p.766).

<sup>14</sup> For example, the World Council of Churches has catholic and orthodox members. It describes itself as ‘a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures’. World Council of Churches, ‘What is the World Council of Churches?’ <<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us>> [accessed 22 June 2017]

<sup>15</sup> ‘It is estimated that John Wesley read 600 volumes and authored or edited 400 publications.’ James R. Roy, ‘Wesley: Man of a Thousand Books and a Book’ in *Religion in Life*, 8 (1939) cited by William M. Arnatt, ‘John Wesley and the Bible’, *Wesleyan Theological Review*, 3 (1968), 3-9 (p.4). See also Rupert Davies, ‘The People called Methodists - 1. ‘Our Doctrines’ in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, Volume One* ed. by Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth Press, 1965), pp.145-79 (p.148).

his Notes his own translation using the best scholarly tools of his time.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, it requires unceasing effort. For example, the doctrinal standards do not state which edition of the Notes are authoritative, despite Wesley producing many editions, with each new edition offering a more careful revision of the text.<sup>17</sup> An encounter with scripture, then, is not a one-off event but continuing engagement in order to obtain ‘divine revelation’ for each context and generation using the best methods that are available.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, in this thesis I have set aside a complete chapter to engage with scripture, not with an expectation of revealing content unique to Methodism but rather, as Scott Jones argues, ‘a genuine attempt to articulate the best understanding of the whole Christian church.’<sup>19</sup>

The third signpost is the focus in the doctrinal standards on transformation. This focus can be seen in the way Wesley’s Notes and Sermons

are not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology [... but to] secure loyalty to the fundamental truths of the gospel of redemption and ensure the continued witness of the Church to the realities of the Christian experience of salvation.<sup>20</sup>

Methodist normative theology is therefore not concerned with knowledge only but with how scripture speaks of God’s seeking to save and be in relationship with creation which, I argued in chapter three, is the essence of God’s holiness. Therefore, in his Notes, Wesley’s translation shows a preference for plainer rather than eloquent language and Wesley sets out his Sermons to be ‘the plain truth for plain people’, suggesting they were both written to

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<sup>16</sup> Professor George Croft Cell found that between half and three quarters of Wesley’s deviations from the King James Version pre-empted the changes made by the Revised Version published in 1881. Thomas C. Oden, *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition* rev. edn. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), p.93. See also Francis Glasson, ‘Wesley’s New Testament Reconsidered’, *Epworth Review*, 10 (1983), 28-34 (p.28).

<sup>17</sup> Oden, p.94.

<sup>18</sup> Langford argues that, in making scripture primary, Methodism affirms the role of the Holy Spirit and emphasizes the significance of a community ‘which shapes, forms, criticizes and enhances biblical interpretation’. He also argues that this emphasis led to Methodists having made a ‘major contribution to ecumenical Christianity through its biblical scholarship’. See Thomas A. Langford, *Methodist Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1998), p.53 and 56-7. See also Rupert Davies, ‘Since 1932’ in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, Volume Three* ed. by Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth Press, 1983), pp.362-90 (p.367).

<sup>19</sup> Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), p.223.

<sup>20</sup> Appendix 1.



make scripture more accessible.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Wesley saw the transformation of a person's character — 'the springboard of our words and actions'<sup>22</sup> — as the heart-beat of scripture and viewed any preaching without that focus as 'useless'.<sup>23</sup>

Transformation is personal but it must also be communal. The doctrinal standards direct Methodists to their common memory: the church 'ever remembers that in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land'.<sup>24</sup> This led Gordon Rupp to claim 'what is really distinctive about Methodism is not particular bits and pieces of doctrine and practice [...] but rather a particular history.'<sup>25</sup> This narrative — rooted in the light shone by scripture in the everyday lives of different people — is more important for British Methodists than precise statements of faith.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, normative theology does not call British Methodists to remember static statements but instead to commit to a relationship with other Christians in a continuing rigorous engagement with scripture in expectation of personal and ecclesial transformation.

Yet the focus for the transformation sought in the doctrinal standards is not on that of the individual Christian nor on that of the church community but on that of Great Britain, because Methodists are to spread scriptural holiness 'through the land'.<sup>27</sup> Individual and ecclesial transformation remains important: it is only through this transformation that Methodists are able to offer a 'continued witness of the Church to the realities of the

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<sup>21</sup> Ssee *Notes*, p.6 and *Sermons*, p.v.

<sup>22</sup> Randy L. Maddox, 'The rule of Christian faith, practice and hope: John Wesley and the Bible', *Epworth Review*, 38 (2011), 6-37. p.32.

<sup>23</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, 'John Wesley's Principles and Practice of Preaching', *Methodist History*, 27 (1999), 89-106, p.101.

<sup>24</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>25</sup> Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Epworth, 1992), p.553.

<sup>26</sup> In contrast to how he directed Methodists in America, for Methodists in Britain Wesley did not prepare Articles of Religion. As a consequence, nowhere in the constitutional documents of the British Methodist Church are doctrines 'ever closely defined in terms of formulae, lists, definitions or any other kind of statement of faith to which Methodists have to give assent.' Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *A Lamp to my Feet And a Light to my Path: The Nature of Authority and the Place of the Bible in the Methodist Church* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1998), p.27.

<sup>27</sup> Appendix 1.

Christian experience of salvation'.<sup>28</sup> This witness cannot be reduced to history, as Rupp contends, but is the passion to share God's transforming power — God's holiness — with the whole of Great Britain in every generation.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, the fourth signpost points to three ways in which a Methodist theology of holiness is also a theology of vocation. First, the doctrinal standards do not offer formal articles of faith or focus on history but point to a 'special vocation' to spread scriptural holiness.<sup>30</sup> This is not to say that Methodist normative theology does not value formal theological belief, as John Lawson has implied.<sup>31</sup> Certainly, there are omissions from the doctrinal standards that one could reasonably expect to be highlighted in the normative theology of any Christian church.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, it is not vocation *instead of* doctrine because that would be to ignore the fact that the doctrinal standards describe how Methodism 'cherishes' the whole church and 'loyally' accepts the principles of the creeds and the Protestant Reformation.<sup>33</sup> It is vocation *as well as* doctrine that defines the British Methodist normative theology: it is the continuing story of God's people being touched by God's holiness; recognising and interpreting that holiness through the lens of scripture; and seeking to share that holiness with others in their land and in their generation. In this way, British Methodism makes theological purpose as important as theological content. Indeed, resonating with the claims of practical theology in chapter two, the church in its

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<sup>28</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the reason why Wesley's Notes and Sermons are normative while his journals are not is in order to prevent Methodism being stuck in a particular moment in time, leading Abraham to argue, 'Important though the life of Wesley is [...] it does not count as doctrinal standards in any shape or form.' William J. Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), p.36.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Cracknell, *Our Doctrines: Methodist Theology as Classical Christianity* (Sheffield: Cliff College Publishing, 1998), pp.33 and 35.

<sup>31</sup> Lawson, *Selections from John Wesley's 'Notes Upon the New Testament' systematically arranged with explanatory comments* (London: Epworth Press, 1955), p.10.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Wesley's sermon on the Trinity is absent from his *Sermons*, together with any sermon on the incarnation.

<sup>33</sup> Resonating with this, Abraham makes the point that '*the primary content of the doctrinal standards is Christian doctrine.*' (Abraham, p.67).

contemporary setting faithfully interpreting and living out the scriptures is part of the message of God's holiness and the 'gospel of redemption'. This does not make Methodist normative theology distinctively Christian but makes it deeply Christian, taking seriously that Methodists have been 'appointed' to give witness to God's holiness.

The second way in which a Methodist theology of holiness is also a theology of vocation is the way 'the office of the Christian ministry depends upon the call of God who bestows the gifts of the Spirit'. Here the doctrinal standards suggest that British Methodism knows who its ministers are by the 'grace and the fruit which indicate those who He has chosen.'<sup>34</sup> For a church 'raised up to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land', this must mean that its ministers will exhibit grace and fruit that are connected with holiness. This does not necessarily mean that church ministers display more holiness than others, but it should mean that they are noted for pursuing holiness. In addition, it is 'All Methodist preachers' — rather than ministers generally or presbyters specifically — who 'are authorised to minister in holy things', which suggests that Methodism highlights the 'proclamation of the evangelical faith'<sup>35</sup> as an activity particularly radiant with holiness.

The third way in which a Methodist theology of holiness is also a theology of vocation is the way this is generously applied. The doctrinal standards broadly refer to *Christ's* ministers rather than *church* ministers, who are 'stewards' and 'shepherds'.<sup>36</sup> Of 'Christ's ministers', presbyters have 'a principal and directing part'.<sup>37</sup> They are not priests or gate-keepers to God's holiness,<sup>38</sup> but responsible for upholding and communicating the church's normative theology and 'For the sake of church order'.<sup>39</sup> In this way, not only is

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<sup>34</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> A possibility raised in 3.8.

<sup>39</sup> Appendix 1.

spreading scriptural holiness a corporate vocation but it is also the ‘personal call’ of *all* God’s people.<sup>40</sup>

#### *4.2. Holiness themes in Wesley’s Notes and Sermons*

In these preliminary observations, I have argued that the normative theology of the Methodist Church of Great Britain does not contain static articles of faith but four signposts whereby contemporary Methodists can discover their mooring. These signposts include the importance of relationships with the whole Christian church, the interpretation of scripture for each context in every generation, the focus on transformation of God’s world and the related gift of vocation. Here, then, the complex and interrelatedness of the ‘four voices of theology’ is particularly clear, with facets of each of the three other voices being present within British Methodism’s normative theology. This makes the task of carefully attending to how Methodists engage with God’s holiness especially important and this will be my focus in chapter six. However, there remain two outstanding tasks in order to adequately review Methodism’s doctrinal standards. First, we must receive Holy Scripture with the importance it is given and therefore I will set aside the whole of chapter five to exploring holiness in the Bible. Second, given the importance of Wesley’s Notes and Sermons as distinctive Methodist tools for interpreting scripture, it is essential to provide space to discover the normative voice within these documents. I have found that, whilst Wesley’s Sermons and Notes address many subjects, their underlying themes as well as the underlying logic is the pursuit of holiness. In particular, I will now highlight the way these documents emphasise the holiness of God, the image of God’s holiness in humanity, the necessity of grace, the dependence on faith, and the fact that holiness is rooted in the heart and leads to happiness and growth.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

#### 4.2.1. Holiness is God

A search for the word ‘holy’ and other related words in Wesley’s Notes shows that Wesley focused on those Bible passages that give particular voice to holiness and also that he introduces holiness words when there is no mention of holiness in the Bible passage being studied.<sup>42</sup> As Timothy Smith argues, Wesley saw that in the ‘living center of every part of inspired scripture was the call to be holy, and the promise of grace to answer that call.’<sup>43</sup>

Wesley’s comments on holiness in Revelation 4.8 are not ‘short’, thereby breaking one of his own hermeneutical rules.<sup>44</sup> Here, God is described as holy in ‘that excellence which is altogether peculiar to himself; and the glory flowing from all his attributes conjoined, shining forth from all his works, and darkening all things besides itself’.<sup>45</sup> Holiness is what makes God separate, ‘at a distance, not only from all that is impure, but likewise from all that is created.’<sup>46</sup> In turn, those who are consecrated to him are separate from other things.<sup>47</sup> Wesley delineates holiness and glory: ‘holiness is covered glory, and glory is uncovered holiness.’<sup>48</sup>

Though God is separate, God cannot be at a distance because human holiness presumes a degree of intimacy with God. The Levitical command ‘Be holy, for I am holy’ was particularly important for Wesley, with several references in his Sermons.<sup>49</sup> This gives

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<sup>42</sup> Bullen thoroughly, but not always fairly, presents the way that Wesley is drawn to particular parts of scripture. Donald A. Bullen, *A Man of One Book? John Wesley’s Interpretation and Use of the Bible* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007).

<sup>43</sup> Timothy L. Smith, ‘John Wesley and the Wholeness of Scripture’, *Interpretation*, 39 (1985), 246-62 (p.246).  
<sup>44</sup> *Notes*, p.7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.957.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.957.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.958.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.957-8.

<sup>49</sup> I have counted eleven. See ‘Justification by faith’, in *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 1 - Sermons 1:1-33* ed. by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), p.184; ‘The Righteousness of Faith’ in *Works, Volume 1*, p.205; ‘The Marks of the New Birth’ in *Works, Volume 1*, p.422; ‘Upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the First’ in *Works, Volume 1*, p.530; ‘Upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Fifth’ in *Works, Volume 1*, p.555; ‘Upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Seventh’ in *Works, Volume 1*, p.610; ‘Upon the Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Ninth’ in *Works, Volume 1*, p.648; ‘Upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Thirteenth’ in *Works, Volume 1*, p.690; Sermon upon the ‘Christian

particular authority to the holiness triangle (that I developed in chapter three in response to Hooker's exposition) as indicative of Methodist normative theology. It also asserts that human holiness is measured by the extent to which people model the holiness of God. Wesley's sermon on Romans 10.5-8, 'The Righteousness of Faith', shows God's intention for humanity to be

holy as He which had created him was holy [...] that he should be pure in heart, even as God is pure; perfect as his Father in heaven was perfect; that he should love the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength; that he should love every soul which God had made, even as God had loved him: that by this universal benevolence, he should dwell in God (who is love), and God in him: that he should serve the Lord his God with all his strength, and in all things singly aim at His glory.<sup>50</sup>

Outler regards the sermon on Romans 2.29, 'The Circumcision of the Heart', as 'one of Wesley's most careful and complete statements on his doctrine of holiness'.<sup>51</sup> Though Wesley preached it before his 'conversion', he did not think he could better it.<sup>52</sup> In this sermon, Wesley equates the circumcision of the heart with holiness and calls it 'habitual disposition of the soul' and 'the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Christ'.<sup>53</sup> Humanity is utterly dependent on God to impart holiness and, having acknowledged that dependence, is 'born of God' and becomes part of the 'children of God'.<sup>54</sup> This means that 'their heart is upright toward God' and that, at the end of earthly life, they will be assured of the 'crown of glory'. It is 'humility, faith, hope, and charity' but, more importantly, love which is perfection, glory, happiness and the 'fulfilling of the law'.<sup>55</sup>

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Perfection' in *Works, Volume 2*, p.111; 'Satan's Devices' in *Works, Volume 2*, p.151; and 'Heaviness through Manifold Temptations' in *Works, Volume 2*, p.224.

<sup>50</sup> *Works*, Volume 1, p.205.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.398.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.402.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.403-4, 406.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.403 and 407. Romans 13.10.

#### 4.2.2. Holiness as the image of God in humanity

In his sermon on Romans 4.5, ‘Justification by Faith’, hailed to be ‘the earliest full summary of Wesley’s soteriology’,<sup>56</sup> Wesley affirms that humanity was created holy.

In the image of God was man made; holy as He that created him is holy; merciful as the Author of all is merciful; perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect. As God is love, so man, dwelling in love, dwelt in God, and God in him. God made him to be an ‘image of His own eternity,’ an incorruptible picture of the God of glory. He was accordingly pure, as God is pure, from every spot of sin. He knew not evil in any kind or degree, but was inwardly and outwardly sinless and undefiled. He ‘loved the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his mind, and soul, and strength.’<sup>57</sup>

Holiness is therefore the original state of humanity. The story of creation is the story of holiness, concluding in God hallowing the seventh day.<sup>58</sup> The logical conclusion of the doctrine of *imago dei*, which Wesley perceives in his sermon on John 3.7, ‘The New Birth’, is a call to return to the image of God. Wesley’s understanding of ‘image’ therefore affirms a vocational emphasis, the fulfilment of humanity’s call which Theodore Runyon argues ‘constitutes their true destiny.’<sup>59</sup>

Methodist normative theology sees returning to God’s image in three ways. Our ‘natural’ image: ‘a spiritual being endued with understanding, freedom of will’; our ‘political’ image: ‘the governor of this lower world’; and our ‘moral’ image: “‘God is love’”; accordingly, man at his creation was full of love; which was the sole principle of all his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions.’<sup>60</sup> It is the ‘moral’ image in which humanity was made which is the most significant because he connects love with the very essence of what it means to be holy. It suggests that love — for God and for others — is humanity’s most natural instinct, yet an instinct that has been lost.

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<sup>56</sup> *Works, Volume 1*, p.182.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.184

<sup>58</sup> Genesis 2.3. I will explore this further in 5.2.

<sup>59</sup> Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), p.14.

<sup>60</sup> *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 2 - Sermons II:33-70* ed. by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), p.188.

Wesley's sermon on Mark 1.15, 'The Way to the Kingdom', presents sin as the opposite of holiness, suggesting that sin is not principally wrong action but the broken relationship between humanity and God.<sup>61</sup> Runyon concurs that Wesley sees the *imago dei* 'not so much as something humans possess as the way they relate to God and live out that relation in the world'.<sup>62</sup> Without a relationship with God, humanity is not able to reflect the divine image and therefore be holy. Therefore, Wesley's sermon on Genesis 6.6, 'Original Sin', describes humanity after the Fall as having no knowledge or love of God: 'we cannot love him we know not [... and] No man loves God by nature'.<sup>63</sup> The Fall therefore changed the status of humanity from holy to unholy. Wesley asserts this with force in his sermon on 'The New Birth':

everyone descended from [Adam] comes into the world spiritually dead, dead to God [...] entirely void of the life of God, void of the image of God, of all that 'righteousness and holiness' [...] Instead of this every man born into the world now bears the image of the devil, in pride and self-will; the image of the beast, in sensual appetites and desires.<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, the recovery of holiness is

no less than the image of God stamped upon the heart; it is no other than the whole mind which was in Christ Jesus. It consists of all heavenly affections and tempers mingled together into one. It implies such a continual, thankful love to him who hath not withheld from us his Son [...] It is such a love of God as teaches us to be blameless in all manner of conversation; as enables us to present our souls and bodies, all we are and all we have, all our thoughts, words, and actions, a continual sacrifice to God, acceptable through Christ Jesus.<sup>65</sup>

Outler argues that 'the recovery of the defaced image of God is the axial theme of Wesley's soteriology'.<sup>66</sup> Yet the force of Wesley's rhetoric suggests an image not defaced, but destroyed. This does not mean that God's grace cannot access the human heart. Methodist normative theology holds that 'the Spirit of God may be striving with them'<sup>67</sup> and this striving is enabled by 'preventing grace': one of the distinguishing marks of humans over

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<sup>61</sup> 'But are thou able to change thy own heart, from all sin to all holiness?' *Works, Volume 2*, p.229.

<sup>62</sup> Runyon, p.13.

<sup>63</sup> *Works, Volume 2*, p.178.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.190.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.194.

<sup>66</sup> *Works, Volume 1*, p.185, footnotes.

<sup>67</sup> 'Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Third' in *Works, Volume 1*, p.526.



the rest of creation.<sup>68</sup> However, Methodist normative theology labours hard to show just how far humanity is from God.<sup>69</sup> While God's image is present, though marred, in that people are spiritual and exert stewardship over creation, in the most important way — receiving and offering love to God — the image of God is absent. Kenneth Collins therefore persuasively argues that, though the 'natural' and 'political' image was polluted or lost in part, the 'moral' image — the principal image of God — 'was *totally* lost'.<sup>70</sup> The 'moral' image (an intentional relationship with God) is absent in humanity because to suggest otherwise would be to minimise the need and the depth of God's grace.<sup>71</sup> While the 'natural' and the 'political' image of God must be repaired, the 'moral' image of God must be replanted again, indicating a change in heart. Then a conscious relationship with God begins, receiving love from, and offering love to, God. 'Ye know,' says Wesley in his sermon 'Original Sin', 'that the great end of religion is to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total loss of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parent.'<sup>72</sup>

#### 4.2.3. Holiness as grace

Rupert Davies argues, 'The grace of God is the real focus of Wesley's theology'.<sup>73</sup> Certainly, because Methodist normative theology places humanity at a distance from God, Wesley contends that, 'It is strange that any whom He has actually saved should doubt the universality of grace'.<sup>74</sup> It is through grace that humanity was first made in the image of God

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<sup>68</sup> 'Original Sin' in *Works, Volume 2*, p.180.

<sup>69</sup> Wesley 'made very few concessions on the subject of total depravity'. Davies, 'The People called Methodists', p.150.

<sup>70</sup> Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), p.63. Davies also concurs, citing a sermon beyond the doctrinal standards where Wesley says that man 'lost the moral image of God' and instead 'We bear the image of the Devil'. Davies, 'The People called Methodists', p.151.

<sup>71</sup> Wesley emphasises the fallen state of man 'that he may describe more fully, and emphasise more convincingly, the free grace of God.' Davies, 'The People called Methodists', p.159.

<sup>72</sup> *Works, Volume 1*, p.185.

<sup>73</sup> Davies, 'The People called Methodists', p.159.

<sup>74</sup> Comment on 1 Timothy 2.3. *Notes*, p.774.

and it is only through grace that a person is re-made in God's image. It is not insignificant that the first of Wesley's Sermons, 'Salvation by Faith', emphasises the necessity of grace:

All the blessings which God hath bestowed upon man are of His mere grace [...] His free, undeserved favour; favour altogether undeserved; man having no claim to the least of His mercies. It was free grace that 'formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into him a living soul,' and stamped on that soul the image of God, and 'put all things under his feet.' The same free grace continues to us, as this day, life, and breath, and all things [...] If then sinful men find favour with God, it is 'grace upon grace!' [...] Grace is the source, faith the condition, of salvation.<sup>75</sup>

The grace emphasised here is 'prevenient' or 'preventing'. Maddox notes that prevenient grace can refer generally to the fact that 'every salutary human action or virtue, from the earliest expression of faith to the highest degree of sanctification, is grounded in the prior empowering of God's grace'; or more specifically as is likely in 'Salvation by Faith', 'God's saving work in fallen humanity *prior to justification*'.<sup>76</sup> It is only because of God's grace that people know of God: Wesley's sermon 'Original Sin' reminds us, 'no one knoweth the Son but the Father, and he to whom the Father revealed him'.<sup>77</sup> It is only through grace that people benefit from God's goodness which, to quote Wesley's comment on John 1.5, shines 'even on fallen man'.<sup>78</sup> Prevenient grace includes conscience,<sup>79</sup> which in Wesley's sermon 'The Witness of Our Own Spirit' has a role to 'excuse or accuse, to approve or disapprove, to acquit or condemn'.<sup>80</sup> It is the grace that enables harmony among those outside the fellowship of believers.<sup>81</sup> When we respond to this knowledge by putting our faith in God, we are forgiven and reconciled to God.<sup>82</sup> We cannot cause God's forgiveness,

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<sup>75</sup> *Works, Volume 1*, pp.117-8.

<sup>76</sup> Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), p.84. Collins argues, 'in virtually every instance in which Wesley employs the term "prevenient grace" in his works, he is referring to prevenience not in a broad sense but in the narrow sense', Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, p.76.

<sup>77</sup> Matthew 11.27, cited in *Works, Volume 2*, p.177.

<sup>78</sup> *Notes*, p.303.

<sup>79</sup> Runyon, pp.31-3.

<sup>80</sup> *Works, Volume 1*, p.302.

<sup>81</sup> 'Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third'. *Works, Volume 1*, p.526.

<sup>82</sup> Wesley's teaching on prevenient grace is particularly plentiful outside the doctrinal standards. For example, in sermons 'The Imperfection of Human Knowledge' (*Works, Volume 2*, p.570-1); 'The Scripture Way of Salvation' (*Works, Volume 2*, p.156-7 and 166); 'The Good Steward' (*Works, Volume 2*, p.297); 'On Working out our Salvation' (*The Works of John Wesley, Volume 3, Sermons III: 71-114* ed. by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), p.203, 207 and 209); and 'On Conscience' (*Works, Volume 3*, p.484).

but we can receive God's 'justifying grace'. This begins our regeneration through which God's image — the likeness of Christ — is established within. Again, this does not happen through our own effort, but rather through receiving God's 'sanctifying grace'.

There are not three graces: there is only one unmerited loving action of God. Prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace are simply terms to indicate the human need for God's help in various facets of the human relationship with God. In his sermon 'The Means of Grace', Wesley outlines prayer, searching the scriptures and receiving the Lord's Supper as 'ordinary channels' through which we might encounter God's grace necessary for growing in holiness.<sup>83</sup> Through God's grace, people are able to respond with faith.

#### *4.2.4. Holiness as faith*

In his sermon on Ephesians 2.8, 'Salvation by Faith', Wesley presents faith as 'productive of all good works, and all holiness'.<sup>84</sup> In his sermon on Romans 3.31, 'The Law Established through Faith', Wesley states that 'so long as we walk by faith, not by sight, we go swiftly on in the way of holiness [...] So that faith, in general, is the most direct and effectual means of promoting all righteousness and true holiness'.<sup>85</sup> In that same sermon, Wesley defines faith as 'confidence in a pardoning God', which points to his definition of justification in his sermon on Romans 4.5, 'Justification by Faith': the 'pardon, the forgiveness of sins'.<sup>86</sup> Justification is what God has done for us and, because holiness can only come from God, justification by faith must come before any return to a state of holiness.<sup>87</sup>

Holiness is a sequence of faith enabled by grace. To summarise Wesley's sermon 'The Witness of the Spirit', it is, first, the testimony of the Spirit of God to our spirit; second,

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<sup>83</sup> *Works, Volume 1*, pp.378-397.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.125.

<sup>85</sup> *Works, Volume 2*, p.41.

<sup>86</sup> *Works, Volume 1*, p.189.

<sup>87</sup> *Works, Volume 2*, p.187

the knowledge of God's pardoning love; third, love for God ('the root of all holiness'); fourth, being holy in heart and life; fifth, a consciousness of being holy in heart and life; and sixth, the testimony of our own spirit that we are inwardly and outwardly holy.<sup>88</sup> We may travel through this sequence many times, as suggested in Wesley's sermon 'Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the First':

The more we advance in the knowledge and love of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ (as great a mystery as this may appear to those who know not the power of God unto salvation), the more do we discern of our alienation from God, of the enmity that is in our carnal mind, the necessity of our being entirely renewed in righteousness and true holiness.<sup>89</sup>

Wesley addresses the place of baptism within this sequence of faith towards holiness enabled by faith. Drawing on the Larger Catechism published by the Westminster Assembly in 1647, Wesley argues that baptism is the sign of regeneration, not regeneration itself. In this way, Wesley separates the Methodist Church from Roman Catholic teaching outlined by Keating.<sup>90</sup> For Wesley, baptism is external, visible and the act of man; whereas regeneration is internal, invisible and 'a change wrought by God in the soul'.<sup>91</sup>

Wesley also distinguishes between regeneration and sanctification, regeneration being the gate whereby the process of sanctification (inward and outward holiness) begins. Like physical birth that results in a child who grows up to become an adult, regeneration is spiritual birth that begins the process whereby a person 'grows up to the measure of the full stature of Christ'.<sup>92</sup> The Holy Spirit — and therefore God's holiness — enters a person when they turn to God in Christ, but it will take time for them to become fully holy, fully like God in Christ. To draw a metaphor from Colossians 3, being born again is to be fitted with new clothes that identify a person as belonging to God, and therefore holy. However, it will take time before that person learns to grow into those clothes until they fit perfectly.

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<sup>88</sup> *Works, Volume 1*, pp.274-5

<sup>89</sup> *Works, Volume 1*, p.483.

<sup>90</sup> See 3.8.

<sup>91</sup> *Works, Volume 2*, p.197.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.197.

#### 4.2.5. Holiness as rooted in the heart

We have already seen that some Bible passages have a more prominent place than others in British Methodist normative theology. Wesley described Matthew chapters 5 to 7 as ‘the noblest compendium of religion found in the oracles of God’ and nearly one-third of his Sermons are rooted in this text.<sup>93</sup> In his comment on prayer in Matthew 6.7, Wesley identifies love as integral to holiness: it is the ‘language of the heart’.<sup>94</sup> Wesley quotes Philippians 2.5, ‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’ more than any other verse in the Bible,<sup>95</sup> suggesting that the self-emptying of God revealed in Christ is the heart of God’s holiness and the centre of Methodist normative theology.<sup>96</sup> Maddox argues that Wesley used I John for his sermon text — and alludes to it within sermons — much more frequently (relative to the number of verses in the book) than any other biblical book.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, ‘Wesley read Paul (and the rest of the Bible) through the lens of central convictions he found most clearly expressed in I John’.<sup>98</sup> Wesley’s comment on I John 4.8, ‘God is love’, states:

This little sentence brought St. John more sweetness, even in the time he was writing it, than the whole world can bring. God is often styled holy, righteous, wise; but not holiness, righteousness, or wisdom in the abstract, as he is said to be love; intimating that this is his darling, his reigning attribute, the attribute that sheds an amiable glory on all his other perfections.<sup>99</sup>

On 1 John 4.19, ‘We love because God first loved us’, Wesley comments, ‘This is the sum of all religion, the genuine model of Christianity. None can say more: why should anyone say less, or less intelligibly?’<sup>100</sup> Wesley ranked I Corinthians 13 similarly, thus

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<sup>93</sup> Maddox, ‘The Rule of Christian Faith’, p.27.

<sup>94</sup> *Notes*, pp.35-6.

<sup>95</sup> Jones, p.159.

<sup>96</sup> This is Gorman’s point, discussed in chapter three.

<sup>97</sup> Maddox, ‘The Rule of Christian Faith’, p.27.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>99</sup> *Notes*, p.914.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p.915.

cementing the centrality of love and holiness of God revealed in Christ; and how this will be central in disciples that are revealed to God as in Christ.

In Wesley's sermon on Matthew 5.13-16, it is possible to see an outline of the holiness triangle developed in chapter three, where a three-way connection of holiness is delineated as 'The beauty of holiness, of that inward man of the heart which is renewed after the image of God, cannot but strike every eye which God hath opened'.<sup>101</sup> Again, but more specifically,

Your holiness makes you as conspicuous as the sun in the midst of heaven [...] it is impossible to hide your lowliness and meekness and those other dispositions whereby ye aspire to be perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Love cannot be hid any more than light, and least of all when it shines forth in action, when ye exercise yourselves in the labour of love, in beneficence of every kind.<sup>102</sup>

Love towards others in action is expressed in Methodist normative theology not as reluctant striving but a natural overflowing from a disciple's love for God. Changing metaphors from light to horticulture, Wesley therefore asserts

the root of religion lies in the heart, in the inmost soul; that is the union of the soul with God, the life of God in the soul of man [...] But if this root be really in the heart, it cannot but put forth branches.<sup>103</sup>

Wesley's sermon on Matthew 6.19-23 makes the same argument but deepens the metaphor, moving from root to seed, and from religion to the kingdom of heaven: 'Which is first sown in the heart as a grain of mustard seed, but afterwards putteth forth great branches, on which grow all the fruits of righteousness, every good temper and word and work.'<sup>104</sup> Using a further metaphor, salt, the purpose of holiness is so disciples 'season whatever is around you [...] with every holy and heavenly temper'.<sup>105</sup> So while inward holiness must be prioritised, that it is prioritised will be evidenced through its overflowing.

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<sup>101</sup> *Works, Volume 1*, p.531.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p.539.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.541

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.690.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.537.

Yet there is tension that accompanies this overflowing. Loving God leads to loving the world God loves. Methodism's contemporary engagement is often hailed through the words 'no holiness but social holiness'.<sup>106</sup> Walton rightly argues that these words are often quoted without context to encourage 'anything from an afternoon tea party to Christian Socialism'.<sup>107</sup> More crucially, it is odd that those words have significance at all, given that they lie outside Methodist normative theology. More significant are Wesley's words within Methodist normative theology, such as the simple assertion that without 'commerce with the world [...] we cannot be Christians at all.'<sup>108</sup> However, there is the contrasting argument that engagement with the world will dilute, even extinguish, Christian hope. Wesley states, seemingly in sympathy with the Pharisees' contesting of Jesus' view of holiness, that

it is certainly not advisable to company with [...] any of the workers of iniquity, as to have any particular familiarity, or any strictness of friendship with them. To contract or continue an intimacy with any such is no way expedient for a Christian. It must necessarily expose him to abundance of dangers and snares, out of which he can have no reasonable hope of deliverance.<sup>109</sup>

Methodist normative theology does not fully explore the practical difficulties of navigating this tension, but implies that it is the Methodist vocation to navigate this tension. Wesley's focus on the heart is perhaps the compass for Methodists to find a path that is both towards God and towards the world. It reminds Methodism that engagement with the world must be accompanied and fuelled by remaining connected to the love of God. It presents being in relation to God — and remaining in that relation — as the way humans open themselves to the renewal of God's image and sanctification. This love for God generates light, keeps disciples rooted and enables them to season the world. The outworking may not be perfectly performed, but the optimism of holiness rooted in the heart emphasised in

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<sup>106</sup> John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1739), p.viii  
<[https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/cswt/04\\_Hymns\\_and\\_Sacred\\_Poems\\_%281739%29.pdf](https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/cswt/04_Hymns_and_Sacred_Poems_%281739%29.pdf)> [accessed 5 June 2018]

<sup>107</sup> Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 'New Methodist President Calls for Holiness'.

<sup>108</sup> *Works, Volume 1*, p.536. See also pp.533-534.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p.535.

Methodist theology is that ‘all our actions [...] even those that are indifferent in their own nature, may be made holy and good and acceptable to God, by a pure and holy intention.’<sup>110</sup>

Collins coins ‘holy love’ as a definition of Wesleyan theology, ‘not a simple and straightforward expression but involves a conjunction that is expressed in the ideas of separation for the sake of purity and communion for the sake of love.’<sup>111</sup> Yet, in Methodist normative theology, ‘love’ does not appear so much as a counterweight to ‘holy’, but holiness is the nature of God revealed in the selfless love of Jesus Christ and the nature of humanity when lived in Jesus Christ.<sup>112</sup>

#### *4.2.6. Holiness leads to happiness*

We have already noted the central place of Matthew 5-7 in Methodist normative theology. It is striking that, in his Notes, Wesley translates ‘happy’ where the King James Version translates ‘blessed’. The reason for this rendering may be in Wesley’s desire to write in the ‘mother-tongue’ of ‘plain, unlettered men’.<sup>113</sup> However, I have traced 25 different occasions in his Notes and 10 occasions in his Sermons where Wesley connects the word ‘holy’ or ‘holiness’ with ‘happy’ or ‘happiness’. The frequency of this connection — together with the many other occasions where ‘holiness’ is paired with expressions of joy, discipleship and trust, and where happiness is paired with the path to perfection and being saints<sup>114</sup> — highlights happiness not only as a preferred rendering but as a key Methodist normative theological theme.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> ‘Upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Sixth’ in *Works, Volume 1*, p.573.

<sup>111</sup> Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, p.8.

<sup>112</sup> ‘The Lord our God, the Lord, the God of all men, is one God [...] From this unity of God it follows that we owe all our love to him alone.’ Comment on Mark 12.29. *Notes*, p.181.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>114</sup> Cracknell remembers Albert Outler counting fifty pairings of the words ‘happiness’ and ‘holiness’ throughout the writings of John Wesley. See Cracknell, p.90.

<sup>115</sup> This is supported by Rebekah L. Miles, ‘Happiness, holiness, and the moral life in John Wesley’ in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* ed. by Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.207-24 (p.207).



British Methodist normative theology asserts that there is a ‘happiness that naturally and directly results from holiness’<sup>116</sup> because ‘without inward and as well as outward holiness you cannot be happy even in this world’.<sup>118</sup> Happiness relates to grace because ‘By the free and unmerited love of God he was holy and happy’.<sup>119</sup> Happiness is fundamental to creation in that humanity was ‘created in the image and enjoying the favour of God’<sup>120</sup> and being holy therefore means having the original contentment of Adam in Eden who, in ‘wanting nothing’, could continue to be holy and happy.<sup>121</sup> Happiness relates to contemporary life in that it is the ‘solid joy [...that] arises from the testimony of the Spirit that he is a child of God’<sup>122</sup> and living ‘a life of love, of pure love both to God and man’.<sup>125</sup> Happiness is also connected to the future because ‘those who are called holy here [...] will be equally happy hereafter’<sup>126</sup> and will be when ‘all mankind receive him for their king, truly believing in his name’.<sup>129</sup>

In Methodist normative theology happiness does not equal sensual pleasure, an emotional feeling, the absence of work or a naive smile in the face of difficulties encountered. Happiness includes struggle, as many of Wesley’s sermon titles indicate.<sup>130</sup> It is the hard work of looking for answers to prayer, using the means of grace and praying for one another.<sup>131</sup> It is the joy that accompanies being one with God, who is ‘The fountain of all our life, holiness, happiness’ and without whom a person becomes ‘unholy as well as

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<sup>116</sup> Comment on Matthew 5.3. *Notes*, p.30.

<sup>118</sup> ‘The New Birth’ in *Works, Volume 2*, p.200. See also comment on Galatians 4.9 and Ephesians 2.12 in *Notes*, pp.691 and 708.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Justification by Faith’. *Works Volume 1*, p.185.

<sup>120</sup> ‘The Righteousness of Faith’. *Ibid.*, p.208.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p.204.

<sup>122</sup> ‘The Way to the Kingdom’. *Ibid.*, p.224.

<sup>125</sup> ‘Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Thirteenth’. *Ibid.*, p.693.

<sup>126</sup> Comment on Matthew 20.12. *Notes*, p.97.

<sup>129</sup> ‘Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Sixth’. *Works, Volume 1*, p.582.

<sup>130</sup> For example, ‘Wandering Thoughts’, ‘Satan’s Devices’, ‘The Wilderness State’, ‘Heaviness through Manifold Temptations’ and ‘Self-Denial’.

<sup>131</sup> Gordon S. Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1999), p.55.

unhappy’ as ‘no wicked man is happy’.<sup>132</sup> Outside the Sermons, Wesley goes further to elaborate that ‘mankind in general has gained by the fall of Adam a capacity of attaining more holiness and happiness on earth than would have been possible [...] if Adam had not fallen.’<sup>133</sup> Therefore, happiness with holiness is amplified through God’s grace empowering God’s people through the trials and temptations of everyday living.

#### 4.2.7. Holiness leads to growth

Holiness is therefore shown through the way God’s people grow in the grace of God.

Wesley’s sermon on Philippians 3.12 says Christian perfection ‘is only another term for holiness. They are two names for the same thing. Thus, everyone that is perfect is holy, and everyone that is holy is, in the Scriptural sense, perfect.’<sup>134</sup> Yet, while synonymous, what holiness means depends on context. For example, they might refer to the moment of initial belonging to God (new birth);<sup>135</sup> the moment in this life where it is thought possible to have achieved purity in heart and grown up into ‘the measure of the stature of Christ’ (entire sanctification);<sup>136</sup> the moment of being united to God in death (glorification);<sup>137</sup> or the ongoing regeneration and renewal of God’s image in people.<sup>138</sup> With the myriad of uses,<sup>139</sup> is possible to see how people have been confused or concerned by Wesley’s language about holiness.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> *Notes*, p.818 (comment on Hebrews 3.12) and ‘The New Birth’ in *Works, Volume 2*, p.189 and 195.

<sup>133</sup> ‘God’s Love to Fallen Man’. *Ibid.*, p.425.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p.104.

<sup>135</sup> ‘The New Birth’. *Ibid.*, p.198.

<sup>136</sup> See Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, pp.294-5.

<sup>137</sup> ‘There is a difference between one that is perfect and one that is perfected. The one is fitted for the race [...] the other, ready to receive the prize.’ Comment on Philippians 3.12. *Notes*, p.735.

<sup>138</sup> Scriptural holiness can be seen to be equivalent to ‘scriptural Christianity’. Hooker, ‘Scriptural Holiness’, p.12.

<sup>139</sup> In the eighteenth century, Christian perfection ‘was meant to describe both the process and its goal.’ Runyon, p.82.

<sup>140</sup> Wesley acknowledges that the use of ‘Christian perfection’ has, on occasion, given ‘great offence’. *Works, Volume 2*, p.99.

Even so, Methodist normative theology presents Christian perfection as being free from sin. This does not mean a person is free from ignorance, mistake, infirmities or temptation,<sup>141</sup> but free in the sense that ‘If we confess our sin God will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ and go on to live out the command to sin no more.<sup>142</sup> For this to be possible, disciples need to have ‘overcome the wicked one’ and be freed from ‘evil thoughts and evil tempers’,<sup>143</sup> which is only possible if Christ — all that is holy, just and good — is living within them. And here lies the pivotal assertion of Christian perfection: it is what God has done for us through justification and now continues to do in us through sanctification. Therefore, being holy is not primarily what a person achieves. It is not a personal accolade. It is what God achieves in a person by grace but, being grace, relies upon a person’s response.

Outside of the doctrinal standards, Wesley uses the *Collect for Purity* to indicate the ‘cleansing the thoughts of our hearts’ as the negative (and lowest) branch of inward holiness, whereas the positive part of holiness is ‘that we may perfectly love thee’.<sup>144</sup> On Matthew 5.48, Methodist normative theology says that Jesus ‘knew how ready our unbelief would be to cry out, This is impossible! and therefore stakes upon it all the power, truth, and faithfulness of Him to whom all things are possible.’<sup>145</sup> This optimism of holiness is rooted in the optimism of grace. In his comment on 1 Thessalonians 5.16, Wesley suggests that when we root ourselves in the means of grace — for example praying without ceasing and in everything giving thanks — this is Christian perfection.<sup>146</sup> At least at one point, Wesley seems to resonate with Keating’s exploration of deification and Gorman’s presentation of

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.100-105.

<sup>142</sup> I John 1.9 and John 5.14. See I John 2.1.

<sup>143</sup> *Works, Volume 2*, p.118.

<sup>144</sup> The Archbishops’ Council, *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), p.229. ‘Hypocrisy in Oxford’ in *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 4, Sermons IV: 115-151* ed. by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), p.398. See also ‘On Perfection’ in *Works, Volume 3*, p.76.

<sup>145</sup> Matthew 5.48. *Notes*, p.35.

<sup>146</sup> I Thessalonians 5.16. *Notes*, p.762.

theosis,<sup>147</sup> saying that to approach God, as in Hebrews 7.19, is ‘to be one spirit with him’.<sup>148</sup> Therefore, Christian perfection is more than the negative ‘bare freedom from sin’<sup>149</sup> but the positive ‘love of God and man includes all perfection’.<sup>150</sup> ‘The love of God contains the whole of Christian perfection, and connects all the parts of it together’.<sup>151</sup> Whereas faith is preached to ‘produce holiness’, holiness is love, which is ‘the end of all the commandments of God’.<sup>152</sup>

Christian perfection is not static but requires the ongoing desire of a person to be holy. Moreover, as Maddox notes, Wesley ‘specifically rejected any notion of [... an] absolute perfection in holiness.’<sup>153</sup> Paradoxically, on becoming perfect a person may undergo change far more rapid than before.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, while the possibility of being perfected is not ‘peculiar to Methodists’,<sup>155</sup> Maddox does see Wesley’s teaching on perfection as *distinctive* and sees his more general teaching on sanctification (a journey in response to God’s grace) as more *characteristic* of Wesley.<sup>156</sup> It is the continuing choice to make Jesus the object of the disciple’s heart which, though a gift of the Holy Spirit,<sup>157</sup> requires a response. This response is no act of leisure. In his comment on Philippians 3.12, he commends each person to be ‘Pursuing with the whole bent and vigour of my soul, perfect holiness and eternal glory’.<sup>158</sup> In his comment on Hebrews 12.11, Wesley sees the righteousness that results from discipline as ‘holiness and happiness’.<sup>159</sup> In his ‘Upon the

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<sup>147</sup> See 3.6 and 3.8.

<sup>148</sup> *Notes*, p.829.

<sup>149</sup> Ephesians 3.19. *Notes*, p.711.

<sup>150</sup> Galatians 5.14. *Notes*, p.696.

<sup>151</sup> Colossians 3.14. *Notes*, p.749.

<sup>152</sup> ‘The Law Established through Faith, Discourse II’ in *Works, Volume 1*, p.38.

<sup>153</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, p.181.

<sup>154</sup> John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1997), p.106.

<sup>155</sup> Langford, p.69. Wesley includes Jeremy Taylor, Thomas à Kempis and William Law as his influences. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (repr. Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1997), pp.5-6.

<sup>156</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, p.190.

<sup>157</sup> See Hooker, ‘Scriptural Holiness’, p.12.

<sup>158</sup> Philippians 3.12-13. *Notes*, p.735.

<sup>159</sup> *Notes*, p.848.

Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Fourth', he writes, 'In patience, in longsuffering, in mercy, in benefice of every kind, to all, even to your bitterest persecutors: "'Be ye" Christians "perfect" [...] even "as your Father in heaven is perfect."'”<sup>160</sup> In his sermon on I Peter 1.6, Wesley sees facing various trials as 'consistent with faith, with hope, with love of God and man [...] with inward and outward holiness.'<sup>161</sup> He argues that, far from interfering with holiness, God permits trials to help our

advance in holiness, holiness of heart and holiness of conversation [... because] sanctified afflictions have (through the grace of God) an immediate and direct tenancy to holiness [...] they humble [...] calm and meeken [...] tame the fierceness of our nature, soften our obstinacy and self-will, crucify us to the world, and bring us to expect all our strength from, and to seek all our happiness in, God.<sup>162</sup>

Yet, the task of responding, the outworking of our desire to be holy, is an overflowing of God's love at work within us.

While walking on the path of perfection is the whole purpose of being a Christian and 'entire sanctification' is possible, it was not achieved by many and John Wesley denied any claim of having been made perfect<sup>163</sup>. Munsey Turner suggests the reasons as being the unconscious drives of human nature; doubts over whether the sanctified will be conscious of being so; and the Biblical basis for sudden or miraculous sanctification being disputed.<sup>164</sup> Yet, working towards Christian perfection, because of its connection with our designed identity, grace, faith, love and happiness, will be its own reward.

#### *4.3. Preliminary conclusions*

In this chapter, I have outlined four signposts and seven themes that emerge from attending to British Methodism's doctrinal standards. There I have found a normative theology that is strongly resonant with the formal theology I reviewed in chapter three. It confirms holiness

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<sup>160</sup> *Works, Volume 1*, p.530.

<sup>161</sup> *Works, Volume 2*, p.224.

<sup>162</sup> *Works, Volume 2*, p.232-233.

<sup>163</sup> Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, p.190.

<sup>164</sup> Munsey Turner, p.87.

as ‘relating to God’ in that it concerns God revealed in the holiness of Jesus Christ, mediated through the Holy Spirit and interpreted through communal studying of Holy Scripture lived out in everyday lives. Holiness is a gift of love for God to give and for humanity to receive. It is the gift of transformation: the restoration of a relationship with God. It is a gift that is not deserved and cannot be earned, but through faith — active trust in God’s grace — human consent for God’s transforming work is given. The key to holiness lies in the heart: God’s heart turned towards humanity and the human heart turned towards God. From this heart flows loving action, towards God, God’s people and God’s world. This flowing of holiness creates happiness and growth, not in the sense of shallow pleasure but the sense of fulfilling our human vocation to be like God.

Yet one significant conclusion is easy to overlook: the doctrinal standards present holiness as an orientating theological term for British Methodists. Holy is God who calls Methodists to worship, gives them their identity, offers a vocation and provides a gift for sharing with the world. Yet this focal concern is in tension with British Methodist experience. Frequently, the doctrinal standards — and therefore the foundation of Methodism’s focus on holiness — are not mentioned in official publicity articulating the church’s vision, values and priorities,<sup>165</sup> and holiness is phrased as a past focus leaving the reader to decide whether holiness is a legitimate contemporary concern.<sup>166</sup> Furthermore, there is little promotion of Wesley’s Notes and Sermons, either nationally or locally in the

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<sup>165</sup> Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Priorities for the Methodist Church* <<http://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/our-calling/priorities-for-the-methodist-church>> [accessed 19 June 2018].

<sup>166</sup> Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Called by Name: Being a member in the Methodist Church* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing, 2012), p.12. Furthermore, while holiness has been connected (though missing) from the recent orientating phrase ‘discipleship movement shaped for mission’, reference to this phrase has been progressively deleted from the church’s webpages. Roger L. Walton, ‘A discipleship movement shaped for mission: forming a new ecclesial identity for British Methodism?’ in *Holiness*, 1 (2015) pp.57-77 (p.65) <<http://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/04-walton.pdf>> [accessed 1 June 2016].

church.<sup>167</sup> Certainly, there are places where holiness is explored,<sup>168</sup> but the way attention is drawn highlights that a tension exists.<sup>169</sup> This divergence between British Methodist normative theology and contemporary experience may be long-standing, leading Cracknell to diagnose ‘doctrinal amnesia’.<sup>170</sup> Yet amnesia suggests something forgotten whereas contemporary Methodists may not have memory to lose. Certainly, it is through research for this thesis that as a life-long Methodist I first noticed how focal holiness is to my church’s normative theology.<sup>171</sup> Indeed, it is because the theme of holiness felt fresh that I was drawn into research.

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<sup>167</sup> On the national church website, an excerpt, not a full quote, from the Deed of Union is available, yet there is no weblink to the Notes and Sermons which are freely available on the internet.

<<http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/doctrine-of-the-methodist-church>> [accessed 17 June 2017]. Locally, many Methodist churches offer access to the historic creeds (through *The Methodist Worship Book*) and the Bible but, in my experience, Wesley’s Notes and Sermons are much harder to access. Methodist preachers are required to prove that they are ‘faithful to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith and to the Methodist doctrinal standards’ (Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, p.500) but, in my experience, preachers are tested on one or perhaps two of Wesley’s Sermons but never on Wesley’s Notes.

<sup>168</sup> A special conference on ‘Holiness and Risk’ was held in February 2009. Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, ‘Holiness and Risk’ <<http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/vision-values/priorities-for-the-methodist-church/holiness-and-risk>> [accessed 7 July 2014]. The theme for the 2016 Cliff Fest at Cliff College was ‘Holy Ground’. Cliff College is a college that seeks ‘to provide Biblical, Evangelical training [...] with an emphasis on Scriptural Holiness’. Cliff College, ‘About Us’ <<http://www.cliffcollege.ac.uk/about/>> [Accessed 9 July 2017]. *Holiness* is an on-line journal produced by Wesley House, Cambridge and sponsored by the Methodist Church. Wesley House, ‘Holiness’ <<http://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/holiness/>> [accessed 9 July 2017]. Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path: The Nature of Authority and the Place of the Bible in the Methodist Church* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1998). Also, Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Called to Love and Praise: The Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999).

<sup>169</sup> The Deed of Union ‘is still the basis of our Church, our Conference, our Connexion. Yet do we still “ever remember” what it says? Do we know what our “divinely appointed mission” is? And do we still have an ‘unfaltering resolve to be true’ to it?’ Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Back to the Bible, forward to the world*; ‘on my heart is the need to re-discover the centrality of holiness in our life as a church [...] Methodism was a holiness movement.’ (my italics) Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, ‘New Methodist President Calls for holiness’; ‘Wesley believed that Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness [...] Is this still the conviction of those who stand in the Methodist tradition today? Is it still our mission? Do we still believe ourselves to be called to be “holy, as God is holy”?’ Morna Hooker, ‘What have the sermons of John Wesley ever done for us? Scriptural Christianity: the mind of Christ’ in *Holiness*, 2 (2016), 257-65 (p.265) <<http://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/09-hooker.pdf>> [accessed 26 June 2017]; ‘what is it we are here for? [...] Perhaps we can find renewed vigour for the word ‘holiness’. Jane Craske, ‘The threads with which we weave: towards a holy church’ in *Methodism and the Future: Facing the Challenge* ed. by Jane Craske and Clive Marsh (London: Cassell, 1999), pp.171-86 (p.177).

<sup>170</sup> Cracknell, p.13. See also Abraham.

<sup>171</sup> In contrast, I have been very aware of the ‘Wesleyan quadrilateral’ of scripture, tradition, reason and experience and the focus on hymnody and liturgy as ‘the main vehicle for theological education’ and providing the ‘norms’ for Methodist worship. Where there is an attempt to understand normative theology, Methodists often mistakenly look to the whole of the Wesleyan corpus. See Albert C. Outler, ‘The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley’, *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 20 (1985), 7-18; Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Singing the Faith, Music Edition* (London: Hymns Ancient and Modern, 2011), p.vii; Shier-Jones, p. 12; and

My review of formal theology illuminated a holiness triangle as an important lens for understanding holiness. My review of normative theology asserts a relational understanding of holiness as a way of understanding the Methodist vocation to spread ‘scriptural holiness’. I want to discover how people within my local Methodist church respond to holiness and whether the formal and normative theology will animate them, as it is animating me. Yet, to be fully faithful to the way doctrinal standards locate Methodism’s normative theology, we must first turn to the Bible as the source of ‘divine revelation’ and the church’s ‘supreme rule of faith and practice’.

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Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *The Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999), p.viii; Heitzenrater, p.90; and Davies, ‘The People Called Methodists’, pp.145-79.



## Chapter 5

### *Holy Scripture*

#### 5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I proposed that the Bible was the most significant signpost for discovering British Methodism's normative theology of holiness and my analysis of the way holiness is emphasised in Wesley's Notes and Sermons further asserted this. Yet discovering what the Bible says about holiness is no easy task. This is because, as 'the most intimately divine word of all',<sup>1</sup> 'holy' is found throughout the Bible, appearing nearly 800 times in the *New Revised Standard Version*. Add the associated words and cognates like 'sanctify', 'purity', 'cleanness' and 'perfection' and a comprehensive word study soon overwhelms. Some academics focus on the etymology of the word,<sup>2</sup> a particular section,<sup>3</sup> theme<sup>4</sup> or set of doctrines.<sup>5</sup> Yet, if the Bible is indeed *holy* scripture, then exploring holiness in the Bible must address the whole of the Bible. To discover the meaning of 'holy' in the whole of Holy Scripture I will adhere to three principles that respect Methodism's doctrinal standards which situate the Bible as authoritative. First, I will approach scripture in its presented final canonical sequence (as held in common with churches aligned with the Protestant Reformation) and look for the way it reveals the 'gospel of redemption'.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, I will approach scripture as 'divine revelation', but also critically in order to find out what it means

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<sup>1</sup> Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, p.21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24-36.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Philip Jenson, 'Holiness in the Priestly Writings of the Old Testament' in *Holiness* ed. by Barton, pp.93-121.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Allan Coppedge, *Portraits of God: A Biblical Theology of Holiness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001); John N. Oswald, *Called to be Holy* (Nappanee: Evangel Publishing House, 1999); and John G. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> William M. Greathouse, *Wholeness in Christ: Towards a Biblical Theology of Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 1.

to live among people who hold the Bible as ‘the supreme rule of faith and practice’.<sup>7</sup> To do this, I will listen to specific verses of scripture but hold those verses in dialogue with the whole canon of scripture; with other scholars who are engaging with those verses; and with practice of faith in daily life.<sup>8</sup> Thirdly, I will approach the Bible as someone who is already engaged in the study of holiness, keen to draw out a breadth of scriptural motifs and voices across the canon of scripture that engage with the picture of holiness I have already begun to visualise. I will explore eight motifs rooted in particular passages but with echoes elsewhere in the Bible. Some of the passages are regularly considered by those studying holiness while others can be overlooked but, held together, I contend they bring us close to glimpsing a nuanced picture of Biblical holiness.

### *5.2. Holiness as the wholeness of creation*

Many approaches to Biblical holiness do not commence by stressing how Holy Scripture begins,<sup>9</sup> yet it is striking that it begins with an account of creation which, like a crescendo, culminates in a pronouncement of holiness. On six occasions in Genesis, like a refrain, God views a specific facet of creation and ‘saw that it was good’.<sup>10</sup> When everything had been created, God viewed creation as ‘very good’.<sup>11</sup> Then on the seventh day, God ‘hallowed it’.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Scripture begins by presenting the hallowing of the seventh day as the goal or

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> This principle is a development of an approach offered by others. See Christopher Bryan, *Listening to the Bible: The Art of Faithful Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.45.

<sup>9</sup> For example, John Rogerson, ‘What is Holiness’ in *Holiness* ed. by Barton, pp.3-21 and Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*. In addition, Bailey Wells notices the Bible begins with holiness but discounts it as ‘presented from the hindsight of a mature Israelite faith’, which is an odd decision for a thesis taking a canonical approach. Bailey Wells, p.13.

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1.4,10,12,18,21,25.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 1.31.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 2.3.

fulfilment of creation. This connects holiness and wholeness in a way that is more significant than sometimes presented.<sup>13</sup>

First, as Westermann notes, the author of Genesis ‘was not concerned merely with a succession of seven days, but with a whole, with a basic unit of time [... creation] would not be whole without the seventh day, which is something different from the six days.’<sup>14</sup> This point finds an echo in Sinai being covered by a cloud for six days and God calling to Moses out of the cloud on the seventh day.<sup>15</sup> In both cases, the activity of the six days gain their meaning through the hallowing of the seventh day. In this way, it becomes apparent that ‘holiness’ is not synonymous with ‘wholeness’ but rather it is through the holiness of the seventh day that creation becomes whole and we understand what wholeness really means.

Second, the hallowing of the seventh day is not to be viewed in the westernised sense of a ‘day off’, providing time for recreational opportunities. The precise translation of Genesis 2.2 is not ‘rest’ but rather ‘cease from’.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the hallowing of the seventh day involves a negative drawing away from work, an absence of activity which Hamilton sees as an echo of the earlier silence that preceded God’s creative work.<sup>17</sup> This inactivity is not because work is bad, which is inconsistent with the fruit of God’s labour being ‘very good’; nor is it because God requires rest, which is inconsistent with God’s omnipotence. Through the seventh day, creation is whole, integrated and interrelated, and God's cessation of work celebrates that fact. This point is reinforced through the account of the seven stages in forming the tabernacle, culminating in the seventh stage where ‘Moses finished his

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<sup>13</sup> Goldbrunner sees the connection between holiness and wholeness through the prism of spiritual health, but the hallowing of the seventh day has a greater and more specific intention than enabling humanity to ‘live a spiritually healthy life’. Josef Goldbrunner, *Holiness is Wholeness and Other Essays*, trans. Stanley Godman (Notre Dame, Indiana: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), p.14.

<sup>14</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. by John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1984), p.171.

<sup>15</sup> Exodus 15.15-16.

<sup>16</sup> This is reinforced through the rhythm of rest for creation outlined in Exodus 23.10-13, where on the seventh day land is left fallow ‘so that the poor of your people may eat’ and on the seventh day ‘you shall rest’ along with ‘your ox and your donkey [...] and your homeborn slave and the resident alien’.

<sup>17</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), p.141.

work'.<sup>18</sup> The cessation of work demonstrates that creation is an integrated and interrelated whole and, in that sense, is 'finished'.

Third, "'Finishing'", argues Fretheim, 'does not mean that God will not engage in further acts',<sup>19</sup> as some authors imply.<sup>20</sup> God is not 'finished' like the way a machinist is distanced from the product when it leaves the factory. God continues to engage with creation, delighting in the way it is interrelated. Moreover, as no evening is mentioned, it is possible to see a deep connection between God and God's creation — God's blessing and hallowing — as continuing into perpetuity. We see the depth of this connection through scripture, suggesting not only that creation is the work of God or even the place (as Moses and others discover) where God can be encountered;<sup>21</sup> but also that Earth, particularly the temple, is the place where God can dwell.<sup>22</sup> This deep connectedness between God and God's creation will become particularly clear in the next section.

Fourth, while von Rad notes that 'nothing at all is said' of the Sabbath in Genesis 2.3 and 'as a cultic institution is quite outside the purview',<sup>23</sup> there is certainly a connection between the hallowing of the seventh day and the holiness of the Sabbath. For example, when God promised to 'rain bread from heaven', bread fell on six days and twice as much on the sixth so that the Israelites did not need to gather food on the seventh. It is here that, in the canonical sequence, the reader first encounters the Sabbath command 'This is what the Lord has commanded: Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Exodus 40.16-33.

<sup>19</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, 'The Book of Genesis' in *The New Interpreters Bible Volume 1* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), p.346. For a similar point expressed differently, see Samuel R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 12th edn. (London: Methuen & Co., 1926), p.18.

<sup>20</sup> Hartley asserts, 'God's sanctifying the seventh day certified that the creation was finished and perfect'. John E. Hartley, *Genesis* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), p.50. Von Rad claims 'the world is no longer in process of being created [...] but it has been "completed" by God'. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 2nd edn, trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1972), p.62.

<sup>21</sup> See also Psalms 19 and 139.

<sup>22</sup> See I Chronicles 28.2; Psalm 99.5; 132.7; Isaiah 66.1; Lamentations 2.1; Matthew 5.35; Acts 7.49.

<sup>23</sup> Von Rad, p.62.

<sup>24</sup> Exodus 16.23.

The decalogue provides the next connection between the seventh day and the Sabbath in the canonical sequence.<sup>25</sup> Later, the relationship between Israel and the God of creation is made when Moses addresses the Israelites.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the seventh day is clearly connected with the Sabbath. The Sabbath is also a day God fiercely protects as a gift to God's people, enabling them to see creation as whole, interrelated, benefiting from God's wholehearted involvement and, therefore, as a time for delighting in their relationship with God. The connection between the Sabbath and the seventh day positions the gift of the Sabbath as an invitation to participate in God's life. To refuse this gift is to refuse the connection between the created and the creator. Calling the seventh day holy gives 'the clearest of hints of how man created in the divine image should conduct himself on the seventh day.'<sup>27</sup>

As with other Jewish teachers of his time, Jesus saw the purpose of the Sabbath as being to focus on God and the world He had created,<sup>28</sup> although the manner in which he lived this out drew conflict. In Luke 13.10-17, a woman who had been crippled for 18 years approached Jesus on the Sabbath and Jesus healed her. A leader of the synagogue was indignant, telling the crowd that there are six days for work and she should have come then, not on the Sabbath. His point is not unreasonable: she could have requested healing on any non-Sabbath day during the previous 18 years. More strikingly, Jesus would have been aware of Exodus 31.14: 'whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death.' Yet Jesus sees the opportunity of healing to draw people back to how that verse begins: 'You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you'. Therefore, Johnson argues, Jesus 'never undercuts Sabbath-keeping per se, but privileges its life-giving, salvific purpose over its boundary-keeping function.'<sup>29</sup> The Sabbath is precisely the day that a person should be 'set

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<sup>25</sup> Exodus 20.8-11.

<sup>26</sup> Exodus 31.12-17. See also Exodus 35.1-3.

<sup>27</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), p.36.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Luke 4.16.

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, p.67.

free' from the constraints that keep people from the wholeness God intended for the whole of creation. In Jesus, God's delight in — and commitment to — creation is precisely shown. Jesus lay buried in creation on the seventh day and then appeared to his disciples on the first day, causing Christian worship to focus on 'the Lord's Day' in gratitude for what was completed on that particular Sabbath.

I suggested in 3.4 that the beginning of scripture is the beginning of the revelation of God's holiness. The holiness revealed is the whole of creation of which humanity is part, its interrelatedness, the way it caused God to delight and the invitation to share in God's delight, blessing and hallowing.

### *5.3. Holiness as the fire of grace*

At the beginning of the second book of the Bible, Exodus, the intervention of God through a burning bush is particularly striking, not just because it shows God's sovereignty over nature — or because it shows God's interest in the particular person of Moses — but because it also shows God intervening in the politics of people groups. The intervention is the result of alarming circumstances. Joseph, through whom God rescued Egypt from famine,<sup>30</sup> has been forgotten and therefore, by implication, Egypt has also forgotten God.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, it appears that Moses had also forgotten God: when the angel of the Lord appears to Moses in Exodus 3, he does not 'fear God and [...] turn away from sight' but is 'totally oblivious even to the possibility of the confrontation that is to follow'.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, while the narrative highlights the faithfulness of the Hebrew midwives,<sup>33</sup> the emphasis is on God — not God's

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<sup>30</sup> Genesis 41.39-57; 47.13-26.

<sup>31</sup> Exodus 1.8.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus* (Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), p.126 and John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Exodus* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), p.30. However, when reminded by God, Moses does offer a proper response. See Exodus 3.6.

<sup>33</sup> Exodus 1.17.

people — as faithful. It is God who deals well with the midwives;<sup>34</sup> God who ‘heard their groaning, and [...] remembered his covenant’;<sup>35</sup> God who ‘looked upon the Israelites, and [...] took notice of them’;<sup>36</sup> and God who ‘observed the misery’ and ‘heard their cry’.<sup>37</sup> It is because of grace that God intervenes in the world and Moses finds, with no credit to himself, that he is standing on ‘holy ground’.<sup>38</sup>

Holiness as grace is more than intervention. The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses ‘in a flame of fire’.<sup>39</sup> In Exodus, fire denotes God’s powerful presence;<sup>40</sup> it is the sacrificial means by which people offer worship;<sup>41</sup> and elsewhere it is a metaphor for purification.<sup>42</sup> Moses is not more ‘suited to receive Yahweh’s spirit than a desert shrub’, yet ‘like the dry wood, will not be harmed by God’s spirit.’<sup>43</sup> God’s promise to Moses is ‘I will be with you’,<sup>44</sup> a promise made previously only to Isaac and Jacob.<sup>45</sup> Yet the heart of the message is not about Moses, but about God, who heard the cries of the suffering Israelites, took notice and, as if indicative of the intimacy of God’s presence among the Hebrews, said ‘I know their sufferings’.<sup>46</sup> Johnstone is perhaps right to argue that ‘The fire of the burning bush [...] is best understood as a symbol [...] of persecution despite which God’s people Israel is not consumed. God appears not *as* fire, but *in* the fire’.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the ‘holy ground’ where Moses stands is not the intervention of a distant god, but of God who knows people’s pain.

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<sup>34</sup> Exodus 1.20-21.

<sup>35</sup> Exodus 2.24.

<sup>36</sup> Exodus 2.25.

<sup>37</sup> Exodus 3.7.

<sup>38</sup> Exodus 3.5.

<sup>39</sup> Exodus 3.3.

<sup>40</sup> See Exodus 14.24; 19.18; 24.17.

<sup>41</sup> See Exodus 29.18,25,34; 30.20.

<sup>42</sup> See Zechariah 13.9; Malachi 3.2-3; I Peter 1.6-7.

<sup>43</sup> William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p.222.

<sup>44</sup> Exodus 3.12.

<sup>45</sup> Genesis 26.24; 28.15.

<sup>46</sup> Exodus 3.7.

<sup>47</sup> William Johnstone, *Exodus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), p.47. See Daniel 3.24-28 and Isaiah 42.3.

Moses' encounter with the angel of the Lord resonates with cultic worship, particularly God's words in Exodus 3.5. 'Come no closer!' includes a verb that the Old Testament frequently uses 'as a technical term to describe approaching the Presence of God in worship'.<sup>48</sup> 'Remove the sandals from your feet' connects with the likelihood of the Tabernacle priests ministering barefoot.<sup>49</sup> The word 'place' is 'often a technical term in biblical Hebrew for a sanctuary or holy place' and the term 'holy ground' likewise 'connotes sacred space'.<sup>50</sup> Yet, while these words point to the location of God's theophany, God will not be geographically constrained. The Egyptian god 'stayed within the *temenos*, the holy place, where alone he was to be encountered',<sup>51</sup> yet Israel's God has heard, known, come down, appeared in fire on Horeb and will deliver them from the Egyptians. Israel's God will be with them in a 'pillar of fire'<sup>52</sup> as they journey from Pharaoh back to the mountain, where they will be one with God in the freedom of worship.<sup>53</sup>

Holiness is God's presence that dangerously burns against impurity, always remembers (even though others forget) and needs to be approached carefully. Yet God's presence is grace that enters the fire of human suffering to save and deliver God's people. Therefore, holiness is God's unmerited regard that burns *for* God's people and burns *against* all that harms God's people. Biblical writers recall this grace in song.<sup>54</sup> The Bible foretells God's action in Jesus who lives out the grace narrative and baptises with 'the Holy Spirit and

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<sup>48</sup> Durham, p.30. See also Richard Coggins, *The Book of Exodus* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000), p.16. Hyatt wonders whether Horeb had already been a sanctuary of another god (J. Philip Hyatt, *Commentary on Exodus* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971), p.71) yet Exodus 3.6 states that the ground is holy because of association: 'I am the God of your father'.

<sup>49</sup> There is an absence of any reference to footwear when the Bible describes what the priests wear. Moreover, priests are only instructed to wash their hands and feet, suggesting that these are the only parts of the body which are uncovered. See Exodus 28; 30.18-21.

<sup>50</sup> Carol L. Meyers, *Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.51.

<sup>51</sup> George A.F. Knight, *Theology as Narration: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1976), p.18.

<sup>52</sup> Exodus 13.21,22; 14.24; Numbers 14.14. See also Nehemiah 9.12,19.

<sup>53</sup> Exodus 3.12. See also Exodus 4.23; 5.1; 7.16; 8.1,20; 9.1,13; 10.3,7-8,11,24,26; 12.31.

<sup>54</sup> Exodus 15; Psalm 66; 76; 78; 106; 136.



fire'.<sup>55</sup> The proper response to holiness as grace is to receive God's favour, the transformation that God offers and to allow God to enter into the fire of our becoming.

#### *5.4. Holiness as likeness to God*

In 3.4, we saw Hooker persuasively placing 'be holy as I am holy' at the axis of her thinking about holiness. Wenham names it 'the motto of holiness'<sup>56</sup> and, in 4.2.1, we saw frequent allusions to this phrase in Wesley's Sermons. In the canonical sequence, the phrase first appears in Leviticus 11.44-45, where God calls Moses and Aaron to communicate to Israel various laws about what the people may and may not eat. The next three occurrences appear in a section about relationships with their extended family, animals, land, neighbours and those outside their community who worship other Gods, or who are mediums or wizards (Leviticus 19.2; 20.7,26).

The force of the injunction 'be holy' is that Israel belongs to God and that abiding by these laws is an expression of their belonging. The range of words used to describe not abiding by these laws is instructive. It would be to 'defile yourselves';<sup>57</sup> to do a 'detestable' thing;<sup>58</sup> it is an 'abomination';<sup>59</sup> to be rendered 'unclean';<sup>60</sup> and to be 'cut off' from kin or Israel as a whole.<sup>61</sup> The thrust of Leviticus is that Israel must behave as if having a right relationship with God is of greatest importance, because to behave in any other way is for Israel to put at a distance the God who named and rescued her.

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<sup>55</sup> Matthew 3.11-12; Luke 1.46-55; 1.68-79; 3.16-17.

<sup>56</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), p.18.

<sup>57</sup> Leviticus 11.43-44 (associating with swarming creatures); 18.20-30 (sexual relationship with relatives).

<sup>58</sup> Leviticus 11.10-43 (food to be avoided).

<sup>59</sup> Leviticus 7.18 and 19.7 (eating sacrifice too late); 11.13 (birds that must not be eaten); 18.22 and 20.13 (a man lying with a man); 20.25 (not making a distinction between clean and unclean).

<sup>60</sup> Leviticus 5.3 (unclean things); 11.4-47 (unclean food); 12.2,5 (childbirth); 13.3-59 (skin disease); 14.36-46 (contaminated houses); 15.2-33 (body fluids); 17.15; 22.4-11,27.

<sup>61</sup> Leviticus 7.20-27 (touching or eaten that which is forbidden); 17.4-9 (wrongly offering for sacrifice); 10-14 (eating blood); 18.29 (forbidden sexual relations); 19.8 (eating a sacrifice too late); 20.3-6 (sacrificing a child to a foreign God and turning to wizards or mediums); 20.17-18 (inappropriate nakedness); 22.3 (gathering to worship while unclean); 23.29 (not practising self-denial during the day of atonement).

The command 'be holy' is an expression of God's grace. As Hooker notes, 'what God demands is based on what God has already done [...]. Yahweh has graciously chosen Israel as his special people, and her holiness depends on her relationship with him.'<sup>62</sup> The absence of an explanation of what holiness is confirms that to 'be holy' is about staying connected with God.<sup>63</sup> However, a relationship with God is not only personal but the means by which the divine nature will be communicated, as God asserts in Leviticus 10.3: 'Through those who are near me I will show myself holy, and before all the people I will be glorified.' Therefore, to 'be holy' means belonging to God for the benefit of those who are already close and of those who are still to become close. In contrast to Deuteronomy, holiness in Leviticus is not something already possessed.<sup>64</sup> Israel is commanded to 'be holy', to be drawn 'into a relationship with the one who alone can make distinctions and reconcile them'<sup>65</sup> and to be led into 'divine fruitfulness'.<sup>66</sup>

While not the exact phrase, Exodus 19.5-6 echoes the Levitical command. Though everything belongs to God, Israel is in focus because of 'God's initiative and personal involvement in acquiring Israel'.<sup>67</sup> Yet favour is accompanied by function. Holiness results from divine choice,<sup>68</sup> but Israel must 'exemplify sanctity and transmit God's will' and 'play a mediatorial role between Yahweh and all other nations'.<sup>69</sup> Presented here is less of a holiness triangle and more of a priestly train-track along which God's grace reaches the nations through Israel. Yet God's grace will not be limited to moving in such a way, as the exile narratives demonstrate,<sup>70</sup> but it does nevertheless highlight Israel's high calling.

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<sup>62</sup> Hooker, 'Be Holy as I am Holy' p.5.

<sup>63</sup> Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, p.21.

<sup>64</sup> Deuteronomy 7.6; 14.2.

<sup>65</sup> Ephraim Radner, *Leviticus* (London: SCM Press, 2008), p.202.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.210.

<sup>67</sup> Meyers, p.147.

<sup>68</sup> Though in Deuteronomy 26.18-19 the sequence is reversed.

<sup>69</sup> Meyers, p.147 and Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), p.304.

<sup>70</sup> For example, in Isaiah 45, God anoints the Persian King, Cyrus.

The Levitical command is quoted once in the New Testament. I will explore I Peter 1.14-16 in 5.9 but it is important to note here that the command ‘be holy’ is firmly at the heart of the Christian understanding of discipleship;<sup>71</sup> that this understanding is shaped by God in Christ; and that it invites faith and conduct that distinguishes Christians from those who are without hope in Christ.

In Matthew 5.48 and Luke 6.36, Jesus can be seen to develop the Levitical command. The interaction of these two verses has created scholarly debate in at least two ways. First, the Greek in Matthew suggests a future promise with the sense of what God might do within the disciple (‘you will be’), whereas in Luke there is an emphasis on the disciple’s present response (‘you must be’). Second, the emphasis might be moral perfection,<sup>72</sup> with Jesus wanting his disciples to outdo the Pharisees;<sup>73</sup> but the more likely emphasis is on character. This means more than ‘be true’ or sincere,<sup>74</sup> but be wholehearted in relation to human behaviour before God<sup>75</sup> and express the maturity of one who exercises mercy<sup>76</sup> and whose instinct is selfless love. Here is the absence of egocentricism that is implicit in Leviticus<sup>77</sup> and explicit in Jesus.<sup>78</sup> Overall, what is most compelling is the consistency of Jesus inviting his disciples to see God as ‘your’ Father, which must mean bearing God’s likeness (echoing my exploration in 4.2.2), and exhibiting a lifestyle that reflects the family relationship between children and their father. This finds further echo in the Lord’s Prayer, where the

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<sup>71</sup> Be holy is ‘the foundation of the author’s thought’. Ralph P. Martin, ‘The Theology of Jude, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter’ in *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude* by Andrew Chester and Ralph P. Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.63-168 (p.106).

<sup>72</sup> ‘without doubt, “moral perfection” is the meaning’. William David Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of According to Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004), p.561. The Greek word rendered ‘perfect’ can also mean whole, complete or mature. This relates to our earlier discussion concerning wholeness.

<sup>73</sup> Matthew 5.20.

<sup>74</sup> William Foxwell Albright and Christopher Stephen Mann, *Matthew* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1971), p.72.

<sup>75</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), p.271. See Matthew 19.21.

<sup>76</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke - Volume 1: 1-9:50* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), p.605.

<sup>77</sup> ‘the essence of holiness lies in death, especially the death of one’s egocentric nature’. Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), p.40.

<sup>78</sup> See Matthew 16.24; Mark 8.34; Luke 9.23.

opening three clauses all describe and interpret the same reality: the world becoming a place where it is visible that God is creator and Lord.<sup>79</sup> In God's requirement for God's people to be holy and the assertion of God as the Father of Jesus' disciples, Christians are called to exceed the Levitical command.<sup>80</sup>

### 5.5. Holiness as sovereignty

As highlighted in 3.4 and 3.5, Isaiah is crucial to a Biblical understanding of holiness, with the adjective 'holy' used with reference to God more often here than throughout the rest of the Old Testament<sup>81</sup> and the phrase 'the Holy One of Israel' appearing repeatedly throughout Isaiah but less frequently elsewhere.<sup>82</sup> Recent research favours seeing Isaiah as whole, with Barton arguing that 'Isaiah has been drawn together into a unity through the controlling theme of God's holiness'.<sup>83</sup> This focus highlights even further the significance of the prophet's call in Isaiah 6, with Bailey Wells describing Isaiah 6.3 as 'the most emphatic statement concerning God's holiness found anywhere in the Old Testament'.<sup>84</sup>

The prophet, probably near to the temple sanctuary,<sup>85</sup> begins with a vision of a sovereign God: 'I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.'<sup>86</sup> Many commentators draw attention to the 'Seraphs' attending God, but

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<sup>79</sup> 'hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' Matthew 6.9-10. See also Luke 11.2.

<sup>80</sup> William David Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of According to Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004), p.565.

<sup>81</sup> Orsuto notes 34 times in Isaiah and 26 times in the rest of the Old Testament. Orsuto, p.19.

<sup>82</sup> Compare 1 Kings 19.22; Psalm 71.22; 78.41; 89.18; Jeremiah 50.29; 51.5 with Isaiah 1.4; 5.19, 24; 10.20; 12.6; 17.7; 29.19,23 ('of Jacob'); 30.12,15; 31.1; 37.23; 41.14,16,20; 43.3,14; 45.11; 47.4; 48.17; 49.7; 54.5; 55.5; 60.9,14.

<sup>83</sup> John Barton, *Isaiah 1-39*, (London: T&T Clark, 2003), p.111. See also Hugh Godfrey Maturin Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

<sup>84</sup> Bailey Wells, p.148.

<sup>85</sup> Isaiah is either attending worship (John Goldingay, *Isaiah* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), p.58) or, given the small size of the worship space, looking through the porch (David Stacey, *Isaiah* (London: Epworth, 1993), p.42). Brueggemann notes how influenced Isaiah was by worship, seeing the sequence of Isaiah's vision as praise (v.1-4), confession (v.5), forgiveness (v.6-7) and commissioning (v.8) (Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p.58).

<sup>86</sup> Isaiah 6.1.

Widyapranawa goes further to suggest that ‘a seraph was an effigy of a foreign god’ which King Uzziah allowed into the temple courts, perhaps connected to the tribute Judah was paying to Assyria.<sup>87</sup> If true, the seraphs ‘in attendance’ to God calling out to one another ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts’<sup>88</sup> adds weight to Barton’s assertion that ‘the essence of holiness for Isaiah seems to have been God’s supremacy over everything’.<sup>89</sup>

The threefold reiteration of the word ‘holy’ is unique, emphasising and intensifying the supremacy of God. The prophet picturing how ‘The pivots on the thresholds shook [...] and the house filled with smoke’ echoes the Sinai narratives and further adds to the sense of God’s supremacy.<sup>90</sup> Isaiah is aware of his own sinfulness and that he is a member of the community that has turned against God.<sup>91</sup> Yet ‘Isaiah’s instinct to infer that holiness will be the end of him turns out to be mistaken.’<sup>92</sup> A seraph flies to him with a coal from the altar,<sup>93</sup> a reiteration of the association between holiness and fire that we found in Exodus 3. The heat is too much for the seraph so that ‘tongs’ need to be used, yet for Isaiah this heat is forgiveness and life. So, Isaiah’s relationship with God is different: the seraphs are compelled into service, may not look at God and cannot come into contact with holiness<sup>94</sup>, but Isaiah seeks mercy, sees God and is touched by holiness.<sup>95</sup> ‘How could being touched with a coal effect this sort of purification?’ asks John Goldingay.<sup>96</sup> Yet the purification offered is nothing to do with the size of the coal but with where it comes from. God is supreme and, through the coal, effects transformation.

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<sup>87</sup> Isaiah 6.4. Samuel H. Widyapranawa, *The Lord is Savior: Faith in National Crisis* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1990), p.31.

<sup>88</sup> Isaiah 6.3.

<sup>89</sup> Barton, *Isaiah 1-39*, p.110.

<sup>90</sup> See Exodus 19.18; 24.17; Deuteronomy 5.4-5, 22-26; 9.10; 10.4; and 18.16.

<sup>91</sup> Isaiah 1.2-11; 6.5.

<sup>92</sup> Goldingay, p.59.

<sup>93</sup> Isaiah 6.6-7.

<sup>94</sup> Isaiah 6.2.

<sup>95</sup> Isaiah 6.5.

<sup>96</sup> Goldingay, p.60.

God expresses sovereignty to the prophet, not as a power forcing obedience, but as an invitation to participate in God's purposes and activity. 'Whom shall I send?' asks God. With enthusiasm uncharacteristic of a prophet, Isaiah responds, 'Here am I; send me!'<sup>97</sup> God then commissions Isaiah with a message for people who listen but do not comprehend. It is unsettling to read that God will 'make the mind of his people dull', yet already in Isaiah 1 and 2 the people are closing their minds to God. Like Jonah preaching to Nineveh, Isaiah must speak, but unlike Nineveh, Israel will not turn back: Isaiah's message simply deepens Israel's resolve.<sup>98</sup> Isaiah pleads for mercy: 'How long, O Lord?'<sup>99</sup> Though holiness includes judgement, it cannot 'leave the terrible message finally at nullification and termination'.<sup>100</sup> God's people are portrayed as a tree which, when felled, leaves behind a stump that contains the potential for new life. God's people will become, to translate literally, 'a seed of holiness'.<sup>101</sup> Isaiah, in continuity with Exodus, presents God alone as holy and, in continuity with Leviticus, calls Judah to step forward and 'be holy' so that one day 'God's holiness will be exalted and his glory evident to all [...] accompanied by justice and righteousness and joy'.<sup>102</sup>

In Revelation 4.8, John moves through heaven's open door and sees someone seated on the throne, surrounded by 24 elders and a rainbow. There are four living creatures — the first like a lion, the second like an ox, the third with a human face and the fourth like a flying eagle — singing day and night, echoing of the seraphs in Isaiah 6.3, 'Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.' In a modification of Ezekiel's vision,<sup>103</sup> those offering praise represent the variety of mortal power on earth who are in

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<sup>97</sup> Contrast Isaiah 6.8 with Moses in Exodus 3. See also Jeremiah 1 and Jonah 1.

<sup>98</sup> Jonah 1.1; 3.1-10.

<sup>99</sup> Isaiah 6.11.

<sup>100</sup> Brueggemann, p.62.

<sup>101</sup> Isaiah 6.13. See also Isaiah 11.

<sup>102</sup> Bailey Wells, p.157-8. Judah has overlooked justice and righteousness in her concern for cultic exactitude. See Isaiah 1.17; 3.14-15; 5.22-23.

<sup>103</sup> Ezekiel 1.4-14. See also 10.1-22.

ceaseless praise of God's power.<sup>104</sup> The content of their song develops Isaiah 6.3 to emphasise further God's 'almighty' and eternal power and is a prelude to the worship of Jesus.

In these two visions, God's supremacy is asserted over all things: worshippers, foreign gods and those who cannot (or will not) hear God's call. Through judgement, forgiveness and new life, holiness changes everything that it touches, reinforcing the third signpost offered by the doctrinal standards for Methodists to discover their normative theology.<sup>105</sup> The vision of holiness elevates the perspective of those who feel overwhelmed by their present circumstances. It is a vision of God's sovereignty as a current reality even if it is not yet fully felt. Through its reading at ordination services and formal liturgies of Holy Communion, the vision has considerable influence within the church, yet the focus is almost always limited to the threefold 'holy, holy, holy'.<sup>106</sup> The church needs to present these visions in their context if it is to gain a full sense of holiness as God's sovereignty. In doing so, 'holy' becomes not only the cry of those in awe or in receipt of God's mercy, but also the action of God sending willing worshippers alongside those who do not see God's sovereignty as good news. Therefore, the sovereignty of God includes faithfulness and selflessness.

### 5.6. *Holiness as Jesus*

Peterson argues that 'Jesus offers very little direct teaching on the theme of holiness and sanctification'<sup>107</sup> and Bailey Wells contends that 'there is a notable absence of the language of holiness in the gospels',<sup>108</sup> yet I contend the Gospels are at ease with holiness

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<sup>104</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), p.360; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), p.234); Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), p.332.

<sup>105</sup> See 4.1.

<sup>106</sup> Only the first eight verses of Isaiah 6 are read during the ordination of presbyters and the 'Holy, holy, holy' is repeated in all Holy Communion liturgies in the Methodist Worship Book. Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *The Methodist Worship Book*, p.125, 138, 154, 170, 180, 193, 204, 216, 299.

<sup>107</sup> Peterson, *Possessed by God*, p.27.

<sup>108</sup> Bailey Wells, p.231-2.

terminology.<sup>109</sup> Perhaps the familiarity with ‘Holy’ as the prefix for God’s ‘Spirit’ prevents readers from noticing the importance of holiness.<sup>110</sup> The Holy Spirit is always mentioned in relation to Jesus, with regards to his conception;<sup>111</sup> the baptism and receiving of the Holy Spirit through Jesus;<sup>112</sup> the baptism and temptation of Jesus;<sup>113</sup> John the Baptist, Elizabeth, Zechariah and Simeon who proclaim the arrival of Jesus;<sup>114</sup> the praising of God by Jesus;<sup>115</sup> and Jesus’ teaching about blasphemy, making disciples, the Messiah, facing trial, prayer or how disciples will be reminded of Jesus’ words.<sup>116</sup> When used not as a prefix to ‘Spirit’, the word ‘holy’ is used to refer to Jerusalem, angels, food, John the Baptist, ‘the Mighty One’, prophets, the covenant, first-born males and the Father.<sup>117</sup> There are also occasions when an evangelist adds the word ‘holy’<sup>118</sup> or ‘Holy Spirit’<sup>119</sup> when in parallel passages these are absent. However, while this shows that the evangelists are comfortable in using holiness terminology, the compelling presentation of holiness in the Gospels is not in how much the word is used or even, as Borg contends, in Jesus’ desire to modify the way Pharisees and others interpreted holiness.<sup>120</sup> The primary contribution of the Gospels to our understanding of holiness is through the assertion that the person of Jesus — his words, his actions, his life and the anticipation of his death — causes others to mark him out as holy.

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<sup>109</sup> Especially Luke. The word ‘holy’ appears in Matthew 9 times, in Mark 7 times and in John 6 times, compared with 20 times in Luke and 50 times in Acts.

<sup>110</sup> Of the 42 occurrences of ‘holy’ in the Gospels, 25 are as a prefix to ‘Spirit’.

<sup>111</sup> Matthew 1.18,20; Luke 1.35.

<sup>112</sup> Matthew 3.11; Mark 1.8; Luke 3.16; John 1.33; 20.22.

<sup>113</sup> Luke 3.22; 4.1.

<sup>114</sup> Luke 1.15, 41, 67; 2.25-26.

<sup>115</sup> Luke 10.21.

<sup>116</sup> Matthew 12.31-32; 28.19; Mark 3.29; 12.36; 13.11; Luke 11.13; 12.10, 12; John 14.26.

<sup>117</sup> Matthew 4.5; 7.6; 24.15; Mark 6.20; 8.38; Luke 1.49; 1.70, 72; 2.23; 9.26; John 11.48; 17.11.

<sup>118</sup> Luke uniquely prefixes ‘Spirit’ with ‘Holy’ in relation to Jesus’ temptations (contrast Luke 4.1 with Matthew 4.1 and Mark 1.12) and in relation to prayer (contrast Luke 10.21 with Matthew 11.25).

<sup>119</sup> Contrast Luke 10.21 with Matthew 11.25; Luke 11.13 with Matthew 7.11; and Mark 6.20 with Matthew 14.14.

<sup>120</sup> Borg, p.146 and Bailey Wells, p.232.



From the beginning, Jesus is known as holy. In Matthew, the presence of Jesus means ‘God is with us’.<sup>121</sup> In Luke, Mary is told that her child Jesus ‘will be holy’.<sup>122</sup> In Mark and John — with parallel passages in Matthew and Luke — John the Baptist announces that, unlike him, Jesus baptises with the Holy Spirit.<sup>123</sup> Yet what is particularly striking is the declaration that Jesus is ‘the Holy One of God’.<sup>124</sup>

This statement has shades of meaning. In Mark and Luke, it is an unclean spirit who recognises Jesus’ identity and superiority, and therefore marks Jesus as God’s agent. This resonates the way the phrase is used in the Old Testament.<sup>125</sup> It could also mean that Jesus is the Messiah or, more generically, that Jesus is ‘set against demonic forces, for they are at variance with God’s purpose for human wholeness’.<sup>126</sup> Even more precise and persuasive is Bultman’s claim that ‘Jesus stands over against the world simply as the One who comes from the other world and belongs to God’.<sup>127</sup> This resonates with Luke, who uses the word ‘spirit’ to denote evil and ‘Holy Spirit’ to show belonging to God.<sup>128</sup> However, being ‘the holy one of God’ implies not just belonging to but sharing in the Father’s holiness.<sup>129</sup> The definite article is important: Jesus is not *a* holy one but *the* holy one of God, exalted over ‘all other mere human beings as the holiest of God’s elect.’<sup>130</sup> The exaltation by an unclean spirit adds

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<sup>121</sup> Matthew 1.23.

<sup>122</sup> Luke 1.35.

<sup>123</sup> Mark 1.8; John 1.33; Matthew 3.11; Luke 3.16.

<sup>124</sup> Mark 1.23-28; Luke 4.33-37; John 6.66-71.

<sup>125</sup> For example, Elisha (2 Kings 4.9) and Aaron (Psalm 106.16). Interestingly, the phrase is also used of God (Isaiah 40.25; 57.15) and is found in a plural form (Daniel 7.18-27) and to describe a Nazirite (Judges 13.7; 16.17).

<sup>126</sup> Judith Lieu, *The Gospel of Luke* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1997), p.34-35 and Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), p.221.

<sup>127</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* trans. by G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), p.449. See Morna D. Hooker, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St Mark* (London: A & C Black, 1991), p.64 (‘this phrase was not a messianic title in Judaism’); C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p.77; and George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 36: John* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), p.97.

<sup>128</sup> The few cases where Luke does use ‘spirit’ for God’s Spirit is ‘when resuming an earlier reference expressly to the Holy Spirit’. See Luke 2.27; 4.1,14. See John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 35A: Luke 1-9:20* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1989), p.161.

<sup>129</sup> See John 17.1; 10.36. Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (London: Continuum, 2005), p.238.

<sup>130</sup> Adela Yabro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p.170.

weight to holiness as sovereignty.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, the Gospels present holiness not merely as within Jesus but Jesus as the embodiment of God's holiness. Furthermore, Peter's response when Jesus asks him if he will join others in turning away is 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'<sup>132</sup> Later, Jesus prays to the Father about his disciples: 'Sanctify them in the truth [...] And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.'<sup>133</sup> From the voices that surrounded Jesus' conception to an evil spirit commenting on Jesus' ministry and from the confession of a disciple to Jesus' own self-understanding, the Gospels present Jesus as holiness personified and, as a consequence, challenge the church to make Jesus central to its identity and ministry.

### *5.7. Holiness as the Christ ethic*

The entire corpus of Pauline literature is important for the understanding of holiness, yet within the constraints of this chapter we focus on I Thessalonians, the earliest New Testament document, to discover what holiness meant for one of the earliest churches.<sup>134</sup>

Paul calls the recipients of this letter the 'church', 'beloved by God', whom God 'has chosen', to whom the message of the gospel has come 'in power and in the Holy Spirit', who have 'received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit', who are 'imitators [...] of the Lord' and 'an example to all the believers'.<sup>135</sup> However, in I Thessalonians, Paul presents holiness to his recipients as obtainable but does not name his recipients, as he does in his later

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<sup>131</sup> Further research would be useful in order to establish whether there is a connection between God as the 'holy one of Israel' in Isaiah and Jesus as 'the holy one of God' in the Gospels.

<sup>132</sup> John 6.68.

<sup>133</sup> John 17.17-19.

<sup>134</sup> See Stanley E. Porter, 'Holiness, Sanctification' in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* ed. by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp.397-402 (p.398) and John A. Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.1.

<sup>135</sup> I Thessalonians 1.1-6.

letters, as ‘holy ones’.<sup>136</sup> Instead, Paul holds before the Thessalonians that the ‘will of God’ is their ‘sanctification’ with God calling them not ‘to impurity but in holiness.’<sup>137</sup> The goal of holiness is enlightened through the ‘wish-prayers’ of I Thessalonians 3.11-13 and I Thessalonians 5.23-24.

Three facets are immediately apparent in these prayers. First, the focus here, and overarching the whole letter, is the Parousia.<sup>138</sup> Second, eschatological salvation is contingent on the church’s holiness which, though a gift, requires the church’s willing participation. Third, there is a shift in emphasis from the first to the second prayer; from relative strengthening in holiness to being sanctified entirely, and from uncertainty about strengthening in holiness to the faithfulness of God who will do it. Perhaps this is because, before offering this assurance, Paul wishes to focus the church on specific instructions, like those in I Thessalonians 4.2-3.

It is doubtful whether Paul writes to the Thessalonians in anger over their bad behaviour, but rather he is aware of temptations and the need for the Thessalonians to focus on pleasing God.<sup>139</sup> From the outset, Christianity had a social ethic. It ‘sanctified sexual union within marriage [...] outside marriage it was forbidden’,<sup>140</sup> yet Thessalonica contained a contrasting ethic.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, Paul wanted the recipients of his letter to remember that being ready for Christ’s return cannot mean (to draw on the Wesleyan language we saw in

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<sup>136</sup> Most Pauline letters to churches start by indicating that they are addressed to the ‘saints’. Romans 1.7; I Corinthians 1.2; II Corinthians 1.1; Ephesians 1.1; Philippians 1.1; Colossians 1.2. The exceptions are Galatians, I Thessalonians and II Thessalonians. When Paul does mention ‘holy ones’ in I Thessalonians 3.13, he seems to be quoting Zechariah 14.5, which alludes to angels rather than God’s people being holy. For discussion, see Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), p.134-136, and Ben Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), p.104.

<sup>137</sup> I Thessalonians 4.3,7.

<sup>138</sup> I Thessalonians 1.10; 2.12,19; 4.14 - 5.11

<sup>139</sup> Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1977), p.15. Nicholl goes further to assert that there is ‘no evidence that holiness was an exceptionally great preoccupation of the neophytes’. This comment betrays his narrow view of holiness.

<sup>140</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 45: 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco: Word Books, 1982), p.82.

<sup>141</sup> Bruce quotes the statesman and orator Demosthenes, ‘We keep mistresses for pleasure, concubines for our day-to-day bodily needs, but we have wives to produce legitimate children and serve as trustworthy guardians of our homes.’ Bruce, p.87.

chapter four) limiting holiness to something ‘inward’, but it must also be ‘outward’.<sup>142</sup> Externalising holiness will not have been easy. Paul is writing primarily to console and encourage a Christian community in suffering and persecution,<sup>143</sup> which may not be unconnected with Paul’s sudden departure.<sup>144</sup> Neither is externalising holiness limited to sexuality: Paul celebrates and encourages selfless love in the church community along with quiet living, minding one’s own affairs, manual labour and sobriety.<sup>145</sup> Yet the flow of Paul’s rhetoric does particularly link together sanctification and the Christian sexual ethic as if to suggest this may be where the Thessalonian church is being tested most. Jewett suggests that some in the community are already persuaded that the presence of Christ experienced in ecstatic worship ‘should in principle free them also for the expression of full sexual freedom’; and that some were refusing to prepare for the presence of Christ to arrive because ‘they were experiencing and embodying it already in their ecstatic activities.’<sup>146</sup> This reads too much into the text, but without doubt Paul believes the church in Thessalonica must play a part in its own sanctification.

Working towards sanctification involves people of the church controlling their bodies ‘in holiness and honour’.<sup>147</sup> To let their behaviour be directed by ‘lustful passion’,<sup>148</sup> associated with greed and crossing established boundaries, is to draw a severe response: ‘the Lord is an avenger in all these things’.<sup>149</sup> So, consistent with what has been said earlier regarding holiness as wholeness,<sup>150</sup> holiness is about how people, as part of God’s

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<sup>142</sup> For example, *Works, Volume 1*, p.184, 274-5 and 531; and *Works, Volume 2*, p.200 and 224.

<sup>143</sup> Karl P. Donfried, ‘The Theology of 1 Thessalonians’ in *The Theology of the Shorter Pauline Letters* by Karl P. Donfried and I. Howard Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.1-79 (p.5, 19 and 63).

<sup>144</sup> I Thessalonians 2.17.

<sup>145</sup> I Thessalonians 1.2; 3.4,12; 4.9-12; 5.6-8,13.

<sup>146</sup> Robert Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p.172-3, 176.

<sup>147</sup> I Thessalonians 4.4.

<sup>148</sup> I Thessalonians 4.4-5. Galatians 5.24 and Colossians 3.5 say that these passions must be ‘crucified’ or ‘put to death’. See also Romans 1.24.

<sup>149</sup> I Thessalonians 4.6.

<sup>150</sup> See 5.2.

interconnected creation, live in relation with each other. For this reason, Christ, as ‘the holy one of God’, expresses self-control, faithfulness and selfless love in relationships. For people of the church, not to express this Christ ethic is to be ‘like Gentiles who do not know God’.<sup>151</sup> As Johnson succinctly states, ‘Holiness [...] is intensely personal but never private; it has an unavoidably *public* expression’ which Paul asserts is embodied in his own ministry.<sup>152</sup> With the twenty-first century church surrounded by values different to its own, Donfried considers I Thessalonians of immense contemporary relevance: ‘To remain authentically Christian, to swim against the popular tides of public opinion, means that often discipleship involves subtle, and in some places overt, harassment, alienation and/or persecution.’<sup>153</sup> To receive the Holy Spirit is for holiness to overflow into every area of relating. This holiness — exhibiting the life of Christ — can mean going against the flow of behaviour exhibited by others.

### 5.8. *Holiness as pursuit*

Paul’s emphasis on holiness being a social ethic requiring action is also found with greater intensity in the letter to the Hebrews. The letter intentionally focuses on holiness in its choice of words<sup>154</sup> and in references to purity,<sup>155</sup> but it is Hebrews 12.14 that resonates with Wesleyan aspirations to ‘pursue holiness’.<sup>156</sup>

The chapter provides the context for this invitation. It begins by encouraging recipients through the image of a great ‘cloud of witnesses’ that surrounds them like an

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<sup>151</sup> I Thessalonians 4.5.

<sup>152</sup> Johnson, p.132 and I Thessalonians 2.1-12.

<sup>153</sup> Donfried, p.73.

<sup>154</sup> For example, ‘Holy Place’, the ‘Holy of Holies’ and ‘Holy partners in a heavenly calling’. See Hebrews 3.1; 9.2,3,12 and 25. The Holy Spirit is referenced in Hebrews 2.4; 3.7; 6.4 and 10.15.

<sup>155</sup> Hebrews 1.3; 7.26; 9.14; 10.22.

<sup>156</sup> See Calvin T. Samuel, “‘Pursue peace with everyone and the holiness without which none shall see the Lord (Heb 12.14).’” Do Wesleyans read scripture through the lens of the book of Hebrews? *The Thirteenth Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies* <<https://oimts.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/2013-1-samuel.pdf>> [accessed 3 August 2017]. However, we note that Hebrews 12.14 is not quoted at all in Wesley’s *Sermons* and receives only a brief comment in Wesley’s *Notes*.

amphitheatre, populated not with passive spectators but with active ‘witnesses’ to inspire and give an account of the contemporary faithful.<sup>157</sup> Like an athlete who keeps their physical girth to a minimum and strips down to their running clothes in readiness for the race, believers are to ‘lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely’ and then to ‘run with perseverance the race that is set before us’.<sup>158</sup> It may be a struggle and the race may go on for some time, hence the necessity of preparation and the need to look to the one who has embodied God’s pursuit of us: ‘Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame’.<sup>159</sup> The recipients, then, are to see their struggles in the light of the struggles of Christ, ‘who endured such hostilities’ to the point of shedding blood.<sup>160</sup> Jesus is not a martyr but rather ‘the paradigm of faithful endurance who has completed the course in advance of all others.’<sup>161</sup> Further, struggles are not just inflicted by ‘sinners’, but allowed by God. So athletic imagery provides a crucial perspective: discipline is not punishment but training.<sup>162</sup> Echoing Proverbs 3.11-12, the author to the Hebrews writes, ‘the Lord disciplines those whom he loves [...] chastises every child whom he accepts’.<sup>163</sup> The absence of discipline would signal their illegitimacy:<sup>164</sup> ‘discipline is for our good, in order that we may share his holiness [...] the peaceful fruit of righteousness’.<sup>165</sup> Earlier, the letter suggests people already know holiness,<sup>166</sup> but Hebrews 12 makes it clear that, in the stark words of Peter O’Brien, ‘apart

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<sup>157</sup> Hebrews 12.1. See Gareth Lee Cockrill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), p.602.

<sup>158</sup> Hebrews 12.1, linking with previous chapter. ἀγῶνα can be translated ‘race’ or ‘struggle’ and ὑπομονῆς can be translated ‘perseverance’ or ‘endurance’.

<sup>159</sup> Hebrews 12.2. See also Hebrews 2.10-11; 5.8-9; 7.28; 10.14.

<sup>160</sup> Hebrews 12.3-4. See also Hebrews 2.18; 9.11-14; 13.12.

<sup>161</sup> N. Clayton Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12:1-13 in its rhetorical, religious, and philosophical context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.76.

<sup>162</sup> παιδείαν can be translated ‘discipline’ or ‘instruction’. See also Hebrews 12.11. There is also a sense in Hebrews of military conflict. See Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), p.360.

<sup>163</sup> Hebrews 12.5-6. See also Job 5.17; Revelation 3.19.

<sup>164</sup> Hebrews 12.7-8. See also Ephesians 6.4.

<sup>165</sup> Hebrews 12.9-11. The Holy Spirit also empowers the disciple to have self-discipline. See II Timothy 1.7; I Peter 1.13; 4.7; 5.8.

<sup>166</sup> Hebrews 2.14; 10.10,14.

from his disciplinary sufferings it is not possible to share in it at all.<sup>167</sup> Yet holiness is not a prize for highly performing individuals, but something for the community to share. So, the aim is not for disciples to compete against each other, but to attend to the ‘drooping hands’, ‘weak knees’ and ‘feet’ so that the ‘lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed’ and cross the finishing line together.<sup>168</sup>

This assertion of athletic training, father-like discipline and commitment to community all leads towards Hebrews 12.14: ‘Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.’ This is not to make holiness the product of human effort: without Jesus the ‘pioneer’ and ‘perfecter’ of faith, the disciple has no reason for faith or hope. Yet, while Christ’s suffering and death is the grace that opens the door for holiness to flow, it is through the continual pursuit of holiness that the disciples will ‘see the Lord’, whether in a vision, the Lord’s coming or at their death.<sup>169</sup> It means participating in the process of being made holy ‘by cultivating a life-style that is pleasing to God’ and ‘reflect the essential quality of the Father so that a pagan society will recognize in them the family likeness!’<sup>170</sup> Pursuing peace means doing all that can be done to ensure that ‘no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled.’<sup>171</sup> The pursuit of holiness is a self-emptied surrendering to God but also connected to self-interest: it is about our need for grace and reconciliation with God and humanity.

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<sup>167</sup> See Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010), p.468.

<sup>168</sup> Hebrews 12.12-13, developing Isaiah 35.3 and Proverbs 4.26. ‘it is vital that no member should be found wanting [...] the responsibility for the holiness of the community rests on all.’ Robert McLachlan Wilson, *New Century Bible Commentary: Hebrews* (Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan and Scott Publications, 1987), p.228. See also Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, p.174.

<sup>169</sup> Psalm 62.3; Isaiah 52.10; Revelation 22.4; I Corinthians 13.12; and I John 3.2. See Attridge, p.367.

<sup>170</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2004), p.167. See also Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.98.

<sup>171</sup> Hebrews 12.15.

The juxtaposition of peace, holiness and grace is important, with the Pauline correspondence commonly including all three in its opening greetings, suggesting that these three define Christian life.<sup>172</sup> Peace, holiness and grace is what God offers in Christ to humanity, but also what humanity in Christ offers to God. It means disciples demonstrating ‘mutual love’. This means showing ‘hospitality to strangers’, remembering those in prison and being tortured, honouring marriage, being free of greed, imitating the faith of their leaders and not being ‘carried away by all kinds of strange teachings’.<sup>173</sup> It is the outworking of holiness we saw in chapter three, particularly illuminated by Gorman and Bretherton.

Wherever in the amphitheatre of faith a person may stand, passivity is not a possibility. Though the original audience of the letter is uncertain, there is a consensus that the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews have lost their enthusiasm<sup>174</sup> and become spiritually lethargic<sup>175</sup> and careless with the blessings they have by being part of the new covenant.<sup>176</sup> Leviticus, Isaiah and I Thessalonians propose action but Hebrews emphasises passion. To ‘pursue’ is not a half-hearted engagement: the Greek word rendered ‘to pursue’ could equally mean, in keeping with the athletic imagery, ‘to run after’. Therefore, pursuing holiness requires energy, drive and determination. Through Christ’s passion, God has pursued God’s people and with passion people must pursue God. People have been sanctified, but only training, discipline and commitment will enable them to complete the race. This is challenging, particularly for those called to ‘spread scriptural holiness throughout the land’. It requires Methodists to see themselves less as receiving an affirming gift as being challenged to engage energetically with God and God’s creation.

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<sup>172</sup> Romans 1.7; I Corinthians 1.2-3; II Corinthians 1.1; Ephesians 1.1-2; Philippians 1.1-2; Colossians 1.2.

<sup>173</sup> Hebrews 13.1-9.

<sup>174</sup> Wilson, p.15.

<sup>175</sup> David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the ‘Epistle to the Hebrews’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.186.

<sup>176</sup> Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary*, p.488.



### 5.9. Holiness as identity

We have already begun to see that ‘holiness emerges as a central concern’ in I Peter.<sup>177</sup> The writer is ‘self-conscious in offering a biblical theology of holiness’.<sup>178</sup> Yet, whereas earlier we considered I Peter’s reassertion of the Levitical command, we now turn to the letter’s underlying emphasis, described by David Horrell as ‘this is what you are [...] so you must do this’.<sup>179</sup> The juxtaposition of these two themes — what you are and what you do — is, John Elliott argues, ‘the fundamental indicative for the entire epistle’.<sup>180</sup> This emphasis finds focus in I Peter 2.9.

Within this verse, the letter’s recipients are described with multiple words. They are ‘God’s own people’, literally rendered ‘a people for his possession’, which we earlier noted as the designation of Israel: the people God had acquired through rescue from Egypt and the people God enabled to escape from Babylon.<sup>181</sup> They are a ‘chosen race’, not defined by a common genetic background but inclusive of all those who ‘come to him’.<sup>182</sup> They are a ‘royal priesthood’ which, drawing on Exodus 19.6 in the Septuagint, points to a new spiritualisation of sacrifice, in which a community no longer offers slaughtered animals in a temple but instead forms a ‘spiritual house’. They are ‘consecrated in order to proclaim God’s goodness or redemptive power precisely to God — that is, in praise. Additionally [...] the offering of prayer to God on behalf of the world’.<sup>183</sup> They are also a ‘holy nation’, which refers not so much to their moral status but to their calling as set apart for God. We note

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<sup>177</sup> Bailey Wells, p.15.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p.208.

<sup>179</sup> David Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1998), p.38.

<sup>180</sup> John Hall Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of I Peter 2.4-10 and the Phrase βασιλειον ιεράτευμα* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1966), p.217.

<sup>181</sup> See Exodus 19.5; Isaiah 43.21.

<sup>182</sup> I Peter 2.4-5. Thus, the community may be a composite of prior ethnicities. See Galatians 3.28, Colossians 3.11 and David G. Horrell, “‘Race’, ‘Nation’, ‘People’: Ethnic Identity-Construction in 1 Peter 2.9” *New Testament Studies*, 56 (2011), pp.123-43.

<sup>183</sup> Catrin Lyn Harland Davies, ‘Holy and Royal: The New Testament church as a priestly community’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2013), p.178.

these descriptions ‘are essentially corporate’<sup>184</sup> and so I Peter asserts, more boldly than Hebrews, that ‘Holiness is not a matter of personal faithfulness; it is a community identity which necessarily involves standing out and being different, because it *is* their difference.’<sup>185</sup>

This community identity provides a description and an identifiable role: they are to proclaim God’s ‘mighty acts’. Yet it would be wrong to see their description and their role in distinct categories. As roots shoot forth branches, Wesley saw ‘inward holiness’ naturally flowing into ‘outward holiness’ and the point of I Peter is not ‘to cross the divide between private devotion and public witness: it is that there is no divide.’<sup>186</sup>

God’s ‘mighty acts’ are not just inherited stories of the faithful past, but their own contemporary story ‘of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’.<sup>187</sup> Certainly, the letter hints at their past: their former ‘ignorance’,<sup>188</sup> their ‘futile ways’<sup>189</sup> and being ‘not a people’ and having ‘not received mercy’.<sup>190</sup> In this way, the recipients of I Peter resonate with Moses and Isaiah: they have had an encounter with the holy God and, as a result of that encounter, have a message to articulate verbally to their community. Yet it is clear from the way that I Peter 2 proceeds that ‘proclaim’ is not limited to words. Perhaps even more than the recipients of I Thessalonians and Hebrews, the recipients of I Peter are called to live out their discipleship ‘in intensely practical and down-to-earth terms’.<sup>191</sup> They are to ‘accept the authority of every human institution’<sup>192</sup> and to ‘honour the emperor’;<sup>193</sup> slaves are urged to ‘accept the authority of your masters’<sup>194</sup> and wives to ‘accept the authority

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<sup>184</sup> Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p.44. Other descriptions are ‘exiles’ (I Peter 1.1; 2.11), ‘new born infants’ (I Peter 2.2), ‘living stones’ (I Peter 2.5), ‘aliens’ (I Peter 2.11), ‘servants’ (I Peter 2.16) and ‘stewards’ (I Peter 4.10).

<sup>185</sup> Bailey Wells, p.229. See also Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p.44.

<sup>186</sup> Bailey Wells, p.229.

<sup>187</sup> I Peter 2.9.

<sup>188</sup> I Peter 1.14.

<sup>189</sup> I Peter 1.18.

<sup>190</sup> I Peter 2.10.

<sup>191</sup> Martin, p.125.

<sup>192</sup> I Peter 2.13.

<sup>193</sup> I Peter 2.17.

<sup>194</sup> I Peter 2.18.

of your husbands' and not to braid their hair or wear gold or fine clothes;<sup>195</sup> and husbands must honour their wives.<sup>196</sup> For believers must not 'repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse' but serve each other<sup>197</sup> and not be surprised by persecution which is like a 'fiery ordeal'.<sup>198</sup> This fusion of description and role, personal piety and public action, means that Michaels cannot be right in limiting 'proclaim' to the category of gathered worship.<sup>199</sup> The integration of life that forms the holy identity in I Peter does not see these as separable.<sup>200</sup> Proclamation will happen in a service of worship but 'the context here undoubtedly demands that it be associated also with missionary activity'.<sup>201</sup> Therefore, in I Peter 2, there is a practical theology where what God has done in the private and public spheres of the recipients' lives connects, informs and channels their discipleship. Being and doing, along with worship and mission, combine to form the identity of God's holy people.

### 5.10. Preliminary conclusions

Holiness is a principal theme encompassing the whole of scripture, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. Therefore, to gain a sense of holiness in the Bible, the whole of scripture needs to be read, and this is the proper activity of Christian discipleship. For the purposes of this thesis, I have focused on selected texts while drawing in voices from across the canon in dialogue with commentators with a range of theological perspectives.<sup>202</sup> My Biblical study

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<sup>195</sup> I Peter 3.1,3.

<sup>196</sup> I Peter 3.7.

<sup>197</sup> I Peter 3.9; 4.10.

<sup>198</sup> I Peter 4.12. See also I Peter 1.6-7; 2.19-25; 3.13-18; 4.1,16-19; 5.9-10.

<sup>199</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 49: 1 Peter* (Texas: Word Books, 1988), p.110.

<sup>200</sup> 'in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence' (I Peter 3.15-16). 'hope in God [...] knows no boundaries'. Bailey Wells, p.228.

<sup>201</sup> Bailey Wells, p.229. This interpretation is supported by Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), p.92-93; Harland Davies, p.179; Horrell, 'Race'; and others.

<sup>202</sup> Other parts of the Bible on which I could have focused include Deuteronomy ('one of the most complex and impressive theologies of holiness to be found in the Old Testament' (Gammie, p.106-7)); Ezekiel, where God says 'I will manifest my holiness' through mercy and 'display my holiness' through Israel (Ezekiel 20.41; 36.23; 38.16. See also Ezekiel 28.22,2 5;39.27); and the Acts of the Apostles as the story of God's holiness present in Jesus's disciples.

shows that holiness is the whole of God's activity which hallowed the whole of creation and is the invitation to humanity to participate in that activity. Holiness is also the love that expresses choice, faithfulness, seeks reconciliation and is not egocentric. However, holiness cannot be caricatured as gentle. It is the fire of God's grace that burns for people and against that which seeks to harm people. It is the activity of a sovereign God, the discipline administered to those God loves and it is God's challenge to 'be holy as I am holy'.

Ultimately, God is the source of holiness and therefore people are only holy insofar as they are close to God. On the one hand, holiness is absolute: to all who receive the good news of God supremely revealed in Jesus, 'the Holy One of God', holiness is unmerited grace. On the other hand, holiness is relative: people are called to 'be holy', to desire God, to care in human relationships, to look out for those who are weak and to generally — but passionately — 'pursue holiness'. Therefore, holiness is deeply personal and thoroughly public: it is about God's love for the whole world and about those who are drawn together into a community of 'holy ones' to share in God's love for the world. The clearest glimpse we have of God's holiness — and human holiness — is seen in the person (the words, actions, life, death, resurrection and ascension) of Jesus Christ. Christian holiness, as the phrase suggests, is therefore centred on the Christ. It is focused on this encounter between divinity and humanity, which in turn invites a contemporary encounter with God who, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, enables human holiness as a continuing expression of God's love for the whole world. Therefore, holiness in the Bible strongly resonates with the holiness triangle developed in chapter three of a deep and engaged relationship between God, God's people and God's creation.

Given what we have discovered so far in this thesis about holiness, in the next chapter we will explore understandings of holiness present within a Methodist congregation in the north east of England. The aim is not to discover how far 'ordinary' people succeed or fail to

understand formal theology of academics or the normative teaching of their church. We will treat their voices as having their own integrity in the hope of learning why they perceive holiness the way they do and how they respond to other theological voices.

## *Chapter 6*

### *Village Road*

#### *6.1. Introduction*

In chapter three, I engaged with, to use Theological Action Research terminology, the formal theology of academics, offering a contemporary theology of holiness. In chapters four and five, I explored the normative theologies of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, the church with which I have a life-long covenant through ordination. These formal and normative theologies uncover an engaging theological vision of holiness but, by themselves, offer an incomplete picture because theology is more than vision or codified beliefs. Theology includes the lived reality of God's people gathered and dispersed in their various places of relating as parents, children, students and friends, and their contribution to economic life as consumers, employers and employees. These espoused and operant theologies are important and, without them, this thesis would fail to be about holiness, because I contend that holiness is 'relating to God' and therefore a theology of holiness needs to be about God, the movement of the triune God towards the whole world and the grace-enabled response through which people engage with that movement. Academics and churches need espoused and operant theologies, as much as congregations need formal and normative theologies.

In this chapter, I seek to offer a theology of holiness that is embodied in a particular people with their complex histories and nuanced relationships associated with their time and place. The members of Village Road Methodist Church were the people with whom I was most closely connected: I was their minister during the doctoral research phase. It seemed natural that I chose them as my research context and so I invited people from the church to join me in a programme of exploration. Chapter two describes this exploration, namely

leading youth groups, a writing group, house groups, a band meeting and semi-structured interviews.

There are significant advantages of researching within a community, particularly the awareness of how relationships and formative stories are part of a continuing theological engagement. Of course, there are difficulties too: it is difficult to see things with fresh eyes and, as Rowan Williams rightly cautions, ‘when you try to tidy up unsystematized speech, you are likely to lose a great deal’.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I will balance the need for a coherent argument with ensuring each voice has its own integrity, mindful that behind each voice is a person still working out what they think and feel.

## *6.2. Theologians unfamiliar with holiness terminology relating to God’s ministry*

Given what I have argued about the sources of theology, it is important to assert that the members of Village Road are theologians: they are people able to articulate their thoughts about God. This is especially evident in the responses to my first interview question that sought a description of their journey of faith in whatever way made most sense to them. This question suggested that faith emerges over time, yet their response often highlighted at least one pivotal event — sometimes a crisis — whereby they were drawn to open their lives to God, who they perceived (at least at the time) to be living, active and personal to them. They showed notable theological ability and their experiences strongly resonated with the description of holiness explored in this thesis. I will give space for different voices here to indicate the prevalence of a remembered moment of God’s direct action.

I had cancer [... and] there was a serious chance that I might not get out of that [...] But for me I just felt lifted up and carried along. And a lot of it was about the way that the people of God actually cared about me [...] That whole experience really deepened my faith. And I came out of it a preacher.  
(Bernie)

My brother ended up marrying somebody from the church and they had their first son. And when we went to the dedication service there was something so different in the people at that service and I was

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<sup>1</sup> Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), p.xii.

kind of feeling emotional and really sensed God's presence and when I went home it wasn't something I could shake off [...] I just had to go back. (Cathy)

When I was 19, something happened which really changed my outlook on life forever. Because I should have died but I didn't [...] just over a year later I made a decision that I was going to follow Christianity [...] for the simple reason of grace. (Denise)

I went along to the mission [...] I suppose emotionally I was happy with the people and the church but faith didn't necessarily make a lot of sense [...] I suppose even then it was less about becoming clear, more of a case of you can wait all your life for this to become clear, you've got to make a decision based on not just reason and understanding but on your experience and how you feel [...] So I made a commitment there [...] I came across a chap from our church who was doing a theology degree and I thought that this is something that I could do [...] That was fabulous, absolutely fabulous [...] Tremendous experience [...] Realising that from moving to trying to get my head around everything to be more of a relationship, more of an emotional journey. (Frank)

I went to Spring Harvest with my mates from church and absolutely hated it [...] because it just seemed like it was a big top full of people full of faith [...] I went back next year [...] there was one night there when I went to an alternative thing and the preacher did a bit of a call at the end about people being there with their lid on to God and needed to take their lid off and let God in [...] it just felt like that was a decision moment where I said yes and God came in and it sealed things for me. (Isaac)

The leaders [...] musicians [...] singers were trying to direct us spiritually [...] I took offence that they were in fact manipulating my emotions, manipulating my brain and I pretty much stormed out of the building. I was met at the door by the person I discovered was a detached youth worker from Youth for Christ but just looked like a guy in a bin jacket [...] he just listened to what I had to say and where I was in my faith journey at that point. And that made a big, big difference to me. (Kyle)

I went to a youth rally one evening and the preacher was out there talking about the gospel message which I'd heard 6420 times about Jesus dying on the cross to save me and [...] I was transported somewhere else. Something I can't explain. It was a wonderful place to be. I knew then God was calling me. (Oliver)

As a teenager I met with people of faith whose faith looked different [...] I realised my faith wasn't like theirs [...] They had a desire to love God and to worship God that was very attractive. Really contagious. And they were caring of people as well [...] I remember sitting in my bedroom [...] reading my Bible on my own and not wanting to put it down, at all. (Queenie)

I went to Peru and was very ill when I came back. And the following year I spent four weeks [in hospital...] the lady in the next bed [...] was a strong Christian [...] When I eventually got home I thought really and truly I may be a Christian on the inside but I ought to nail my colours to the mast [...] So then I started going to [... the] Methodist Church. (Suzie)

Methodist backgrounds never used to be spiritual at all in my experience [...] but when I went to Spring Harvest [...] we were all just told to pray together [...] it brought another dimension I think to my Christian life. It wasn't just sort of, as it perhaps had been, quite theoretical. It became more emotive and a bit more of a living thing. (William)

I sensed in some interviews that the story I was hearing had been told many times:

Christian communities can emphasise the importance of worshippers having a 'conversion' narrative that they can readily recall. Even so, the prevalence of a divine encounter in their stories — and the way the teller became animated in the telling — expressed a conviction that they had received, to use Root's terminology, 'ministry':



a relational, personal, and embodied (even emotive) encounter of love and care, a willingness to share in the other, to join in concrete experiences of homelessness, imprisonment, and hunger, to enter the experiences of suffering or the sake of participating in the transformation towards new life.<sup>2</sup>

Though people may mediate this ministry, the responses suggest that ‘lived and concrete communities’ — like Village Road — ‘have personal, though not individualistic [...] experiences of the presence of the living Jesus.’<sup>3</sup> Participants felt that they had encountered God, wanted to talk about it and were able to do so in a compelling way. Furthermore, many participants could talk about their life experience in ways that resonate with the broad themes I had discovered in formal and normative theologies of holiness. The ministry participants received is a sign that they encountered God’s holiness which, I argue, is fundamentally relational. However, as will be apparent from the voices we have heard, it was unusual for anyone to use holiness terminology with reference to the ministry they had received from God. Just one person, without being prompted, drew upon holiness terminology to describe their experience in the evangelical para-church group *Navigators*.<sup>4</sup>

[it was a] very positive experience for the most part and certainly in relation to holiness. We talked about that [...] It was something to be consciously and intently worked upon from an attitude or behavioural point of view and it was a life of discipline. It brought some rigour and it brought some intent at that point to me. (Vince)

While others did talk about God through drawing on theology which I have discovered to be central to a formal and normative understanding of holiness, Vince was the only interviewee who drew on holiness language unprompted to describe their journey of faith.

The reasons for this are complex but might relate to how conversation about holiness seems absent from discourse in public life, the church and even in theological training.

Regarding public discourse, interviewees said:

It is a word we don’t talk about very much [...] even if we want to, we struggle to find the language to express what we mean by it. (Julie)

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<sup>2</sup> Root, p.xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Root, p.91. There is resonance here with Ward’s writing about the Gospel: ‘The Gospel is “light”: a mystical illumination that comes through personal encounter with Christ who is the image of God.’ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, p.58.

<sup>4</sup> <<http://navigators.co.uk>> [accessed 19 June 2016]

It is certainly not a word I would use with a non-Christian or a person of no faith [...] I do see it as a technical theological word. (Denise)

Even though holiness terminology is prevalent in the Bible and church liturgy,<sup>5</sup> participants at Village Road found it difficult to recall occasions when they had encountered holiness language. There were three exceptions. Heidi recalled it coming up in conversation when she and her husband were preparing for baptism in a Baptist Church; Denise claimed she had ‘heard several sermons on holiness’ within the Church of England; and, through serendipity, Gemma took a book about holiness off her mother’s shelf and began reading. Yet most interviewees did not recall holiness terminology being highlighted, for example, by preachers, ministers, stewards or pastoral visitors. Moreover, few participants were unable to either recall a time that holiness had received particular attention in the life of their church or were able to convey a sense that holiness is a contemporary focus in British Methodist experience.

I suppose it is a word that I’ve grown up with in the church and never really stopped to think, “What does this mean?” (Bernie)

It is a word that I’ve always been aware of and it is a word that I vaguely think I knew where it was pointing, but I’ve never really delved into it before and really thought about what does it actually mean. (Trey)

I think [our exploration...] was probably the first time I’d done anything which was concentrated around the question. So [beforehand...] holiness has come in as a side issue. (Robert)

This teaching material we have been using is the first time I have been forced to concentrate my attention on the word [...] it confirmed, enforced, it enlarged, it brought home to me far more than normal [... my reliance on Jesus Christ] (Oliver)

As a former President of Methodist Conference confided to me, holiness is ‘the great un-talked about for a long time [...] not a serious topic of conversation’.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, when there have been occasions during my doctoral research where British Methodism highlighted

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<sup>5</sup> See chapter five and, in particular, the liturgies for Holy Communion, the Covenant Service and Ordination Services (Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *The Methodist Worship Book*).

<sup>6</sup> A personal telephone conversation in spring 2014.

holiness terminology, it felt fleeting and lacking the desire to purposefully and strategically align Methodism with the holiness theology outlined in its doctrinal standards.<sup>7</sup>

Remarkably, nine interviewees had received formal theological training, yet only Isaac recalled that his theological training had included an opportunity for exploring holiness. It was a single session where, as part of his preparation for Methodist presbyteral ministry, he remembers a tutor ‘talking at some length about holiness and him being completely dissatisfied with the modern way of saying it was just wholeness [...] And that stuck.’

The relative absence of learning about holiness in theological training, especially initial and ongoing training for Methodist ministry, is significant because this training is formative. Furthermore, because of the relative absence of holiness terminology in public and church life, church leaders are unlikely to feel encouraged to talk about holiness. Yet there were people at Village Road who were hungry for opportunities to learn about the God who is holy.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to be clear that it is not that the content of holiness theology was unfamiliar: each person had words to describe God’s ministry they had received, yet it was unusual for participants to see this movement of God towards them and towards the world as holiness. As a consequence, it was also unusual for participants to see the church’s engagement with the world as an expression of holiness.

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<sup>7</sup> See 4.3. At the time of writing (Spring 2018), there is an absence of holiness terminology in two key publications. There is no reference to Methodism’s doctrinal standards or, in the lead article, to holiness in a *Connexion* magazine focusing on the purpose of the church. (See Gareth J. Powell, ‘Beginning with God’ in *the Connexion*, 10 (2018), pp.4-5 (p.5) <<http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/5718/the-connexion-magazine-issue-10-0118.pdf>> [accessed 11 January 2018]). Similarly, while many points in the *3GENERATE Manifesto* are in tune with formal theological understandings of holiness, holiness terminology or reference to Methodism’s normative theology is absent. (*3GENERATE Manifesto* <<http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/6043/3generate-manifesto-2018-final.pdf>> [accessed 2 February 2018]).

<sup>8</sup> ‘Good Christian teaching is important to me [...] Not just from the pulpit, I mean across all places where teaching goes on in the church.’ (Gemma) ‘The teaching from the minister is important [...] it is to do with that trust. I trust [...] when I’m listening to a sermon or whatever it is [...] you will have done the research on whatever the subject is and it comes across to me as being genuine.’ (Paula) ‘Having some [...] teaching. I think that’s important.’ (Edie)

Given the centrality of holiness as a theological term within Christianity generally and Methodist normative theology specifically, it is surprising that holiness terminology is relatively absent from the vocabulary of Methodist people. Moreover, it is remarkable that few associated holiness with God's ministry or can recall a sustained reflection on holiness prior to my research. In chapter three, I noted that there seemed to be only a few academic theologians within British Methodism who are writing about holiness. The lack of formal voices on holiness speaking from within and to Methodist contexts could be a cause — and an outcome — of the lack of holiness terminology within the espoused theology of participants at Village Road.

### *6.3. Holiness terminology has negative connotations*

I have noted the relative absence of explicit reflection on holiness theology, yet my research encountered something deeper and much more problematic: something that made my research unexpectedly difficult and, at times, seemed to threaten the whole project. Among some participants, I found real resistance to the language of holiness. This was not because holiness terminology was unfamiliar: it was all too familiar in ways that ran against the formal and normative theologies I had been exploring.

It does come with a load of baggage. (Frank)

I think the thinking takes so much unpacking [...] there is a worry of it being misheard. (Isaac)

I think that the idea of holiness in the general population, if it is linked to anything, it is linked with 'holier than thou' and it is linked with the idea of searching for some kind of purity and living, and maybe it is purity and certain kinds of living. Everyone bangs on about sexuality and so on [...] The word holiness] has its place in theological discourse because everybody needs technical terms [...] but] I'd be wary of using the word because I'd be worried that people would think I meant the obsession with purity of living, being clean and not touching other people who were dirty. (Bernie)

I don't think it is used an awful lot by the general public [...] by the general people it is almost like, 'Oh Holy Joes', almost got a bit of a negative connotation, either that or holy is something that is set apart over there and it's a holy book or a holy place and it is detached [...] disconnected [...] The word holiness, it is a bit archaic I think [...] If we are talking about sharing our faith with other people and start using the word holy it isn't really that helpful I think. (Eddie)

The negative connotations of holiness terminology might be rooted in the anxiety that holiness terminology misrepresents people's positive and powerful experiences of God's ministry. This could explain a question I was asked in one house group. I was asked for my thoughts about the story of Israel — God's holy people — driving out the original and presumably non-holy Canaanite population. It was a challenging intellectual question. The emotion beneath it echoed with my suspicion, drawn from my preliminary research at the church festival, that there was a prevailing perception that holy people are not only separate but expected benefits associated with their holiness. The question also suggested that holiness is perceived as disconnected from morality, perhaps reflecting the prevalent perception that holiness is 'numinous'.<sup>9</sup>

For two people in particular, powerful negative connotations of holiness terminology were rooted in their memories of belonging. As a teenager and young woman, Maud had been involved in an 'evangelical fundamentalist group' and, for her, this cast a shadow over holiness terminology:

One of their big focuses was sanctification and second blessing. And I struggled with that [...] Everything was black or white. You were either in or you were out [...] if you live like that you're holy and if you're not you are not holy.

Nadine grew up in a 'very exclusive sect' that she came to reject:

They were the only people who had holiness [...] because they followed as closely as they possibly could the New Testament teaching.

Holiness, as described in this thesis, is a movement of God's grace in Christ for the whole world, yet Maud and Nadine saw holiness terminology embodied in graceless judgemental and exclusive behaviour. Exploring holiness for Maud and Nadine meant revisiting these difficult memories. Yet the exploration of holiness enabled Nadine in particular to see holiness terminology more positively. Even so, the exploration was unable to fully counterweight all the negative connotations from her previous experiences:

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<sup>9</sup> See 3.2.

I think, perhaps having such a restricted childhood having been deprived of so many things [..and] I can remember going to these charismatic meetings [...] and people all falling down in the Spirit [...] To me it was not holy [...] And also when one of them said she'd had this wonderful experience she was no more going to do any children's work in the church because God had told her, and that to me was not holy because she had a gift with children and that is where God would want her to be. So there is that kind of caution I think that, you know, if you go all out for holiness, all out for this experience of the Spirit, you're perhaps going beyond and you are not finding holiness in that extreme you are finding a fanaticism somewhere. Something that is not holy at all. I think that's where [...] my] tentativeness comes from.

Cathy's experiences also powerfully influenced her response to holiness terminology.

Her experiences may relate to Nadine's concern over fanaticism, but we cannot be certain because, while the power of prior influences was observable, Cathy struggled to articulate what those influences were. An example of this is when Cathy realised how she instinctively selected the word 'holiness' to describe behaviour that wasn't 'normal':

When [my daughters] left sixth form and went to uni they both went to Christian Union and that was the point where they both stopped going to church. It is funny I should say this because I've never given this a lot of thought, but the people weren't normal [...] I'm saying that because the word holiness reminded me of that. Have you ever heard it said that somebody can be so heavenly focused that they are no earthly good?

Cathy is able to articulate a formal theology of holiness. Holiness is:

like God, it is to try and be like God [...] It is trying to be like Jesus was [...] He was popular. People liked him [...] So he must have been a pretty normal person in terms of being able to relate to him.

Putting to one side how 'popular' or 'normal' Jesus may have been and whether these words describe holiness,<sup>10</sup> Cathy notices the dissonance between formal theology and her operant theology, and between her conscious knowing and her unconscious knowing:<sup>11</sup>

My thoughts about someone who is holy is skewed really I think from thinking of Christian Union, but I think it is just that word, for me, which is just, that's the image I get. Though I know it isn't actually true [...] And it is a turn off?] Yes. Yes.

Though Cathy cognitively understands through formal knowing that her instinctive response to holiness 'isn't actually true', nevertheless it is her 'tacit knowing' — which links holiness with being 'no earthly good' — that determines her response.<sup>12</sup> To visualise the

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<sup>10</sup> In making a different point, Stackhouse argues that Jesus is not 'mild-mannered' but 'rash' and that 'there is nothing balanced about him'. Ian Stackhouse, *Primitive Piety: A Journey from Suburban Mediocrity to Passionate Christianity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012), p.7.

<sup>11</sup> For the original seminal work on cognitive dissonance, see Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957).

<sup>12</sup> Tacit knowing is the knowledge we know but cannot express. The knowing is created through actions and direct experience rather than, for example, through reading or lectures. It contrasts with 'explicit knowing'

power of tacit knowing, Polanyi — who provides the philosophy undergirding tacit knowing — argues that knowing the mathematical formula for keeping balance on a bicycle ‘is ineffectual, unless it is known tacitly.’<sup>13</sup> So, while formal education in a classroom is useful, it is ultimately through the experience of riding a bike that we ‘know’ how to ride. Yet, describing this ‘knowing’ is difficult. In a similar way, Cathy found it difficult to articulate why she responded negatively to holiness terminology. She cannot recall — and therefore interpret — the experiences that imparted ‘knowledge’ about holiness. What she does know is that the word ‘holiness’ prompted her to think about her daughter’s negative experience of a Christian Union. Even though she cannot locate the experiences that imparted knowledge or know how those experiences inform her understanding, she trusts her ‘tacit knowing’ more than she trusts the knowledge gained through teaching or her own reading of the Bible.

‘Tacit knowing’ helps illuminate the meeting I had with the youth leaders — which included Cathy — prior to beginning *Hagios*. In the meeting, I sought to present a credible and persuasive portrayal of holiness, but Cathy was quiet and uncommitted and did not express her reservations. It is quite probable that Cathy was unable to articulate her feelings: the nature of ‘tacit knowing’ is that a person is not consciously aware of all that they know. It would be wrong to accuse Cathy as being irrational or unhelpful as I, at the time, was tempted to do. That is to misjudge the complicated and nuanced processes going on within her. It is better to recognise that within Cathy — and indeed within all of us — there is an accumulated and powerful body of knowledge that is rooted in experience. It is so powerful that where formal theology is different to an operant theology of holiness, operant theology is likely to prevail.

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which is consciously known and can be articulated. Gourlay offers a helpful review of the literature. See Stephen Gourlay, ‘Knowing as semiosis: steps towards a reconceptualization of “tacit knowledge”’ in *Organizations as Knowledge Systems: Knowledge, Learning and Dynamic Capabilities* ed. by Haridimos Tsoukas and Nikolaos Mylonopoulos (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) pp.86-105.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Polanyi, ‘The Logic of Tacit Inference’ *Philosophy*, 40 (1966), pp.1-18 (p.7).

There are a number of unhelpful associations connected to holiness terminology within espoused and operant theologies at Village Road that are in stark contrast to the formal and normative theologies of the academy and Methodist doctrine. At the time of my research, holiness terminology at Village Road was weighed down by unhelpful associations with purity and fanaticism. Holiness was seen as detached, disconnected, immoral, judgemental, exclusive and being of ‘no earthly good’. This is what they ‘knew’ about holiness and, because this knowing was unreflected and deeply rooted, it was difficult (but not impossible) to move beyond these negative connotations.

#### *6.4. Holiness is a standard beyond reach*

Many participants at Village Road initially associated holiness with being separate and attainable by only a few extraordinary people. It was uncommon to hear holiness instinctively presented as connected to grace which — as we have seen in contemporary theological literature, Methodism’s doctrinal standards and Holy Scripture — is a prevailing feature of God’s holiness. This is illustrated by Nadine, who not only felt that she could not reach the standard she associated with holiness but, because of the way she instinctively defined holiness, did not want to:

[I’m] not aiming for some pinnacle of goodness or to be completely holy [...] I think it’s to live a whole full life [...] to look for opportunities that you can grow in faith and express faith. Grow in love, if you like. Grow in love and express love.

Nadine was not unusual in seeing holiness as a standard of behaviour and not the power of God’s love. It was the first response of most house groups that perfection was not about relationship but a standard of performance which few, and no one at Village Road, could reach. Therefore, put simply, holiness is not for ‘normal’ people: holy people are different in being and also in activity, removed from facing the daily challenges that normal



people have to face. This view is perhaps aided by the hagiographies that Plekon suggests can be harmful to faith.<sup>14</sup>

The sense of holiness being beyond reach was illustrated in a house group of mainly older women where one person boldly asserted that there are not many saints and that she was not a saint because no one is ‘good enough’. In a different group, an older lady recalled when she had been called a ‘saint’ for doing something kind, but she had taken offence because she did not see how doing one good deed made her a saint. The group reflected with her, realising that in everyday life different people in different contexts use the word ‘saint’ to mean different things. Yet her instinct is important. It connects with the negative connotations to holiness I have already sought to outline: the way holiness has come to be defined in contemporary life as often something quite different to how it is defined by theologians. It also points to the way that participants at Village Road portray holiness as beyond reach but do not take the consequential step of therefore seeing human holiness as only possible through grace. That this step was not taken suggests that participants at Village Road did not interpret grace as a fire powerful enough to make a person holy, especially them. It seems that people at Village Road — and perhaps elsewhere — have low expectations of the holiness of God, which contrasts with the optimism of God’s grace portrayed in contemporary formal holiness theology and emphasised in the doctrinal standards.<sup>15</sup>

As a consequence, some interviewees highlighted the ordinary pressures of contemporary living as simply not conducive to holiness:

We’re so busy and I think everybody is so busy. (Cathy)

When everything is full and work’s difficult and kids are difficult, then I fall into my old patterns. (Heidi)

The tiredness that comes from having a lot of things in your life, having children, work and other commitments. (Kyle)

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<sup>14</sup> See 3.11.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see 5.3 and 4.2.3.

I don't always give myself enough time to do things. I tend to do everything on the bounce. I fit so much into my life. I think there are days where I should have given myself more time to do this, and I've done things not as well as I could have. Or I've done things wrong. And it has been simply because my time management has been awful. (Denise)

The implication is that these pressures are greater than the power of God's grace and, more importantly, that God is unable to use the complexity and messiness of human living as an expression and a channel for holiness. A few participants did see the possibility of holiness of everyday living. For example, while Oliver and Ursula felt that modern technology was a hindrance to being a Christian, Trey felt the picture was more complex:

There are some fantastic resources you can use [...] available to you 24/7. The whole 24/7 culture we're slowly slipping into is also a hindrance at the same time [...] with everything kind of being, 'I must do that now', 'it is open, we may as well go' and 'We cannot wait until Monday morning.' Sometimes I think that gets in the way.

Eddie also glimpsed the possibility of holiness not only in everyday life, but also in everyday difficulties.

There are distractions that pull you away [...] but actually you can still live [...] like a person of prayer] even though you are living with distractions. Still see everything as discipleship.

Yet belief in God's grace being able to bring holiness into the complexity of twenty-first century British life was rare, with many people visualising holiness, at least initially, through a sociological lens rather than through an embodied holiness of God who became incarnate in Jesus Christ. The 'cruciform' holiness — which presents Jesus as separate *for God*, rather than separate *from the world* — was rarely present at the beginning of conversations about holiness and a fresh thought for many.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, I sensed that some people did not want to dispense with an understanding of holiness as a standard of behaviour, perhaps because to accept grace as a conduit for holiness means having to acknowledge their dependence on that grace. It might be that the resistance I felt when presenting holiness in more relational terms was related to the way I encountered some people keeping at arm's length that which is 'spiritual':

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<sup>16</sup> See 3.6 for Gorman's use of 'cruciform'.

I think it is the age-old debate, what kind of person are you within the church. Are you the spiritual leader or somebody more practical? And I've always been much more, I'll [...] do something with my hands, kind of concentrating my Christianity in that direction. (Trey)

The frustration I felt when I heard Trey's response is perhaps evidence of my 'tacit' knowledge of a duality between spirituality and practicality — of contemplation rooted in grace and action rooted in response — at Village Road. It is not unique to Village Road. Jennifer Smith records women drawing on an interpretation of Luke 10.38-42 to drive her out of the church kitchen saying, 'Ooo, Mary, Mary, get you 'way from here: we's the Martha here. Yours the better part.'<sup>17</sup> If a duality exists like this, it suggests the focus on human practical action at Village Road will naturally mean that holiness is unachievable, creating a tension with those of us who see holiness through the lens of grace. Intuitively, a sense that duality existed may have led to the way I had focused — both in my research and more widely in my pastoral practice — on intentionally holding spirituality and practicality together, rooting embodied faith in a theology of divine love revealed in Jesus. Yet I sensed that some people interpreted my focus on spirituality as singular, with some finding the 'spiritual' aspects of the house group notes difficult.

It was an interesting series. I think it's more metaphysical than perhaps some people were comfortable with [...] I think there was a feeling that two or three weeks less wouldn't have stretched it [...] That's what the group felt. Now my reaction was that if you were a group of people who were studying philosophy then you could have gone on a lot longer than we did, discussing the attributes of holiness at length but you are dealing with ordinary people rather than postgraduate studies [...] we didn't do the last one [...] and we skipped most of the last but one, because we had obviously done it to death. (Suzie)

I think towards the end of the series we were starting to think, well, maybe we have overdone this now. Maybe we are trying to find things that aren't there [...] maybe we can go away and work on that now and not be too theoretical about it. (William)

I am open to the possibility that, regarding holiness, the house groups had 'done it to death'. It is also possible that the difficulties we encountered were procedural. Roxburgh recommends that, before churches address issues of renewal, they should have a conversation

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<sup>17</sup> Smith, 'Mary in the Kitchen, Martha in the Pew', p.13.

about the changing context and how the church is responding to it.<sup>18</sup> Had we introduced holiness as a means for Village Road to become more missional, the exploration of holiness may have gained a more positive engagement. Yet, knowing that, at least in recent years, undertaking a sustained focus on a single theological theme was a new venture for Village Road, it is possible that the level of spiritual engagement we sought from the house groups felt too challenging.

To summarise so far, in addition to holiness terminology being unfamiliar and having negative connotations, I have discovered that the espoused and operant theology I encountered conveyed a sense of holiness being beyond the reach of everyday life but also of everyday life being beyond the reach of God's powerful grace. In addition, some kept spirituality at arm's length and perceived holiness as God drawing close in Christ as a fresh concept. This is not to say that perceptions of holiness at Village Road did not change through the process of research or continue to change after the research phase ended. I shall highlight the transformation I witnessed shortly, but first I wish to attend to the place of relationships in connection to holiness.

#### *6.5. Relationships affect the pursuit of holiness*

Having concluded earlier in this thesis that relationships were key to both understanding and expressing holiness, it was not surprising to discover that relationships played a significant role in the formation of espoused and operant theologies of holiness at Village Road. What is striking, however, is the multifaceted effect of relationships on both the perception and pursuit of holiness. For some, relationships are profoundly encouraging:

Things that help are fellowship with other people. Because if you are doing it on your own everything is harder. (Eddie)

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<sup>18</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2010), p.127.

Being with a group of people, involved in a group of people who are wanting to do the same. That is the most catalysing thing. (Frank)

[My oldest child's...] good friends were all at the Baptist Church as well and were very together and they lived their lives a lot more visibly and inwardly about God [...] I suppose being with people like that makes a difference. (Heidi)

I think what is helpful is being with others who have faith and moving forward with them. (Kyle)

For others, the effect of relationships was more complex:

I think times by myself with God, they are probably the most precious times to me [...] But having said that I love people, so I wouldn't, I would never want to withdraw from people. I would never want to be by myself for too long. But those times are important to me [...] Things that trip me up? Having to interact with people I suppose. Situations that come along that are difficult, or I don't agree with. (Gemma)

Feeling discouraged because of difficulties in Christian community or feeling that people are hypocritical or judgemental or not on the same page or not working towards the same goal [...] On the other hand when people genuinely are sharing together and encouraging each other and noticing God in each other, those are moments when the wind is in the sails. (Alex)

It gets in the way [...] if you see people who are very strict and rigid and bigoted and dogmatic and can only see God in one way [...] but conversely] Seeing God's love in other people. Sharing a journey with other people. (Nadine)

We can't be a Christian on our own [...] I think it is important to meet with other Christians in a house group, in a church, or whatever, and we can talk to each other and reflect and give each other confidence in what we are doing and who we are [...] yet] when things go wrong [...] there is a lot of pain and anguish [...] it may be that through it all in the end somebody comes out of it a better person [...] But it is hard while it's going on. (William)

The effect of relationship on Suzie's approach to holiness was complex in two ways.

First, it was the relational element of hearing the choir sing in the context of a building that has witnessed centuries of prayer:

[The] singing about holiness would rise to the rafters and take your spirit [...] you were conscious that hundreds of people had worshipped and there was a sense of holiness [...] that's to me where holiness is.

Yet it was a minister of the Baptist Church that she attended as a teenager that had an adverse effect on her perception of holiness and, it seems, Christianity more generally:

The overriding feeling of sermons was 'thou shalt not commit adultery' or fornication [...] It was that kind of 'thou shalt not' [...] to] be pure in thought, word and deed [...] They may have been trying to teach us to be holy but certainly for me it backfired.

In Denise's life there have been a number of relationships that have had a positive effect, but there are also some that have affected her negatively:

I feel I ought to use the word 'holy' in relation to the church but I don't feel I can [...] And yet despite of that we are still the bride of Christ [...] I suppose the church is made holy through him. I do know some people I'd describe as holy. Very holy people. But having worked for the church and being part

of the church, I think I've just seen too many flaws and too many difficult times, to see the church holy.

For Vince, it is not so much the experience of negative relationships, but rather the absence of positive relationships that affected his approach to holiness. He simply has not had the encouragement from someone who is truly interested in his discipleship and with whom he felt safe enough to share his faith journey:

What it takes is [...] to be brave enough to share [...] with another and make myself vulnerable in that way and to deliberately say what are we going to do about it and how are we going to help each other [...] There are a couple of people that I tried that with since we've been here and it's just not taken. It's just not taken. If I'm honest, over the last few years I've given up really.

The complexity of relating, combined with its transformative power, led many to intentionally seek out or form groups where a supportive experience is more likely.

*Fellowship Bands* are designed to help. They are single gender, comprise three or four people and are rooted in the Inspire Movement's 'way of life', which resonates strongly with the triangular vision of holiness described in the review of formal theology in chapter three.<sup>19</sup>

A lot of thinking surrounded who would be in the Band at Village Road and, when the group was gathered, how we would conduct ourselves. By participating in Band meetings and intentionally speaking about the practice of faith, Band members expressed their pursuit for holiness and transformation. Kyle spoke for all Band participants when he said:

Probably the most helpful thing was that we were able to be really, really honest [...] I was far more able to open up and talk and go deeper than I'd experienced in other ways.

Yet Band meetings are not easy. Before the group properly formed, one member resigned because he could not cope with vulnerability:

I don't feel able to continue [...] I am having quite a tough time emotionally at the moment [...] I can just about cope with the superficial but really struggle with anything deeper.

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<sup>19</sup> 'We desire an intimate walk with God, so that our daily lives are filled, transformed and overflowing with love of God and neighbour.' *Daily Prayer Encounter with God* <[http://inspiremovement.org/network/sites/default/files/Daily%20Pattern%20v1\\_0.pdf](http://inspiremovement.org/network/sites/default/files/Daily%20Pattern%20v1_0.pdf)> [accessed 15 June 2016]

Band meetings are also not easy because they are deliberately leaderless in anticipation that the group as a whole will discern a way forward. At the end of the research period, I relaxed from my previous efforts to make sure that we had a date for our next meeting because meeting was no longer imperative for my research. Yet, despite interview responses showing that members appreciated meeting, and that our meeting had met a need unsatisfied elsewhere in the church, no arrangements were made for a further meeting. While Band meetings were valued, the level of honesty and depth of relating does require a focus that Band members seemed unable to give in the absence of the momentum offered by doctoral research.

Other facets of the research process provided an arena not just for talking about the effect of relationships but also where relationships were acted out. For example, beyond scheduled meetings, some of the writing group team members spoke together about the excessive time we were spending on harmonising the series, an aspect of writing that Village Road had not spent too long considering in other projects. However, others felt that fine-tuning the series was essential to achieving the goal of holiness:

I struggled with some of the studies because I couldn't see necessarily the way in which it flowed and built on each other. Which I guess if you are looking for transformational stuff then you would want that. (Queenie)

In addition, Trey highlighted how relationships within the wider community affect the pursuit of holiness:

It had been quite tricky because it always seems to me, maybe it is the way people are built, but atheists seem to have a really loud voice [...] Because with atheists it is black and white. Whereas I think explaining why you are a Christian takes more than just shouting and swearing. Which a lot of people I come across, that's their approach.

My research shows significant complexities connected to the way people negotiate relationships. Some relationships are helpful and sometimes we are more open than at other times to fostering helpful relationships. Sometimes the relationships we have with certain people and groups are not helpful and we are less open to enabling those relationships to

become helpful. Sometimes solitude can be helpful but at other times, as Vince implied, it can feel lonely without others to draw alongside in a journey of faith. Negotiating the complexities of relationships requires patience, during which hope can ebb; disappointment with the church can rise; and dissonance between what we say we want and what we seek can widen. Some people simply find deep relationships too complex to manage.

I have already begun to explore ways to build bridges between the theological ‘voices’ but, in addition to bridge-building, I wonder whether there is an opportunity for particular people to reach out proactively with selfless kenotic love and accompany people in crossing the theological bridges. Reflecting upon *Hagios*, Alex noted that while young people responded positively — even enthusiastically — to the theme of holiness, she felt that young people needed more:

I wonder if really young people need more handholding than we were giving them [...] I wonder really if they are able at that age to join up the dots and think [...] how am I called to be holy in my daily life. (Alex)

This need for ‘handholding’ may be universal. While academic theologians rightly strive to answer better the question ‘what is holiness?’, an equally important question is ‘who will pursue holiness with me?’ One reason why formal holiness moved from being an interesting topic to an inspiring research topic is because I had two doctoral supervisors willing to walk with me. I do not mean to imply that doctoral supervision and Christian discipleship are identical, only that there are facets of the former — particularly the level of commitment and accountability — that could helpfully inspire pastoral practice.

### *6.6. Transformation as both wanted and resisted*

In chapter two, we noted that a characteristic feature of TAR is ‘a formative transformation of practice’.<sup>20</sup> Through reflecting on each of the ‘four voices of theology’ and the connections between them, practical theologians seek a renewed embodied theology. In the

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<sup>20</sup> Cameron and others, *Talking about God in Practice*, p. 58.



present chapter, we have discovered, among other things, that Village Road was unfamiliar with holiness terminology, particularly how it is used in formal and normative theology. Moreover, holiness terminology had negative connotations, holiness felt out of reach and, while relationships can be positive, some relationships worked against the pursuit of holiness. These are some of the obstacles I observed that must be surmounted for transformation to take place. Yet an earlier and much more significant hurdle is enabling transformation to be welcome. This is not to say that some participants were not energised by a vision of transformation. Bernie expressed a theological optimism for transformation that is resonant with the exploration of deification and theosis in chapter three:

If we are identifying Jesus as being a union of God and humanity [...] Your life can be transformed, which presumably means that there are bits of us that are of God, being in the image of God.

Yet espoused theology was not always mirrored in the operant theology of participants. I particularly observed this among house group members and leaders who were not part of the writing group. We have already noted that small-group material created locally (in contrast to published professionally) has the greatest transformative potential,<sup>21</sup> yet it was in the house groups particularly that transformation was not only least evident but also most openly resisted. For example, at one house group session the following sentences represent the voices of different house group members:

I don't want to be holy if being holy is set apart or God-like.  
Success in holiness is more about trying than achieving.  
It doesn't occur to me to strive to be holy.  
Striving to be holy is a step too far.  
Being holy is beyond my ability to achieve.  
I wouldn't ever see myself as holy.  
Holiness is separate — out of reach for someone like me.

My interview with Suzie provides a particular insight into the complex processes of human response that illuminate how transformation can be unwelcome. Suzie was a house group leader who had not been part of the writing group. She presents her first memory of

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<sup>21</sup> See 2.5.

holiness as positive. It relates to her attending the local village Baptist church in her early childhood, where the phrase ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty’ was painted on the wall either side of the organ. This provided an understanding of holiness:

It’s sort of awe if you like. Awe of God. It’s beyond personal, it’s awesome. I can’t possibly be holy. Holiness is something beyond.

I did not ask what it was about those words that led to that understanding. It might have been the calligraphy, the association with a song, the way the preachers referred to the words, the ambiance of the worship space or, perhaps most likely, a combination of many things. Nevertheless, the sense of holiness as ‘awe’ that she felt was confirmed in her experiences as she took walking holiday breaks which enabled her to conclude that, in the awesomeness of the natural world, ‘you couldn’t fail to be religious’. Therefore, Suzie’s first set of experiences defines holiness in a way that resonates with the instinctive assumptions held by many participants of holiness as being separate, distant and superior. It directed her to a definition of holiness that resonates with Otto’s ‘The Idea of the Holy’ which, in chapter three, I argued is at a tangent to contemporary formal theologies of holiness. Suzie’s second set of experiences define holiness in a particular interpretation of Christian ethics, which I have already mentioned. There is certainly an ethical dimension to holiness, both as part of God’s holiness and also as part of a grace-enabled response which reflects God’s holiness. However, perhaps because this dimension may have been missing in her earlier understanding of holiness and since, when she did encounter that dimension, grace seemed to be absent, Suzie rebelled. As a consequence, when I announced that we were offering to the house group material on holiness, Suzie panicked and began her own independent study and found the on-line journal *Holiness*.<sup>22</sup>

When you said it was going to be holiness I was very daunted and the [...] Journal has helped a lot because it helped me grasp the definition of holiness you obviously wanted us to put across [...] Yet the articles [if that’s holiness...] it’s not what I thought it was. She’s talking about life as a Christian and a Christian perspective of life.

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<sup>22</sup> <<http://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/holiness>> [accessed 8 June 2016]

In addition, the house group series introduced the theme of relationship, yet the way Suzie caricatured this theme suggested that she found it challenging:

Mum and I ended up with a very similar view of Christianity [...] she saw Jesus as somebody we should follow and try to do his will and a lot of the preaching you have in churches these days, what appears to her and me, modern Christianity, is different from what it was when she grew up in her village Baptist church. When we were growing up we didn't talk about being 'in love' with Jesus. And this sort of thing [...]

So, on the one hand, Suzie holds the teaching in her childhood village chapel with her experiences of mountain-tops, and on the other, she refutes the presentation of particular ethical teaching offered to her as a teenager. Into this tension arrives the journal *Holiness* and the house group series, like a third and fourth ball for her to juggle. She found this difficult because the aspect of holiness as 'relating to God' presented in the house group material expressed a perspective she had not previously anticipated or encountered:

I had never ever come across the kind of holiness that was in that series and so I've had to get rid of 70 years of [...] my understanding of holiness. And I have had to transpose it into a different place and I've found that very difficult.

For Suzie — and perhaps others, like Nadine, Maud, Cathy, Denise and Oliver — significant adjustment is required prior to developing their way of defining holiness. This adjustment is not merely cognitive, but emotional because it involves the bereavement of leaving behind a previously (and perhaps preciously) held view and embracing a new frame of reference. In this way, adopting a new definition of holiness is not dissimilar to conversion which can take years rather than the few months of following a course at Village Road.<sup>23</sup> With notable self-awareness, near the end of the interview, Suzie candidly made this comment:

And so have I changed my perspective of holiness? I understand there is a different definition, there is different understanding. As far as what I feel about holiness, it is still the soaring choir boys going up to the rafters or the awesomeness of being on top of a mountain by yourself in winter.

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<sup>23</sup> 'Conversion is a complex, multifaceted process involving personal, cultural, social, and religious dimensions [...] for the most part it takes place over a period of time [...] and that change is sometimes permanent and sometimes temporary. Certain contemporary theologians believe that genuine conversion transpires over an entire lifetime.' Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p.165.

From his research into the theological vision of Christians in the workplace, Jacob

Belder suggests that:

Because of the way we are formed unconsciously by the cultural habits and practices of work [...] an encounter with a theological vision of work through the means of a small-group course would be insufficient to enable them to reimagine the meaning and significance of their work and reorient how they practised their work.<sup>24</sup>

The example of Suzie leading her house group at Village Road would suggest that

Belder is right, perhaps for four reasons. First, as James Wilhoit notes,

Spiritual formation does not take place primarily in small groups and Sunday school classes; instead, it mostly takes place in the well-lived and everyday events of life. Our small groups, retreats, and studies should help us respond wisely to the events of life that form us.<sup>25</sup>

Second, small groups need to have space to flourish and, to quote Roxburgh and Romanuk, processes that cultivate ‘new imagination among people themselves.’<sup>26</sup> The teaching about holiness had been collaboratively collated and presented by their peers, yet house group members had not shared in that journey of exploration and therefore seemed to receive that exploration as a ‘top-down’ process. Space, as we have seen with Suzie, can be challenging in itself and, through observing Suzie’s leadership, I was aware that she was keen to limit the space in her group, thinking it could ignite a fear like the one she had first felt when she heard she would be leading a house group on holiness. Fear can be overwhelming yet — borrowing from the conversion theory — some level of crisis is essential if transformation is to occur.<sup>27</sup> Adequate emotional support is also essential when adopting a new perspective and perhaps the bonds within many house groups are too loose for members to flourish as disciples.

Third, small groups are less likely to enable change when the relating of their members is unlikely to extend into the intervening days through phone calls, texts and shared

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<sup>24</sup> Jacob John Belder, ‘Reimagining Work: Explorations in integrating a theological vision of work into the discipleship programme of a parish church’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Durham, 2017), p.88.

<sup>25</sup> James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), p.38.

<sup>26</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: equipping your church to reach a changing world* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), p.56.

<sup>27</sup> Rambo, pp.44-55.

activity; and where the house group holds back from being a ‘mentoring group’ in which individual members support each other in their pursuit of holiness.<sup>28</sup>

Fourth, as we shall see in the following section, small groups seem less likely to experience transformation when they are limited to study rather than expanded into being an embodied sharing in God’s ministry in the wider world.

In addition to the weaknesses of the way house groups engaged in the exploration of holiness, it feels important to make two general points regarding the interplay between both wanting and resisting transformation. The first relates to a comment made by Bernie in his interview. Referencing Isaiah, Bernie wonders whether holiness is fundamentally overwhelming and therefore leads some people to surrender, but others to resist. He comments:

That picture of the burning coals touching your lips is quite something [...] I know it’s not meant to be taken literally really, but that vision, that picture, of God somehow reaching out and saying it is OK. There may be bits of you that are unworthy, but I can touch you and sort that out, effectively [...] To get beyond that ‘I’m a person of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips’ to actually being willing to have God’s angel reach out and touch you.

Resonating but also developing formal and normative theologies outlined in this thesis, Bernie therefore saw the main obstacle for human holiness — and therefore transformation — not as God’s distance from us, but as the way people can keep their distance from God. What holds back human pursuit of holiness is less the irrelevance of holiness or the condescending ‘holier than thou’ association but a person’s inability to believe in, and make themselves vulnerable to, the holiness of God’s grace and love. The awareness of this power at an apposite time in a person’s life can enable a person’s defences to be dismantled when they might otherwise have been determined to keep God at a distance.

It is possible that many people tacitly know the overwhelming power of God’s love. It may be this knowledge, for example, that prompted three men who identified practical

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<sup>28</sup> See Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years: The Young Adult Search for a Faith to Live By* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986), p.89.

transformation as the goal of Christian life, yet focused this change as being what other people need rather than what they will pursue for themselves:

Making a difference to other people that the Christian person has come into contact with. (Kyle)

The goal of Christian life is to bring other people into [...] an understanding, God then I hope will give the conviction. (Oliver)

The goal is to attempt to bring about a realisation or awareness to people of the existence of the kingdom of God here, now. Through the teachings, example and support of Jesus. The kingdom is here now rather than something to be waited for, or to be earned. (Robert)

This focus on others is consistent with the doctrinal standards in the way that it asserts that 'Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land'.<sup>29</sup> Yet Wesley's Sermons and Notes point to the performance of 'outward' holiness as being a result of the 'inward' holiness God is performing in the church. It is this gift of 'inward' transformation that some people seemed to resist. Furthermore, this resistance cannot be simply categorised as the dissonance between what people say and what they do. As we have seen, the mix of working for and against holiness is expressed in participants' espoused theology, but it is also present in their operant theology. Some participants, quite vulnerably, offered a window in their lives, showing how they actively both sought and frustrated the process of change in their lives:

[There are...] things that I'm easily swayed to do the wrong thing by. Knowingly knowing it is the wrong thing but I still do it. (Gemma)

It can be my own selfish desires, if you like. Just wanting things or wanting to go down the easier route, the easier road. (Kyle)

My goodness, where have the 30 years gone? [...] if I'd really worked on this intentionally over the 30 years in-between, what kind of a different person would I be now? (Vince)

I do it [a habit] because I like it but it is not actually improving people's lives or improving my life or making me live in a more godly way or whatever it is. (Bernie)

A second, more general, point relates to hope. We noted that Vince had 'given up' on finding anyone who would be willing to accompany him and hold him accountable in his discipleship. Given his and other stories of disappointment, exclusion and hurt that my

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<sup>29</sup> See Appendix 1.

research has uncovered, we can be sympathetic towards those who have ‘given up’. Arising from their consultancy work with churches, Roxburgh and Ramanuk note:

People have tried programs and worked through schemes over and over again but have seen little substantive change [...] a congregation can lose hope and cease to believe that the Spirit of God is among them. They mouth the words of belief but in reality, it’s a long-lost wish.<sup>30</sup>

Pattison’s exploration of failure offers a possibility for drawing ‘the words of belief’ (normative or espoused theology) closer to operant theology.<sup>31</sup> He persuasively argues how failure is not readily acknowledged or discussed by pastoral carers, yet failure is not only part of the fragility of human existence but also a necessary feature of pastoral practice. He explores failure within the story of Jesus and notes how through failure — particularly the perceived ‘failure’ of the cross — there is a doorway to hope.<sup>32</sup> Even though Pattison's work is not deeply rooted in normative theology, the reference to Jesus offers a way for drawing operant theology closer to normative theology.

Roxburgh and Ramanuk are helpful here, encouraging church leaders to cultivate an environment that ‘invites people to address their experience and to reconnect with the memory of the biblical narrative in a way that grounds their lives in a story bigger than their private needs.’<sup>33</sup> Therefore, in contrast to the direction that can be read into the theological flow in Pattison’s work, they suggest that a greater transformative opportunity lies in beginning with a rigorous engagement with normative and formal theology. It is this ideal that propelled my research process and, while this ideal remains compelling, I have had to contend with the powerful place of ‘tacit’ and ‘informal’ theology in people’s lives. I argue that formal and normative theologies provide the theological vision for people’s lives yet, without understanding the complex realities that lead to people’s espoused and operant theologies, a reflective theological vision will struggle to take root. Furthermore, divine

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<sup>30</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, p.16.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Pattison, *A Critique of Pastoral Care* 2nd edn. (London: SCM Press, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> Boulding provocatively describes Jesus as ‘history’s greatest failure’. Maria Boulding, *Gateway to Hope* (London: Fount, 1985), p.9.

<sup>33</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, p.69.

grace as integral to holiness, as I argued in chapter four, is unlikely to take root without the counter-cultural admission of failures, along with a willingness to forgive and to be forgiven.<sup>34</sup>

My research had begun with the assumption that people in churches want to be holy. I have come to see this as a naive assumption because the inherited theology of their church does not automatically become the theology that people want to live out in their lives. Jesus asked the man who had been sick for 38 years at the pool near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem, ‘Do you want to be made well?’<sup>35</sup> Perhaps it would have been better if I had explored the related question, ‘Do you want to be holy?’ and enabled a conversation around people’s desire for God’s work in their lives and the world’s need for a holy people. This may have enabled a more fully engaged exploration in the house groups whereby people might have been able to see through the weight of responsibility towards the grace of being offered a relationship with God and God’s world.

After completing the research phase, my appointment as presbyter at Village Road reached a natural review point. The church and I needed to decide whether it would be right for me to continue or whether a fresh phase of ministry would be better. Village Road decided the latter. There are likely to be a number of factors that fed into that decision. It is possible that the church’s response reflects the complexities and difficulties of exploring holiness that my research has revealed. It may also reflect the mixed feeling that participants had towards transformation. Greater emotional distance is needed in order to gain more facts and to be able to think more clearly about the decision, yet for authenticity the decision feels important to mention. It also highlights further the complexity of human relating; the mix of desire and resistance within participants; and how adopting a ‘new’ theology of holiness can

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<sup>34</sup> Pattison likens failure to cancer, a ‘stigmatised disease’, a topic that cannot be talked about openly. Pattison, p.147.

<sup>35</sup> John 5.6.



feel like conversion. Furthermore, it points to the difficulties in discerning possible paths, of overwhelming and holding on to hope. It also points to how the church's structural processes, including ministerial appointments, might reflect the mix of both wanting and resisting transformation that I observed among participants at Village Road.

### *6.7. Transformed practice through embodied theological engagement*

Through this chapter, I have highlighted a number of difficulties that I observed through the process of exploring holiness in a local church. I have shown that the pursuit of holiness is affected by the way holiness terminology is unfamiliar, has negative connotations and is seen to be a standard beyond reach. Moreover, the pursuit of holiness is significantly affected by relationships and, more broadly, the way transformation assumed in Theological Action Research is both desired and resisted. These factors are a squall of winds that make journeying in God's holiness difficult to both navigate and gauge. Yet, despite these forces, I have discovered that the journey is possible and transformation is observable.

I discovered that what seemed to make most participants at Village Road most receptive to formal and normative theologies — and most likely to renew their embodied theology — was the embodied sharing in the ministry of God that is the holiness of God. This includes receiving the ministry of God. This was illustrated in the stories of Alex and Vince, who, some 20 years prior, had joined a local Christian community and *Navigators* respectively. They recall their participation as transformative:

I felt accepted and valued [...] People from different backgrounds, different denominations, different values, different cultures, but joining together to pray and have fun and share life together. (Alex)

I encountered the Navigators. I found that really challenging [...] the basis of the challenge was that there is a difference between a follower and a disciple [...] Are you a disciple that is committed to a path of learning and following and change or are you a follower by association who is happy for the social benefits of the Christian scene [...] I really sort of immersed myself in that context. (Vince)

Yet embodied sharing in the ministry of God also includes giving: being a channel through which God's ministry might be received by others. This is my own story of the

research process. Having been genuinely inspired by the holiness I discovered in formal theology, I sought to embody that theology through engagement with my own church. This participation enabled me to root my own learning in my own lived reality. With this embodiment, my exploration became more properly about holiness, enabling not only transformation within me but also, it is possible to glean from participant's responses, in others. Normative theology also claims that embodied participation is Methodism's story: not only is the church's vocation to 'scriptural holiness' a message to share but, through the act of sharing, scriptural holiness is embodied in the church.

We witnessed within the *Hagios* group the power of theological embodiment as a means for transformation. Though we did not frequently use holiness terminology, we did explore normative and formal theologies in the hope that this exploration might renew our operant theologies. We suspected that our approach might be different to other models of youth work, but we did find that the approach was positively received.<sup>36</sup> To do this, we drew on contemporary culture<sup>37</sup> and sought to kinaesthetically engage their imaginations.<sup>38</sup> It was striking how the formal theology I outlined in chapter three seemed to connect with young people's concerns and questions about identity and purpose. For example, one teenager,

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<sup>36</sup> Kendra Creasy Dean contends that 'while youth ministry has routinely capitalized on the passions of adolescents, little (if any) attention has been given to connecting them to the Passion of Christ.' Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), p.10.

<sup>37</sup> For example, we used a clip from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, dir. Chris Columbus (Warner Home Video, 2002) where the sorting hat 'chooses' Harry to introduce the topic of God's choice; we used *Lost and Found* dir. Philip Hunt (Contender Entertainment Group/Studio AKA, 2009) inviting exploration as to what person or thing most expresses the character of God; we approached the question of human purpose by watching the promotional video for *Mars One*, a project to establish a permanent human settlement on Mars (< <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxS7dCMBvSI>> [accessed 8 March 2015]); we explored whether we are stronger by ourselves or as part of a team through a clip from *Hercules*, dir. Brett Ratner (Paramount Home Entertainment, 2014); we used the advertisement by the cosmetic manufacturer Dove to unpack the terms 'beautiful' and 'perfect' (< <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DdM-4siaQw>> [accessed 12 April 2015]); and in the final session we used *The Ark*, dir. Kenneth Glenaan (Acorn, 2015) to open a conversation about what it might mean to love when there is no personal benefit to ourselves.

<sup>38</sup> Young people were invited to go into another room where they could collect a laundry washing tablet and take with them the hope that, regardless of how soiled they may feel, God's Spirit is the holy-making agent in their lives. Other examples include making origami boats to express our vulnerability in the sea of God's care; writing words from 1 Peter 2.4-12 on Jenga bricks and then building a wall from them; and putting an imperfect yet perfect flower in a heart-shaped oasis.

usually quiet, spoke about a pastor she had met in South Africa who offered a home, including his own, to orphaned children. Talking about holiness as self-emptying helped her to understand this pastor's actions, but also challenged us. Teenagers knew instinctively that their identity as Christians should resonate with the whole of their life but, prior to exploring holiness, holiness as affecting the whole of life had not arisen in conversation and they keenly felt the dissonance. The dissonance was particularly felt between how they were at church and how they were at school. They told us that people they met at school did not understand why anyone would want to be a Christian. They encountered this sentiment among their fellow pupils but also among teachers, even Religious Education teachers. This suggested that Christianity, certainly a scriptural Christianity that I have sought to outline in chapter five, may not be well understood in their schools or even in the Religious Education syllabus. Moreover, it highlighted that embodying scriptural Christianity is profoundly counter-cultural. The possibly misunderstood and counter-cultural nature of holiness meant that it felt easier to maintain school and church as separate spheres. Yet they felt uneasy about this because we were realising that responding to God's grace marks a person out as peculiar: our lived lives are to reflect the kenotic life of God revealed in Christ. Through *Hagios*, I came to realise afresh just how difficult this is and how much support and encouragement young people who want to venture forward in faith need.

As *Hagios* leaders, it was not possible for us to accompany young people at school as they sought to embody holiness, though we did seek to enable supportive friendship bonds between them. We also provided opportunities for embodied faith when the group was together. For example, to enact the grace we had learnt about, we arranged to give away sweets at a local festival. These sweets also advertised a *Twitter* account that explained and promoted random acts of kindness. Together we cleaned a local church and worked in its garden. This church was low on money but, more crucially, low on hope, which has been

described as the most important ‘currency’ a congregation has to spend.<sup>39</sup> The expression of ‘holiness as solidarity’ of *Hagios* alongside this neighbouring Methodist community gave formal theology a chance to become embedded in a shared embodied experience.<sup>40</sup> These practical acts created powerful shared memories that continued to be referenced after the *Hagios* series.<sup>41</sup>

This experimentation in embodied theology led to an event when formal, normative, espoused and operant theology particularly converged. Three young people who had been in the *Hagios* sessions joined me in sessions exploring confirmation and membership of the Methodist Church. Special services were held at the end of the summer where two of them were confirmed and received into membership. This included giving their testimony and committing themselves to participate in projects, and initiate some projects, that enabled their church to reach out into the local community. It is possible that they were already progressing towards this embodiment and, with hindsight, it is easy to see how *Hagios* could have been better designed and delivered. Yet it seems clear that the embodied engagement enabled by *Hagios* confirmed and fuelled their desire to journey with God’s holiness.<sup>42</sup>

Though *Hagios* leaders were embodying formal and normative theology through the leadership they offered, I felt that they remained reserved and less engaged. Through the interview process, Cathy reflected, perhaps for the first time, on her ‘knowledge’ and appeared more willing to explore the formal theology behind the *Hagios* series. Yet the interview happened after the *Hagios* series. Had the conversation happened beforehand, along with a more collaborative approach I later employed with the writing team, it may have

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<sup>39</sup> Roxburgh & Romanuk, p.16.

<sup>40</sup> Barton, ‘Dislocating and Relocating Holiness’, p.206.

<sup>41</sup> This supports the assertion that mission forms disciples in a way that Christian education does not. See Walton, *Disciples Together*. See also Steven Emery-Wright and Ed Mackenzie, *Networks for Faith Formation; Relational Bonds and the Spiritual Growth of Youth* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017), p.93-105.

<sup>42</sup> This observation finds resonance with Walton, who argues that ‘mission, worship and community are of the essence of the Christian faith and are learned by participation.’ In this sense they are primary, whereas Christian education is secondary. Roger L. Walton, *Disciples Together: Discipleship, Formation and Small Groups* (London: SCM Press, 2014), p.42.

been possible to have built a bridge between operant and formal theologies among all the leaders. This did not happen and, unfortunately, during the *Hagios* series, Cathy resigned as youth leader. However, the post-*Hagios* interview did go some way in offering the pastoral care I could have expressed much earlier, contributing to the healing between her and the church in addition to enabling some reconciliation between formal theology and her own operant theology.

Of all the activities associated with the doctoral research, it was notable that many of those in the writing group went on to renew their espoused and operant theologies with the formal theologies they had discovered. The act of not merely learning about holiness but learning about holiness for the sake of helping others in the context of a team seemed to enable a deeper engagement with holiness that overflowed into their ongoing life. One member in began exploring becoming a Methodist presbyter and another member continued to write material for other house group series. In addition, one who had been training to become a worship leader has since been commissioned and another who had been training to be a deacon is now in a Methodist circuit. Moreover, one member became an elder in the Society of Friends and others deepened their commitment to pastoral care and writing. As with *Hagios*, it is possible that I called people together who were already wanting to develop their journey with God. It is possible that their interest in vocation was partly prompted by the way I already had, as a result of the literature review, begun referencing holiness in pastoral ministry before forming the writing team. Even so, it is important to note that those in the writing group wanted to explore holiness, and their exploration of holiness contributed principally to their own transformation, but also presented the opportunity to over 100 house group members at Village Road. Moreover, this exercise in trusting a small group with freedom to cultivate for themselves a new imagination of what holiness might mean, while undoubtedly the most risk-filled part of my research, enabled some of the deepest

engagement. It moved holiness from cerebral to an embodied engagement of their hopes and passions, which James Smith argues has the greatest formative potential.<sup>43</sup> As a consequence, the writing group not only displayed more commitment than others in pursuing holiness but were most animated in advocating holiness: it was among these people that I most evidenced the enacting of the Methodist vocation to ‘spread scriptural holiness’.

As I have already indicated, the house groups seemed to exhibit most resistance where formal and normative theologies have less power to renew operant theologies. This is understandable as the house groups at Village Road had focused on study and were the least embodied opportunity for engaging with theologies of holiness. Yet, even here, the possibility of transformation could be seen. For example, in one session the leader introduced the theme of perfection, a word central to holiness terminology, and the whole group spontaneously burst into laughter. This collective embodied response suggests that they held a common understanding of being imperfect and any conversation about being perfect was comic. Yet, during the ensuing conversation, one person ventured, ‘no child is perfect, unless in the eyes of their mother’, pointing to the possibility that, even in popular speech, perfection may be connected with love rather than faultless performance. The conversation continued, highlighting that someone could be perfect because they are loved by God and they could also be perfect because, through their love for God, they are open to God’s power in their lives. Through this conversation, I sensed this group bridging the divide between their initial espoused/operant theological responses and formal/normative theologies. I also sensed the mood of the house group had changed: it felt like the group had become an arena where ‘ministry’ was being encountered. The group appeared to be moving towards embracing holiness, not as unachievable or undesirable, but as being caught up in the loving

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<sup>43</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), p.18.

purposes of God.<sup>44</sup> William, though speaking on behalf of another group, could have been speaking on behalf of all participants when he said:

What we all discovered was that holiness wasn't quite what we thought it was [...] it's somebody with a halo, white robes and all this, but in fact when we read through the studies and talked together it was [...] something that everyone could experience in their lives as a disciple. I think that was for a lot of us quite a good discovery really.

I had anticipated that the interviews would provide an important source of data on the degree to which *Hagios*, the writing group and house groups had been successful. I had not considered that the interview process was a form of practical participation itself and a means for achieving transformation, perhaps even a means by which participants — like Cathy — received ministry. At the end of each interview, I asked each respondent to provide a definition of holiness. I wanted to know how, in the light of our conversation, the interviewees now perceived holiness. While it is not possible to suggest that these responses are solely related to the interview process, it is reasonable to suggest — with the depth of conversation often spanning an hour — that the interview played a significant part in enabling respondents to explore holiness. Strikingly, most answers pointed to a relational dynamic. A significant minority perceived holiness as a mystical relationship with God:

The beautiful cleaning loving powerful changing presence of God. (Alex)

The most helpful word for me personally has been otherness. (Bernie)

The stillness comes with being with God [...] I suppose the people I associate with having been holy I kind of felt closer to God with them I suppose. (Heidi)

What we experience of who God is. (Maud)

An awareness of the presence of God. An awareness and a response. (Robert)

I think it would be that sense of standing in the place or the presence of holiness and to a greater extent not feeling ashamed [...] standing in that place without regret and without being overwhelmed with shame. (Vince)

More interviewees see holiness through their relating with other people:

Set apart to live a life worthy of my saviour and speaking and acting in his name. (Denise)

The pure perfection of God [...] Unfettered compassion and acceptance. (Isaac)

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<sup>44</sup> It does not seem coincidental that this house group had two of the writing team among its members and therefore, I would argue, benefited from the presence of those with deeper embodied engagement in the process.

Reflecting the nature of God [...] reflecting those characteristics of God that we come to understand or see in the person of Jesus [...] love, mercy, grace, forgiveness, justice, being willing to speak up for those who can't speak. (Julie)

Living the way Jesus would live if he happened to live this life. (Kyle)

It is where we are and where we want and need to be. It is a journey word I think [...] We can only achieve it with the help of others [...] It is a doing word. It requires action [...] Which will only come to fruition at the end I would imagine or the end of this bit of life. (Paula)

Holiness is becoming more God-like [...] I think it is more God's character than personality, because character has an impact on actions. (Queenie)

Having every decision you make based around the aim of loving Jesus. And that being evident to others around in everything you do, no matter how big and no matter how small. Radiating. (Trey)

Holiness equates to perfect [...] Perfect from everything. Being graceful. Being kind [...] Do everything that you do for the love of Jesus Christ. (Ursula)

Holiness is reflecting God's glory. (Eddie)

It is to be called apart by God to be fully involved in the realities of life. To live and to love and to make God's love known. (Frank)

The ability to reflect Jesus in your everyday life [...] the Holy Spirit being part of you. (William)

Even Nadine, who at first could not perceive holiness as obtainable or desirable, linking holiness with fanaticism, through the process of her interview (building on her experience within the writing group and leading a house group) became open to the possibility of holiness as love:

Something that maybe was quite narrow and separate and now has opened out and much broader and it has grown into a size that is beyond human comprehension [...] and] I'd never thought of holiness as being love [...] And I do think of it as being love now. And that's where the broadness and the richness comes from. (Nadine)

It is difficult to delineate the effect of the interview in isolation of other facets of participation. Yet, given my own experience as interviewer and also the email feedback received from a number of interviewees, it is important to note that the process of interviewing — like the relational processes within *Hagios*, the writing group, the house groups and the Band meeting — enabled a theological embodiment that would not have occurred had the focus been singularly on conveying information from formative and normative theology. These relational processes, as suggested by the development of the holiness triangle throughout chapter three, are integral to understanding and responding to



God's holiness. They show journeying with God's holiness as varied and complex. Yet these relationship processes are fertile ground for receiving and sharing in God's ministry. Furthermore, the act of giving people the opportunity to talk about their experiences provided space for them to explore God's ministry, confirming Webster's contention that 'theological thinking *about* holiness is itself an exercise *of* holiness'.<sup>45</sup> The response to the interviews illuminated the significance of research within pastoral ministry, being not only a tool for research but a means where, through striving towards a good interviewing style, I expressed God's ministry of grace and helped 'real difference'.<sup>46</sup> This approach expressed the hospitality that Bretherton presented as holiness.<sup>47</sup>

#### *6.8. Preliminary conclusions*

John Rogerson suggests that holiness terminology is flexible, where its meaning 'depends upon the contexts in which it is used and the interests of those who use it.'<sup>48</sup> My empirical research suggests that, in general speech, holiness is not so much flexible but fixed in a point of disconnection from formal and normative theology. This is not to say that participants at Village Road are unable to speak of God: they were able to articulate their sense of God in profound and theologically literate ways. Yet they did not connect the love of God for the world as integral to God's holiness: they did not see the holiness of God as what made Jesus Christ 'God with us' or what drew the Holy Spirit to become God within us. Holiness terminology has negative connotations, therefore risks misrepresenting people's experiences. Sometimes these negative connotations are not available to our conscious memory, but nevertheless contribute to powerful 'tacit' knowledge. Moreover, holiness is seen as a standard beyond what most people can achieve and a reality divorced from everyday life.

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<sup>45</sup> Webster, p.8.

<sup>46</sup> Cameron and others, *Talking about God in Practice*, p.58. This builds on Craine and Seymour.

<sup>47</sup> See 3.12.

<sup>48</sup> Rogerson, 'What is Holiness?', p.3.

Crucially, holiness is not seen to be grace that draws God close so that God is active in human experience, which is often messy and sometimes gritty. Regardless of whether these instinctive espoused and operant theologies of holiness are known to be right or wrong, they are likely to trump formal and normative understandings.

In this chapter, I have presented the pursuit of holiness as both wanted and resisted. The degree to which it is pursued will be affected by the degree of hope held and the willingness to be overwhelmed by God's grace. There are a number of factors that frustrate the pursuit of holiness, but I have found embodied theological engagement with small groups to be the means by which formal and normative holiness theologies might renew operant theologies within the church. This embodied engagement is profoundly connected to relationship. First, the power of a relationship with God, often grounded in a particular experience and resulting in a theological vision for people's lives. It is the experience of God's ministry towards a person and grace flowing in their lives. Second, it is the positive power of a relationship between people. This includes the relationship between a presbyter and their congregation, noting that where I spent the most time exploring and journeying with people — whether regularly meeting with young people on a Sunday evening, collaboratively working within a writing team, the in-depth sharing in Bands or in interviewing — is where transformation and growth mostly clearly took place. The evidence of my research is that holiness is enabled wherever people can see people genuinely related, not distant from each other, journeying with the call to be holy in a world where God is often perceived as distant. Furthermore, experimenting with embodying formal and normative theologies alongside others, however tentatively, seemed to create the greatest potential to set a trajectory for transformation. Third, it is the negative power of a relationship between people, including the ways that I had not enabled the experience of God's ministry; and occasions when people had 'given up' elements that they saw were key to their pursuit of holiness.

In this chapter, we have explored holiness as rooted in the espoused and operant theologies of over 100 participants at a church of a city suburb in north east England. Previous chapters had explored the formal and normative theologies that surround that church. Having given space for these ‘four voices of theology’, in the final chapter I will hold those voices together in order to draw out some practical suggestions for future ministry within and through the church.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

#### 7.1. *Relating to God*

This thesis began as a study in authentic discipleship and was transformed into an exploration of holiness. The change in focus was intentional. The critique that writing about practical theology can fail to be theology (that is, words about God<sup>1</sup>) forged my determination to craft a thesis that was theocentric. The word ‘holiness’ helped because it seemed more intuitively and intimately to begin with God’s being. It is also a prevalent Biblical theme about God and God’s people, and about Christian identity as well as the journey of following Christ. As a Methodist minister seeking shape for discipleship within a local congregation, the theme of holiness as the ‘telos of the founding fathers’<sup>2</sup> helps to make sense of my own self-understanding as a life-long Methodist and someone to whom the church has given ‘a principal and directing part’<sup>3</sup> as a presbyter. Yet I have discovered that it is not easy to shift the focus from discipleship to holiness, from the human journey to God’s being.

My research is rooted in Village Road Methodist Church where I was Minister in Pastoral Charge. Along with many of those whom I interviewed, holiness terminology did not have a significant place in my vocabulary. At the start of my research, I am not sure how comfortable I would have been in referring to the Christian church as holy. I would have seen holiness as at a distance to my everyday life and connected to high standards of piety and morality. Yet through the exploration prompted by my doctoral supervisors I began a

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<sup>1</sup> Pete Ward, ‘Helen Cameron, “Life in all its fullness”’, p.28)

<sup>2</sup> Roger L. Walton, ‘A discipleship movement shaped for mission: forming a new ecclesial identity for British Methodism?’ in *Holiness*, 1 (2015) pp.57-77 (p.65) <<http://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/04-walton.pdf>> [accessed 1 June 2016]

<sup>3</sup> Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, p.213.

process of discovery that revealed a theological vision of holiness which, in turn, helped me understand my own developing Christian spirituality. At the conclusion of the study I have come to see the theme of holiness as the key way of making sense of Methodist identity. It is about how, through the Holy Spirit, the church continues 'to exercise the whole ministry of Christ',<sup>4</sup> and exercising this ministry is relating in love to God, God's people and God's world. Discovering this holiness *telos* has been immensely rewarding. It has located my own personal vocation within the doctrinal standards of British Methodism. It has been a journey of discovery, and yet to enable others to share this journey I need to remember what it feels like at the beginning.

This thesis was prompted by own context as a presbyter in the Methodist Church of Great Britain. I was at a point of transition and I wanted to reflect on my role, vocation and identity. I see this context as positive yet, as I have indicated, there are contexts and interests which, at best, do not help, and at worst, hinder the exploration of holiness. In part this is caused by the unhelpful way holiness can be caricatured, yet it is also to do with real individual experiences that enabled definitions of holiness that can be at a tangent to Christian theology.

In many ways Village Road is far from diverse: the majority of members are white, British and retired. Yet, as we have seen, the picture is more nuanced than these binary descriptions allow. Within this church there were people who carry with them a wide range of experiences and these experiences meant that, for some, their response to a programme exploring holiness was somewhat cautious. It is important that we do not generalise from these very specific experiences, yet it is reasonable to anticipate that other congregations will

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<sup>4</sup> Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, p.512.

also contain people who are carrying their own experiences that affect their response to holiness terminology.

In addition to these negative associations we note that the positive influence of the church has been inconsistent. In recent years Presidents of the Methodist Conference have emphasised holiness,<sup>6</sup> but the appointment as president is for just one year and hence the influence of the presidents has a limited reach. The on-line journal *Holiness* was accessed by one member of Village Road,<sup>7</sup> but only as a result of the studies on holiness. Agencies such as Cliff College emphasise scriptural holiness, but we have seen that the espoused theology of national Methodism leaves uncertainty as to whether the holiness asserted in its doctrinal standards is seen to be relevant or a priority. It is reasonable to conclude that there is much more that could be done by office holders with the Methodist Church to engage congregations with their normative theology and also for the espoused theology of the church to reflect that normative theology. Yet my research suggests that holiness is unlikely to become a living theme more widely in Methodism through formal pronouncements, but by deep relational engagement in the untidiness of everyday life, with people who have caught the vision of holiness but who are realistic and unromantic in facing the hard work of drawing others into that vision.

Such engagement is not sterile but absorbing and intimately connected with everyday life. Chapter three gathered a wide selection of holiness word-pictures including majesty, a building project, electricity, crucifixion, a contagion, a bleaching agent, a perfect shot and hospitality. The numbers of images are a reminder that holiness, like God and the church<sup>8</sup>, is

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 'Back to the Bible, forward to the world: Inaugural address of the Methodist President' and Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 'New Methodist President Calls for holiness'.

<sup>7</sup> <<http://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/holiness/>> [accessed 12 July 2017]

<sup>8</sup> Minear, in his wide-reaching overview, identified 96 minor and major images of the church in the New Testament. Paul Sevier Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961).

not contained by a single idea, but rather that it is through a plethora of images and metaphors we move closer to understanding. Moreover, this thesis asserts holiness in Christian theology is quintessentially God's nature and therefore holiness is not an idea or a subject that can be discussed at a distance: holiness can be properly explored only through relationship, with God, God's people and God's world.

As a consequence, this thesis shows that an exploration of holiness will be dynamic, exciting and profoundly significant for anyone eager to know who they are and whether the Christian faith makes any difference to the well-being of themselves and the world. This thesis shows that the study of holiness offers release for many, by helping them to see Christian discipleship less as a function of their own human effort but more about God's power working within them. I say this not to gloss over the significant difficulties and complexities I encountered, but rather to highlight that those open to an embodied theological exploration of holiness found powerful ways to reflect on the ministry of God. I would go further to suggest that embodied theological engagement opened participants to receive a fresh experience of the ministry of God in their lives.

Those open to the exploration of holiness included young people. This does not mean that adults are not open, but rather my research has shown that teenagers seem to respond well to exploring identity and vocation. Perhaps this is because teenagers are, by virtue of their age, in a phase of transition whereas those in adulthood may have become settled in their self-understanding and look to their own independent self-empowered actions. Certainly, some adults did seem to find holiness theology challenging. Perhaps resonating with Methodism more generally, Village Road did seem more comfortable focusing on 'practical' activity than beginning with the 'spiritual' contemplative task of nurturing a relationship with God and then allowing action to flow from that relationship.

Christian holiness is, as the name suggests, rooted in the holiness of Christ. The Gospels consider Jesus, who was both contemplative and active, as the ultimate ‘holy one of God’.<sup>9</sup> Yet as I have presented the theme of holiness in university seminar rooms, theological colleges, church halls and residential homes, people often first connect holiness to that which is ‘separate’, to people who are ‘good’, or occasions that have been ‘special’. In many instances some people passionately argued for the holiness of people adhering to different religious faiths or those having no faith at all. Yet I argue that the focus of *Christian* holiness must be Christ. This focus shows holiness not as separate but as incarnate in the world. It shows holiness as not outside of humanity but, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, within humanity. It is therefore unobtainable by human effort, even moral excellence. Holiness takes root in human lives through a dependence on God, expressed through faith, in the context of everyday life. Holiness is to love God ‘with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength [... and to] love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, holiness is not an attribute given to an individual but reflected in a community of saints who participate in God’s love for the world.

This thesis offers the phrase ‘Relating to God’ as an attempt to focus a theological understanding of holiness. This phrase encompasses prescriptive doctrinal theology but also the descriptive narrative theology of those seeking to live their everyday lives while in communion with God. As a consequence, holiness is portrayed less by idealised hagiography of canonised saints, but rather by daily discernment in the complexity of contemporary life where it is not always clear what constitutes the best way to embody the selfless love of Christ.

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<sup>9</sup> See 5.6.

<sup>10</sup> Mark 12.30-31.



I identify four different facets of ‘relating to God’. The first is remembering that God is in relationship with God’s self. This is the trinitarian theology that is, to quote the Methodist Deed of Union, one of the ‘fundamental principles of the historic creeds’.<sup>11</sup> God is both one and three: a dynamic union of, to quote the Nicene Creed, ‘the Father, Almighty’, the ‘Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God’ and ‘the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life’.<sup>12</sup> This unity through relationship is expressive of the holiness that is God.

Second, while holiness can be subject to impartial academic enquiry, it is not possible to understand or display holiness outside of a relationship with God. This is the full ‘moral’ image of God described by Methodist normative theology: the perfect relating with God where a person receives and responds to the love that flows from the God of love. People are not so much vessels but channels of love where an ‘inward holiness’ overflows into an ‘outward holiness’ for and in the world. This love is revealed in Jesus Christ, not as a completely new revelation, but as a reassertion of holiness already revealed in Holy Scripture that began with the intimacy between God and humanity in the story of creation and that has since been restored through Christ.<sup>13</sup> Yet Christ’s self-emptying on the cross<sup>14</sup> has such precision that Gorman is right to describe it as the ‘definitive theophany’.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, while the New Testament presents Christ’s holiness through living, dying, rising and ascending as something performed, what it does more profoundly present is the life that flows from an intimate relationship with God.

Third, holiness is, to quote Webster, ‘a venture undertaken in prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit; it is an exercise in the fellowship of the saints’.<sup>16</sup> The intersection of

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<sup>11</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>12</sup> Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *The Methodist Worship Book*, pp.135-6, 167, 178-9, 190-1, 201-2, 300 and 314-5.

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 2.1-3, 7,15,18,21; 3.8-10

<sup>14</sup> Philippians 2.5-11.

<sup>15</sup> Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, p.34.

<sup>16</sup> Webster, p.10

these two parts is crucial because it is only through receiving the Spirit of holiness that the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit can flow. These gifts<sup>17</sup> and fruit<sup>18</sup> are a result of a relationship with God which is profoundly geared towards empowering all human relationships. Therefore, holiness is fundamentally ‘social’, not in the narrow sense of being about social ‘issues’ nor in the sense of easy-going friendliness, but in the hard and gritty sense of joining together a diverse group of people in order for the image of God to be restored in the whole of humanity.<sup>19</sup> This thesis has outlined the ways in which this process can be messy, complex, sometimes negative and sometimes dispiriting. Embracing social holiness means full embodied engagement with real social life as the medium through which holiness is pursued.

Fourth, the revelation of God in Christ incarnate asserts that understanding holiness is not possible without being in relationship with all that God has made, especially all of humanity. Christians engage as people who have within them the ‘contagion’ of holiness, which is the spirit of holiness that was in Jesus Christ, which is the Holy Spirit of God.<sup>20</sup> It is paramount that, as they reach out to the world, they remain in a deep relationship with God and therefore continue to embody holiness which has God as its source. This is why tolerance, while good, is a weak portrayal of the Christian mission whereas ‘hospitality as holiness’ that I explored in 3.12 more richly expresses the gift the church offers to the world. The Methodist Church was ‘raised up’ as a reminder that this sharing of God’s holiness is the fundamental call of the whole church.<sup>21</sup> Through sharing this holiness the church offers a route to happiness and wholeness, both for itself and to the world God loves. Methodist normative theology shows this as not superficial but deeply connected to the human vocation

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<sup>17</sup> For example, Romans 12.6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12.1-11.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 3.8; John 12.24; 15.2-16; Romans 7.4; Galatians 5.22-24; Ephesians 5.9; Colossians 1.10;

<sup>19</sup> See 4.2.5.

<sup>20</sup> See 3.9 and 4.2.5.

<sup>21</sup> Appendix 1.

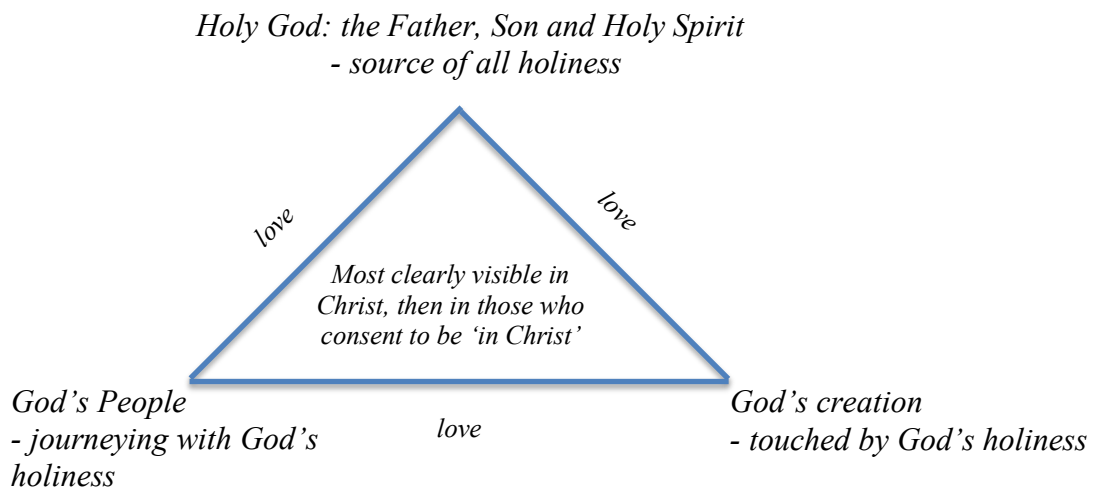
to be holy. Sharing this route means conversing with all people and working with civic leaders, businesses and charities in the belief that they bear the ‘political’ image of God.<sup>22</sup> It also means engaging with the real material of everyday life of each person in Britain and across the world. This is because holiness is not worked out in some sphere separated from everyday life: holiness means being separated for God and the world God loves. Therefore, the vocation to ‘spread scriptural holiness through the land’ is a call to draw alongside people in all their involvements and contexts. It is a call to be an advocate for all that is vulnerable in God’s creation, holding on to the memory that the first mention of holiness in scripture relates to the wholeness of the world where God saw the waters, land, skies, the rhythm of seasons and all that contained therein as good. Undoubtedly, this is a hard vocation which in turn makes it even more essential that holiness is first and foremost seen as grace-empowered: engaging with God’s world can only be done through being caught up in the incoming tide of God’s ministry. It also makes the task of theological education difficult because the world is diverse and people’s involvements are diverse. To be engaged with God’s world — a quintessential element of God’s holiness — the church must remain rooted in the particularities of living in that world. The formation of God’s holy people must therefore prioritise embodied theological engagement.

This model of ‘relating to God’ develops the holiness triangle first outlined in 3.4. It is not a static understanding of holiness but a dynamic process for developing human connection with God who is holy. Throughout chapter three I developed a diagrammatic presentation, heightening the relationship components present at each edge of the triangle, while keeping prominent God as the source of holiness which humanity can reflect but never generate by itself.

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<sup>22</sup> See 4.2.2.

Figure 5: Holiness triangle including the holiness of creation



Throughout this thesis I have been careful to indicate the particularity of both the researcher and the congregation and therefore I have sought to avoid generalisations. Yet, at the conclusion of this thesis, it is appropriate not only to summarise the findings from my research but also to risk exploring of how my findings might be mapped out more broadly. TAR presents formal, normative, espoused and operant theologies not in hierarchy but as voices in conversation, the implication being that, if there are ‘four voices of theology’, there are also four points for hearing and learning theology.<sup>23</sup> I identify the following challenges to the academy, church authority and church life in order to develop Christian holiness theology.

## 7.2. Challenge to the academy

The first challenge relates to how holiness theology from the academy deeply resonates with the real experiences of people I interviewed. Academics can be confident in expressing its holiness theology because, even among teenagers at Village Road, it seemed to powerfully resonate. Yet what resonates most, as I have argued, is not a tidy or neat theology, but a theology engaged in, and ‘in the middle of’ the lived experiences of twenty-first century

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<sup>23</sup> See 2.1 and 6.1.

Britain.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it seems important for the academy to emphasise the complexity of life, seeing the incarnation not only as a doctrine but also as offering a profound cue for the place where theology must be situated. Plekon's writing about 'hidden holiness' is particularly welcome, but even here holiness risks being focused on ecclesial celebrities rather in the diverse experiences of everyday working, studying, family relating, social media networking and leisure activity. This is not so much an 'ordinary theology', but a lived theology arising from heterogeneous experiences. These experiences are not in juxtaposition to 'proper' theology, but part of the 'fullness' of systematic theology.<sup>25</sup> Responding to this challenge, the academy will not only enrich their theological content but might also find new and more effective ways to communicate that theology.

Second, the academy must use holiness terminology carefully. My research at Village Road suggests that, for many people, holiness terminology has gained meaning that is at a tangent to formal holiness theology. This meaning has been sculpted out of pain, joy and the struggles of everyday life. This knowledge is usually informal and often tacit, nevertheless it is a knowledge firmly rooted. This should not cause the academy to dispense with holiness terminology. I have found that holiness terminology has great potential to open up a conversation centred on God who has been revealed as holy. Yet this conversation is likely to be a lengthy journey — likened to bereavement or conversion — as people replant their word associations in different soil.

Third, academic theologians have their own unique experiences and it does not seem congruent nor helpful to hold their relating to God at arms-length within theological discourse. Neither should they keep their lack of relating to God at a distance because, as I have argued, it is the difficult, untidy and mysterious nature of relating to God that is the

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<sup>24</sup> Williams, *On Christian Theology*, p.xii.

<sup>25</sup> Watkins and Cameron, p.72.

content and the process of understanding Christian holiness. At various points in this thesis I have begun to give voice to the complexities which is part of my own relating to God. As part of my own commitment to academic rigour, I will need to go on finding ways to congruently reflect my own relating to God within my writing.

### *7.3. Challenge to church authority*

I have suggested that the theological authority of the Methodist Church of Great Britain can be found in its doctrinal standards. My engagement revealed that church authority points Methodists to an ongoing pilgrimage of faith aided by key signposts and foundational documents. Framed this way, authority in the Methodist Church is not only grounded in law and church documents but also the journey of faith in everyday life. Therefore, while this thesis is a work of practical theology, it is possible to see this thesis as an expression of Methodist normative theology: it describes how, in relationship with others, I have engaged with scripture, sought transformation and renewed my own Christian vocation. This is an appropriate complexification of normative theology, in that it situates British Methodist doctrine as lived discipleship within a particular Methodist tradition. It presents normative theology as prescriptive and descriptive, rooted and responsive. It sees normative theology as participating in divine action and continuing ministry of Christ. I argue that framing church authority in this way is enlivening and this theological voice deserves greater attention.

### *7.4. Challenge to church life*

A particular aim of Theological Action Research is the renewal of theological embodiment at the operant level. There are seven spheres where, drawing on my research, this renewal could meaningfully take place. I will look at espoused theology at the same time, taking the view that, in church life, these voices are not easily separated.

#### 7.4.1. *Talking of God*

It is easy to overlook the fact that, in order to conduct the research, a conversation was required about God. Regardless of the outcome of these conversations it was striking how much those conversations were valued, how they revealed encounters of God's ministry and, in some cases, led to significant developments in pastoral relationships. While the genesis of this thesis was not focused on the general task of enabling people to talk about God, I am aware that the process of talking about God has been in itself, to draw on Webster, an exercise in holiness.<sup>26</sup>

The 2005 report *Time to Talk of God* presented to the Methodist Conference encouraged Methodists, along with all Christians, to renew their ability to talk about God with each other.<sup>27</sup> A faith sharing course was then launched based on that report.<sup>28</sup> This is not the only resource available, and published resources should not be seen as the best means to enable conversation about God as my research showed that locally produced material enables deep conversation about God. In particular, interviews provided most space for participants to talk about — and interpret — their experience of God. From a practitioner's perspective, it also enabled increased collective knowledge about the people interviewed, so that it was more possible to preach and lead worship in a way that might more readily connect the message of God's holiness with the experiences of the congregation. Given what I have already argued in this chapter, this engagement is foundational to spiritual leadership and communal holiness.

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<sup>26</sup> Webster, p.8

<sup>27</sup> Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Time to Talk of God: Recovering Christian conversation as a way of nurturing discipleship* (London: Methodist Church, 2005)

<sup>28</sup> 'Talking of God: a faith sharing resource for local churches' <<http://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/learning/discipleship/journeying-with-others/small-groups/resourcing-your-small-group/talking-of-god>> [accessed 16 March 2018]

#### 7.4.2. *Engaging with scripture*

Holy Scripture is central to Methodist belief and practice; it is a chief means of grace, along with prayer and Holy Communion;<sup>29</sup> and the spread of ‘scriptural holiness’ is Methodism’s ‘divinely appointed mission’.<sup>30</sup> It is part of the Methodist vocation to study scripture, ideally in the original languages; to use it for personal prayer; and to communicate its message in a way that inspires people ‘throughout the land’.<sup>31</sup> The empirical research within this thesis confirmed the transformative effect of group study of the Bible, not just in participating in group conversation but also collaborating to create the material that sparked the conversation. The study of scripture led to a richer offering for worship, for example, through composing an original song; a deeper engagement with the topic through the extra reading and reflection it prompted; and developed pastoral relationships where it was possible to see the lasting effect in those who were involved. The study material produced by participants was not ‘perfect’ in presentation, nor did it have the coherence expected of published resources, but it was ‘perfect’ in that it was the genuine embodied outworking of people committed to relating well to God and God’s people.<sup>32</sup> Producing study material is an act of talking about God and reaching out in love to others, and therefore was in itself an act of holiness.

There is a possibility for extending this act of holiness throughout the Methodist Church. In 2014 the Methodist Church experimented with ‘Bible Month’.<sup>33</sup> In June 2017 the initiative went nationwide with participant churches using chapters of the Letter of James as a theme for worship. The book in focus for June 2018 is Jonah. Mackenzie claims that the Bible Month initiative has ‘significantly impacted the engagement of congregations with the Bible’.<sup>34</sup> Yet my research suggests that the impact of an initiative is less related to the topic

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<sup>29</sup> See ‘The Means of Grace’ in *Works, Volume 1*, pp.378-97.

<sup>30</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>31</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>32</sup> For an exploration of perfection see 3.10, 4.2.7, 5.4, 5.8, 6.4 and 6.7.

<sup>33</sup> Mackenzie, p.169

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*



being studied or the attractiveness of a particular programme but is more related to the depth of participation of each person involved. Enabling participation requires a plan of engagement with congregations as much as material requires a plan of contents. Thinking though the process of engagement is even more important in a national initiative where the relationships between church leaders nationally and worshippers locally are likely to be weaker. Given the potential pastoral diversity within congregations (in addition to the different ways local churches may organise themselves into different congregations, small groups and the varied practice of prayer in each home), a strategy for participation is required for greatest development in discipleship to be achieved, both individually and communally.

My research suggests the most effective way of engaging with scripture is through creating a gracious space whereby scripture can be explored without pressures of predetermined outcomes. From this engagement with scripture, there will be an expectation that, if scripture is Holy Scripture, it will be essential for the theological imagination that emerges to find an embodied response. Moreover, this embodied response will give the emerging theological imagination much more clarity and precision. My research also advocates the opportunity of coordinated exploration whereby house groups, gathered worship, fellowship bands and personal prayer in tandem with other points of pastoral encounter and church business (such as church meetings, websites and church literature) combine to suggest a significant theme for a church.

#### *7.4.3. Introducing Methodism*

While enabling ‘time to talk of God’ is essential, it is paramount that conversation is enabled among those who are newer to Methodist congregations about the Methodist vocation. Participants at Village Road came from different contexts and carried with them different memories of those experiences. Some already knew and had a shared Christian belief but all

were unfamiliar with Methodism's self-understanding of its 'divinely appointed mission' and how this is being worked out in the local context.<sup>35</sup> Dean argues that *Called by Name*, as a guide to membership, 'describes far more explicitly than its predecessors the fundamental Wesleyan tenets of [...] prevenient grace, the importance of social holiness and the call to perfection'.<sup>36</sup> However, this booklet is neither particularly rooted in the doctrinal standards nor does it present a shared exploration through relationships that is key to Methodist normative theology. A newer publication, *Compass*, is designed for group study to enable people to consider 'what makes the Christian way of life distinctive [...] particularly coming from the Methodist tradition.'<sup>37</sup> It does these things well but, again, it is Wesleyan theology that shines through rather than a rootedness in the church's doctrinal standards. *Hagios, Holy Shoes* and the house group series in my research were helpful shared explorations of holiness where film clips, practical tasks and collaborative writing were used to help people engage with the theme of holiness. Yet these programmes were an exploration of holiness based on an interim literature review prior to more extensive research into the church's normative theology and Biblical scholarship outlined in chapters four and five. On completing the research, I would suggest a modified programme. This would include an introduction to Christian belief (as expressed in the creeds, Holy Scripture and through being in relationship with the world-wide church); the vocation of Methodism (as expressed in Wesley's Notes and Sermons); and an articulation of how the local congregation is seeking to live this out (for example, outreach projects, study groups and opportunities for gathered worship). A

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<sup>35</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Dean, 'Spontaneity, Tradition and Renewal' in *Unmasking Methodist Theology* ed. by Clive Marsh, Brian Beck, Angela-Shier-Jones and Helen Wareing (London: Continuum, 2004), pp.220-6 (p.222). See Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Called by Name: Being a member in the Methodist Church* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing, 2012).

<sup>37</sup> Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Compass – Introduction*, p.1  
<[http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/4145/2209\\_compass\\_\\_lg\\_introduction.pdf](http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/4145/2209_compass__lg_introduction.pdf)> [accessed 13 June 2018]

possible programme for exploring Methodist normative theology could take the following form:

1. The nature of God — the first sentence of the Nicene Creed; Isaiah 6 with Revelation 4.8;<sup>38</sup> and an exploration of the local call to worship.
2. The image of God — Genesis 1.26 - 2.3, the ‘natural’, ‘political’ and ‘moral’ image of God;<sup>39</sup> and a conversation of the ways a local church and its people might keep God at a distance.
3. The grace of God — the second sentence of the Nicene Creed; prevenient grace; the means of grace; and a personal account of God’s grace from a church member.
4. The need for faith — the third and fourth sentence of the Nicene Creed; Romans 4.5; justifying grace; baptism; and the testimony of someone connected to the local church who has recently turned to Christ.
5. The focus of the heart — the fifth sentence of the Nicene Creed; sanctifying grace; Matthew 5-7; I John 4; I Corinthians 13; and a conversation about the different ways the local church focuses on the ‘inward holiness’.<sup>40</sup>
6. The route to happiness — the sixth sentence of the Nicene Creed; facing temptations, trials and struggle while remaining in relationship with God; and a conversation on the ‘outward holiness’.
7. The continuing journey — Christian perfection; the triangular flow of love between God, God’s people and God’s world; and an exploration by group participants as to how they might live this out.

Development of this programme falls outside this thesis and, given all that I have said, it would be paramount for such a programme to emerge and be grounded in each local

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<sup>38</sup> See 5.5.

<sup>39</sup> See 4.2.2.

<sup>40</sup> See 4.2.5.

context.<sup>41</sup> Yet, as someone who has devised and led membership programmes for the churches where I have been minister, the above pattern feels like a fresh and an intentional way of exploring a British Methodist theology of holiness. Moreover, given that four Methodist presbyters and deacons interviewed for this thesis were unable to recount any intentional programme of study of holiness as part of their ministerial formation, the above seven points could form the basis of a core module of Methodist ministerial training.

#### *7.4.4. Pastoral Practice*

Sharing the information about holiness discovered in chapters three, four and five is crucial in order that people may know God's holiness that is both the inherited Christian faith, but also in order that Methodists can fulfil their vocation to highlight the invitation to receive and respond to God's holiness. Church ministers need to be consistent in sharing that message and be patient with congregations as they adjust their definitions and trajectories. I have seen how being captivated by a vision of holiness has enabled ministry among others, but also how the progress of that ministry then challenged, deepened, and transformed that vision. Therefore, it is a deep vision humbly held rather than an unyielding imposition of a programme — or a reaction to perceive need in a way that is incongruent to the Methodist vocation — that appears to be the necessary approach. This is ultimately an exercise in pastoral care and, as a result, church ministers have a crucial role as they have local pastoral connections in the way that national leaders do not. Among these ministers, presbyters have a particularly important 'leading and directing part'.<sup>42</sup>

Yet sharing this information is only half of the exercise of learning about holiness. For each person to know what holiness means requires not only communicating information

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<sup>41</sup> Wilkinson's sermon series at Methodist churches in Liverpool during the 1990s is a rare example of engaging with formal holiness in a local context, yet the book that emerged offers little substantive engagement with Methodist normative theology. David Wilkinson, *A Holiness of the Heart* (London: Monarch Books, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Appendix 1.

but sharing in a journey. It means engaging in the experiences, received teaching and cultural messages that have accumulated with each person. It is attending to the prior learning of an individual — formal, informal and tacit - which chapter 6 highlighted as crucial. In doing so, not only is information shared about holiness but the act of sharing in a person's life communicates a crucial aspect of holiness, that is, God's solidarity and love.

#### *7.4.5. Practicing Holiness*

Throughout this thesis we have seen that holiness cannot remain abstract and theoretical but must be embodied. Hence, a theology of holiness must be a *practical theology*: an embodied theology. In chapter three I reviewed various authors. Near the end of their texts they often began to explore possibilities for a lived holiness in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. Orsuto sees holiness rooted in contemplation but expanding out into living simply, in solidarity with the world's poor, recognising what it held in common between faiths and respecting the natural environment, 'the matrix of all the relationships of the living'.<sup>43</sup>

Johnson wants Christians to work against the 'predatory loan practices' leading 'many low-income brothers and sisters in Christ' into 'debt traps'.<sup>44</sup> In Great Britain this could mean churches working with *Poverty and Truth Commissions*, like in Leeds,<sup>45</sup> which in asserting 'nothing about us, without us, is for us' is a reminder that the one whose name is holy has 'lifted up the lowly'.<sup>46</sup> Gorman sees sex as an expression of holiness when it is 'other-regarding, community-regarding [...] within the covenantal bonds and bounds of marriage'; and the absence of any violence, even as a response to twenty-first century terrorism.<sup>47</sup> In

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<sup>43</sup> Orsuto, p.194.

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, p.188-189.

<sup>45</sup> <<http://www.leedspovetrytruth.org.uk>> [accessed 16 March 2018].

<sup>46</sup> Luke 1.46-55.

<sup>47</sup> Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, p.127 and 160.

western society, where euthanasia can dominate conversations about suffering, Bretherton presents hospice care as an embodiment of Christian hospitality.<sup>48</sup>

In practicing holiness, it is important to continually consider — through reflecting on scripture, in prayer and in conversation with the whole church — whether it is really holiness that is being practiced. This is because the essential nature of holiness includes engaging with the world God loves but this engagement risks the secularisation of God’s people unless they prioritise their own relationships with God. An example of secularisation can be seen in the way Christian churches have offered a ‘genuinely and self-consciously Christian response to care for the suffering-dying’ through their involvement in the hospice movement in Britain,<sup>49</sup> retaining a ‘specifically Christian criteria for evaluating what is good and just’.<sup>50</sup> Yet, like with many other areas of care pioneered by Christian vision,<sup>51</sup> many expressions of hospice care have struggled to remain rooted in their Christian origins. As Ann Bradshaw notes, hospice care today is subject to ‘increased medicalization, a reliance on psychosocial techniques, a predominant focus on education, research and audit and most particularly redefined attitudes to the spiritual component of care’ that disconnects care from its foundation as a Christian vocation.<sup>52</sup>

Among all spiritual disciplines the practice of participating in Holy Communion has powerful potential for reminding, re-envisioning and re-directing the church in its journey with God’s holiness. The power of Holy Communion is more than a door by which holiness enters a person’s life,<sup>53</sup> but a way by which a community enacts the cruciform nature of holiness. In participating in Lord’s Supper, the people of God are invited to root their lives in

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<sup>48</sup> Bretherton, pp.160-189.

<sup>49</sup> Bretherton, p.186.

<sup>50</sup> Bretherton, p.183.

<sup>51</sup> For example, education, care for neglected children and responses to homelessness.

<sup>52</sup> Ann Bradshaw, ‘The Spiritual Dimension of Hospice: The Secularization of an Ideal’ in *Social Science & Medicine*, 43 (1996), 409-19 (pp.409 and 413).

<sup>53</sup> As implied by Keating. See 3.8.

the theocentric, Christological and kenotic nature of God's holiness. In particular, the action of sharing one loaf and one chalice puts into action the belief that God's self-emptying love contaminates those who eat and drink, more than perceived impurities which may cross contaminate God's people.<sup>54</sup> What is enacted together as a community offers a theological vision to be enacted by God's people dispersed in their everyday lives. The church needs to guard against moves to sanitise or reduce the overwhelming and challenging sense of God's holiness, lest the vision before participants is merely communion, not Holy Communion.

The drawing together of formal, normative, espoused and operant theologies necessarily commend an iterative process for understanding the nature of holiness. My research experimented with forming a writing group whereby people collaboratively discovered theological vision of holiness and then worked within house groups. It also included *Fellowship Bands* where holiness is explored in a group, acted on and then reported on in the following meeting. In addition, there was a particular learning experience when the *Hagios* group moved, literally, from talking about holiness while seated in a living room to enacting holiness with forks and spades in someone else's garden. It was a memorable experience for the young people, giving them a concrete experience to practice what they had been discussing and deepening their personal discovery of what it is to share in God's holiness. These relationships, with co-workers and with children, not only put into practice their current faith but also channelled and energised their on-going faith development.

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<sup>54</sup> In particular Beck insightfully presents how the draw towards being separate and pure is checked by drinking from a cup used (and therefore 'contaminated') by strangers; and where our disgust instincts are checked by the gospel of inclusion. Richard Beck, *Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011) p.194.

#### *7.4.6. Working with transitions*

Interviewees often cited the significance of a spiritual encounter or, to use Root's terminology, 'divine action'.<sup>55</sup> It was clear that these stories of God's becoming in their lives asserted the reality and value of divine action in the teller's own life story.

Relationships are a key component, whether on-going relationships or one-off events (for example, a Christian conference, an opportunity to serve, or the care they received during illness) though it is important to note that a minority recorded an experience of divine action where the physical presence of human relationships did not seem to play a significant role (for example, thinking things through on their own after a death of a friend or through the stimulation of a distance part-time masters theology degree). The common feature of each of these contexts is that the person experiencing God's holiness is at a point of transition in their life, whether they are young people navigating their way into an adult world or adults experiencing illness, death or personal growth. Given the evidence of this research and the weight of scripture that describes experienced holiness — not least the ministry of God in Jesus — how might communities of faith and learning intentionally engage with people in these transitional moments? Some form of event or activity away from ordinary life featured in many stories of transition. It could be for two hours or two years; contemplative or active; and for a specific age group or an inclusive family event. It is not possible or desirable to force transitional moments, but it is possible to cultivate space and time where such a moment might germinate.

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<sup>55</sup> Root, p.37.



#### 7.4.7. *Equipping and accompanying leaders*

Band meetings are perhaps the earliest expression of Methodist piety<sup>56</sup> and through them spiritual guidance was emphasised as a central feature of Methodist spirituality.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the delegation of spiritual direction to lay people was, according to Wakefield, the ‘revolutionary aspect’ of the early Methodist system. He argues

Christians of suitable gifts, graces and dedications, but otherwise ordinary people of no particular education or social cachet, have the power to be spiritual guides and to exercise the priestly office of the remission and retention of sins [...] Methodist laity are not only to be consulted [...] they are to be pastors of the flock.<sup>58</sup>

Early Methodism trusted the renewal of the image of God to the small group of two or three other people under the oversight of travelling preachers.<sup>59</sup> It is this accountability, primarily to each other, that distinguishes bands from other types of groups. Yet my research shows that it takes dedication to belong to such group. The doctoral supervision process offered the necessary structure of accountability and support, and without it the Band I instigated ceased to meet. It suggests that, while Bands offer accountability and support, Bands must also receive accountability and support from sources external to themselves.

In addition to the Band of which I was a part, I became aware of an increasing number of people who were finding for themselves a spiritual accompanist either voluntarily or as a mandatory part of the course in which they had enrolled.<sup>60</sup> In addition, one of the band members, in addition to myself, gained for themselves a spiritual director. This suggests a desire within some Methodists to be intentionally accompanied in their exploration of holiness. Finding ways to profile opportunities for this accompaniment could enable the

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<sup>56</sup> John Wesley drew up rules for them on 25 December 1739. Gordon S. Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1999), p.12.

<sup>57</sup> Gordon Mursell, *English Spirituality: From 1700 to the Present Day* (London, SPCK, 2008), p.90.

<sup>58</sup> Gordon S. Wakefield, ‘Traditions of Spiritual Guidance: John Wesley and the Methodist System’ in *The Way*, 31 (1991), pp.69-79 (p.76).

<sup>59</sup> John Lawson, ‘The people called Methodists: 2. ‘Our Discipline’’ in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, Volume One* ed. by Davies and Rupp, pp.181-210 (p.191 and 198).

<sup>60</sup> For example, *Encounter*. <<http://www.methodistencounter.org.uk/accompanists>> [accessed 24 July 2017]

Methodist vocation of ‘spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land’.<sup>61</sup> This profiling would need to include practical support for those seeking spiritual directors or the mutual accountability of bands.

### *7.5. The future of Holiness*

I have argued that ‘relating to God’ is the key phrase for unlocking a practical theology of holiness, in that holiness is quintessentially God’s nature, along with being relationship with God and sharing in God’s love for the world. It is appropriate at the end of this study to assert, therefore, the mystery integral to relating. While we have uncovered a lot of knowledge about holiness, we do not know or understand everything. The mystery inherent to relating is also true of human relationships and, while I have sought to explain espoused and operant theologies, there remains mystery. Theological Action Research has been helpful as a structure to attend to the voice of God. This thesis is the first time, to my knowledge, that this methodology has been applied in order to discern more clearly what holiness means within twenty-first century British Methodism. In setting out holiness as relating to God I argue for intentional and reflective participatory learning. ‘Relating to God’ is not something that is done in library, in gatherings for worship, in house groups, alone, at work, in social action or in the struggle for justice. Rather ‘relating to God’ incorporates the complexity of each of these areas as contexts for receiving and sharing in God’s ministry to the world. Furthermore, such learning is unlikely to be linear or systematised and more likely to be iterative; involving embodied behaviour, heart-felt passions and reasoned discourse. The person of Jesus Christ reveals holiness most fully as God’s love for the world and sets out a way for humanity to respond to that love.

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<sup>61</sup> Appendix 1.

This thesis has sought to be an exercise in practical theology whereby orthodoxy is not merely channelled into orthopraxis but where orthopraxis enriches orthodoxy. This theological loop is particularly important in holiness where the axis is relationship. As relationships are never abstract, it has been fundamental to root holiness in a particular time, among a particular people and in a particular place. The particularity of the context is essential for understanding holiness and informing thinking about holiness, with the thinking about holiness itself being a holy act. Therefore, reflection on ministerial practice cannot be a one-off event but must be a continuing engagement. It is only an intentional continuing engagement that is able to lift holiness from the quagmire of Otto's anthropocentrism and allow holiness, which might otherwise be kept at a distance, to draw near. It is not clear if Methodists have a unique contribution to make in this continuing engagement, but they do have a vocation to assert the need for the engagement.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, being part of this ongoing reflection on what it means to be a people whose primary purpose is to relate to God is the fundamental reason for which Methodism was created. It is difficult to perceive the Methodist Church convincingly expressing another purpose, to its own members, to its ecumenical friends or to the general public.

Holiness is the purpose for which people were created. British Methodism has a special vocation to communicate this purpose to British people. It sees this purpose as the route to happiness. This is not to denounce struggle, pain or vulnerability. These are the experiences of God in Christ and therefore likely to be experiences particularly faced by those journeying in holiness. This is not to be regretted but it must be acknowledged that the exploration of holiness can be, and should be, costly, for this is how it was with Christ. The way of Christ, and the way of happiness, is following a vocation to be in relationship with God, the people of God and the world that God loves, whatever the cost. The only arena

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<sup>62</sup> See 4.1.

available for this to happen is the complexity of everyday life. This is the message of the person of God through Jesus calling disciples in Galilee and the message of God through the Holy Spirit calling people in every generation.

## *Appendix 1*

### *Deed of Union, Section 2. Purposes and Doctrine<sup>1</sup>*

**3 Purposes.** The purposes of the Methodist Church are and have been since the date of union those set out in Section 4 of the 1976 Act.

**4 Doctrine.** The doctrinal standards of the Methodist Church are as follows:

The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the apostolic faith and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation. It ever remembers that in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its divinely appointed mission.

The doctrines of the evangelical faith which Methodism has held from the beginning and still holds are based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice. These evangelical doctrines to which the preachers of the Methodist Church are pledged are contained in Wesley's Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his sermons.

The Notes on the New Testament and the 44 Sermons are not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on Methodist preachers, but to set up standards of preaching and belief which should secure loyalty to the fundamental truths of the gospel of redemption and ensure the continued witness of the Church to the realities of the Christian experience of salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church, Volume 2* (London: Methodist Publishing, 2017), p. 213-4.

Christ's ministers in the church are stewards in the household of God and shepherds of his flock. Some are called and ordained to this occupation as presbyters or deacons. Presbyters have a principal and directing part in these great duties but they hold no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all the Lord's people and they have no exclusive title to the preaching of the gospel or the care of souls. These ministries are shared with them by others to whom also the Spirit divides his gifts severally as he wills.

It is the universal conviction of the Methodist people that the office of the Christian ministry depends upon the call of God who bestows the gifts of the Spirit the grace and the fruit which indicate those whom He has chosen.

Those whom the Methodist Church recognises as called of God and therefore receives into its ministry as presbyters or deacons shall be ordained by the imposition of hands as expressive of the Church's recognition of the minister's personal call.

The Methodist Church holds the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and consequently believes that no priesthood exists which belongs exclusively to a particular order or class of persons but in the exercise of its corporate life and worship special qualifications for the discharge of special duties are required and thus the principle of representative selection is recognised.

All Methodist preachers are examined tested and approved before they are authorised to minister in holy things. For the sake of church order and not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office the presbyters of the Methodist Church are set apart by ordination to the ministry of the word and sacraments.

The Methodist Church recognises two sacraments namely baptism and the Lord's Supper as of divine appointment and of perpetual obligation of which it is the privilege and duty of members of the Methodist Church to avail themselves.

This clause was amended, in minor respects, by the Conference in 1995, and further amended in 2012 to reflect the change of usage from 'minister' to 'presbyter' and to give explicit recognition to the diaconal order of ministry.

**5 Interpretation of Doctrine.** The Conference shall be the final authority within the Methodist Church with regard to all questions concerning the interpretation of its doctrines.

*Appendix 2*

*Documents Relating to the Empirical Research*



## RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

### Research Project Title:

What constitutes authentic holiness in a 21st Century British Methodist Congregation?

You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This information sheet is designed to provide you with all the information you might need. Please take time to read it carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

### What is the purpose of this project?

The project is exploring how a local Christian community within the Methodist tradition might embody holiness. Working with other leaders I seek to produce a programme for a youth group running during spring and summer 2015, the autumn 2015 season of house groups and also Sunday worship. In addition I seek to meet in a small group ('band') during spring 2015 to explore accountable discipleship.

### Why have I been invited to take part?

You are part of [church name deleted] and your minister is conducting this research with various leaders within his own congregation.

### Do I have to take part?

No. The research is entirely voluntary and you may decline to take part without any repercussions or consequences whatsoever. If you decide to take part and then change your mind, you should also know that you are free to withdraw from the project at any time and again with no repercussions or consequences.

### What will I have to do if I decide to take part?

If you are a part of the house group writing team or a youth leader within [youth group name deleted] you will be working with me to produce 6-8 session materials. If you are meeting with me as part of an 'Inspire Band' you will be experimenting with me in following the guidance and materials set out by the Inspire Movement (<http://inspiremovement.org>). After the sessions have been written and delivered or the experiment with the 'Inspire Band' has been completed, I will interview you for about an hour concerning your own perceptions of holiness. The technical term for this is a semi-structured interview, which is really like an in-depth conversation on specific topics, in this case concerning perceptions of holiness. The interview is not an exam. The object of the interview is not to see if you have the 'right' answers, but rather to explore with you in depth whatever views you hold on this issue. Your views are very important. The interviews will be held in your own home, or other place of your choosing where you feel entirely comfortable. They will be recorded so that an accurate record is produced. An electronic recorder will be used, and notes will then be transcribed from this. In some circumstances it may be desirable to have a follow-up interview/conversation, but for the majority of participants it should involve only one meeting. The meetings will take place during the summer/Autumn of 2015, but the overall project will not conclude until 2018 (submission date for DThM thesis at the University of Durham).

**What will I be asked to talk about during the interview?**

I will ask you to talk about your perceptions of holiness, how these perceptions have changed during the period of study and what thoughts you may have regarding the church being God's holy people. The specific questions will be formulated over the next few months and will be available prior to the interview. However, it is important that the interview is shaped more by what you feel is important to say rather than the questions I have created.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You may also find it very interesting and helpful to think deeply about this matter. We don't always give time to consider what we believe and the way we behave. This project will give you this opportunity. It is also hoped that the results of this project will be of assistance to others in better understanding the nature of Christian discipleship.

**What if something goes wrong?**

This research study is being conducted under the auspices of the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University. Should you wish to complain about your experience of this project you can contact the Chair of the University of Durham Theology and Religion Departmental Ethics Committee, Abbey House, Palace Green, Durham DH1 3RS (tel. 0191 3343940).

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All information which is collected about you and from you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you which is eventually published or otherwise disseminated will be anonymised, either by having your name removed or changed to a fictitious name. The only other people who will on occasion have access to the data (recordings, transcripts etc.) will be relevant supervising academic staff of the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University and external examiners for the DThM programme. Following publication of the DThM thesis, which is placed in the library of Durham University, all tapes and transcripts will be destroyed. Should you withdraw from the project at any time, you may request that any data concerning you be destroyed. The requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 will be met in full. This document comprises a 'fair processing statement' as required by the Act. Any data collected will be used only for the research purposes indicated above, and will be stored securely until being destroyed at the end of the project.

**What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The results of the project will be published in the form of a DThM thesis in Durham University library.

**Who is organising and supervising the research?**

This research project is being conducted by a Doctoral student in the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University. Professor Mike Higton and Dr Calvin Samuel are the academic supervisors. The project has been approved by the research ethics committee of the Department of Theology and Religion.

**Contact for further information:** Revd Philip Turner, [address, telephone and email deleted]

**UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM**  
**DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGION**  
**DEPARTMENTAL ETHICS COMMITTEE**  
**RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL FORM**

**Introduction**

All work with human volunteers carried out by members of the Department must be assessed for ethics approval, whether it is conducted by undergraduates, postgraduates or staff.

This form should be used by postgraduates and staff. Undergraduates should use the application form for research ethics approval contained in the dissertations handbook, unless they are specifically advised that they need to use this form.

Several categories of research require approval from other bodies: these include any research involving patients and users of the NHS, prisoners and young offenders, any persons to whom either the NHS or statutory social services have a duty of care. Please consult the chair of the Departmental Ethics Committee if you think this may be relevant in your case.

In addition to this signed application form/project proposal applications should include where applicable:

1. Recruitment Poster
2. Letter of invitation to participate
3. Information sheet/fair processing notice
4. Consent form/assent form
5. Access request/agreement
6. Interview schedule/questionnaire
7. Researcher's C.V.
8. Evidence of consultation with the University's Insurance Office
9. Other?

The copy of the consent form you will be asking participants – and where applicable parents and teachers – and the information sheet/fair processing notice must be written in layperson's language.

The term "participant" is used to cover any volunteers involved in the project, with the exclusion of the researcher and his/her supervisor.) An example consent form is included at the end of this form, and this should be followed as closely as possible.

If there are any matters relevant to this application which are not covered by this form, please use a separate sheet.

When completed this form should be forwarded to the postgraduate secretary for approval by the Departmental Ethics Committee.

Further copies of this form are available for download from the department website.

**SECTION A:**  
**SUITABILITY OF THE APPLICANT AND KEY COLLABORATORS**

**INVESTIGATOR**

1. Name:

Philip Turner

2. If undergraduate or postgraduate, state course:

Doctorate of Theology and Ministry

3. If undergraduate or postgraduate, name of supervisor:

Professor Mike Higton and Dr Calvin Samuel

4. If you have any co-workers, list their names, status, employer/department, research experience:

None

5. Please include a CV for Principal Investigator/s

**SECTION B DESCRIPTION OF WORK**

6. Title of project:

What constitutes authentic holiness in a 21st Century British Methodist Congregation?

7. Proposed means of publication (for students, this may be by dissertation; for staff, the type of publication envisaged should be indicated):

Doctoral dissertation

8. Aim of the project:

To explore and understand how a local Christian congregation within the Methodist tradition might embody holiness.

## 9. Design of study and methodology, in brief

Through participant observation and interviews within the church where I am Minister to discuss, design material and experiment in holy living. Specifically,

1. Work with other leaders in a group setting to produce material for a sermon series, small groups and youth groups on the topic of holiness. To interview the leaders individually.
2. Meet two other males fortnightly for three months as an experiment in accountable discipleship.
3. Through short street interviews ascertain the local public perception of its local church and holiness
4. To keep a researchers journal of thoughts, encounters and experiences.

## 10. PARTICIPANTS:

Intrusive research<sup>1</sup> involving adults without the capacity to consent must comply with the requirements of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and requires approval by an NHS Research Ethics Committee or the Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC).

a. Who are they (students, clergy...)?

b. If students: course, year, size of groups, % of students involved

(Names of students may be required subsequently)

c. How many participants are to be recruited?

d. Selection (e.g. age, sex)?

e. How are the participants to be recruited?

f. Is there any link with the investigator (supervisor, tutor, etc)?

g. How are the participants to be involved in the study?

<sup>1</sup> Intrusive research is defined as research that would be unlawful if it was carried out 'on or in relation to a person who had capacity to consent to it, but without their consent'.

11. What research tools do you plan to use (e.g. questionnaire, interview, focus groups, etc.)?

1. Participant observation
2. A recorded semi-structured interview.
3. Structured interview/social survey

If you plan to use a questionnaire, please include a copy of your questionnaire.

## 12. CARE AND PROTECTION OF RESEARCHER & PARTICIPANTS

a. Consider risks and hazards to researchers (e.g. lone working) as well as participants, if any?

In order for interviewees to be at ease most interviews are likely to take place in the participants home.

b. State precautions to minimise them:

The risks as minimal as all interviewees are known to the researcher. In order to be transparent as possible the researcher will make publically known the research. Interviews will be recorded.

13. Anticipated Benefits: What benefit (e.g. in terms of increased knowledge) is it hoped will arise from the work?

It is hoped that through the process of creating and delivering material for study the researcher will gain a deeper understanding of what constitutes holy living. Through the semi-structured interviews and participant observation the researcher hopes to gain an insight into perceptions and practices of holiness; how these have changed during group participation; and what is viewed as the most effective aid to growth in holiness. Through structured interviews/social survey to explore to what extent a local setting may be sympathetic to a local church seeking to embrace holiness.

14. Anticipated Risks:

As in 12.

## 15. Indemnification - Risk Assessment

State special arrangements for indemnification in the event of injury or non-negligent harm to the participants. (For most research done in the department using questionnaires or interviews, no special indemnification is required. In case of doubt, consult the university insurance officer.) Please include any relevant documentation from the University's insurance office.

No special indemnification is required

## 16. APPROPRIATENESS OF THE STUDY DESIGN AND CONDUCT

a. Has statistical advice been sought on study design?

YES

NO

NOT APPLICABLE

If YES, from whom? If NO, give reasons

b. Please describe the statistical/other rationale for the sample size/number of participants to be used in this study and how the study size will yield meaningful research results.

The research aims at producing an ethnography that richly describes the process and the interaction of those connected with their local church. While the research is specific the aims are nomothetic: I seek to generalise from the particular.

## 17. NATURE OF RECRUITMENT AND CONSENT

Please attach a copy of your information sheet and consent form. Where schoolchildren/minors are involved, there should also be an information sheet directed at the teachers, parents/guardians and an assent form.

a. Who will explain the investigation to the participant?

The researcher.

b. Will written explanation be given to the participant as a summary of the project written in layman's language?

Written explanation will be given.

c. Will written consent be obtained? This is the normal expectation; therefore if your response is that you do not intend to obtain written consent, please explain in detail:

Yes, except for the 'street' interview where verbal permission will be sought.

For further information, particularly in the area of consent (T&R section 17), please refer to the [example application form](#) on the [Research Office website](#).

18. REQUIRMENTS OF PROFESSIONAL CODE OF CONDUCT/PRACTICE/ETHICS AND APPLICABLE LEGISLATION

- a. Please state who has conducted an expert independent review of your proposed project, and his/her verdict. (For a student, this will be your research supervisor; for staff, the review may be by another member of the department.)

Professor Mike Higton and Dr Calvin Samuel, my doctoral supervisors. Their verdict is positive.

- b. Please tick to confirm that you completed the [Epigeum Ethics modules](#).

- c. Which Professional Code of Conduct/ Practice/ Ethics the applicant will adhere to?

Data protection Act

19. CONFIDENTIALITY & ANONYMITY

- a. Please indicate what steps will be taken to safeguard the anonymity and confidentiality of the participant's records, and confirm that the requirements of the Data Protection Acts (1998) will be complied with.

Data will be stored on a password protected computer and anonymised.

- b. Data storage/sharing:

- (i) Will a) personal data and b) anonymised research data in all formats be destroyed at the end of the project?

YES / ~~NO~~

- (ii) If NO, what further use do you intend to make of the media and what arrangements will be made for their secure storage?

- (iii) Will consent be requested for this future use?

~~YES~~/NO

If your response is "no", please give reasons:

I do not foresee a future use of data but if needed I would be happy to gain further consent.



## 20. PROJECT DURATION

(i) When do you hope to commence the project?

January 2015

(ii) When will the project finish

27 March 2016

(iii) how long will it take to complete?

Data analysis up until 2018

## 21. FUNDING

Where appropriate, please state the source of funding for the work

Currently no other sources of funding though it may be possible that the local church will cover administrative costs.

22. If there are any other matters relevant to the approval of the application which are not covered by this form, please use a separate sheet.

## 23. Check list

APPENDIX		Please tick or indicate N/A
	Recruitment Poster	
	Letter of invitation to participate	
	Information sheet/fair processing notice	√
	Consent form/assent form	
	Access request/agreement	
	Interview schedule/questionnaire	√
	C.Vs	
	Risk assessment	
	Evidence of consultation with the University's Insurance Office	
	Other?	

YOUR SIGNATURE:

DATE:

.....

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR:

DATE:

.....

DECLARATION BY CHAIR OF DEPARTMENTAL ETHICS COMMITTEE:

I confirm that:

1. I have read and approved this application for consideration by the Departmental Ethics Committee and
2. The principal investigator and other key researchers have the necessary expertise and experience and have access to the resources needed to conduct the proposed research successfully.
3. This application is approved\*/not approved\* by the Departmental Ethics Committee.

\* delete as appropriate

SIGNATURE OF CHAIR OF DEPARTMENTAL ETHICS COMMITTEE:

.....

Date: .....

Please note that this approval expires:

1. where the project continues unchanged, three years after the date of approval;
2. where there is any change to the project, from the date of that change;
3. where there is any change to the legislation/regulations affecting this project, from the date of that change.

RJS/2 December 2005/Revised October MJPP 2012



**CONSENT FORM**

Title of Project: Holiness in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century British Methodist Church

Name of Researcher: Revd Philip Turner

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated January 2015 for the above project	
2. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask any questions	
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason	
4. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and that the recordings will be stored securely and destroyed on completion	
5. I understand that my data will only be accessed by those working on the project	
6. I understand that my data will be anonymised prior to publication	
7. I agree to the publication of verbatim quotes/photographs	
8. I am willing to be contacted in the future regarding this project.	
9. I agree to take part in the above project	

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

**Semi-Structured Interviews  
of those engaged in the exploration of holiness.**

1. Tell me a little about your journey of faith.
2. I know we all fail at this, and don't live out our life as faith as we ought, but I wonder what sort of ways you try to express, practice or live out your faith?
3. I wonder if you can identify for me someone you have really looked up to?
4. What would say is the goal of Christian life?
5. In what way has holiness played a part in your vision of Christian life?
6. What would you say helps someone who is seeking to be a Christian today?
7. What would you say are the biggest obstacles to being a Christian today?
8. You've been involved in Hagios/fellowship bands/ writing material/leading house groups. What have you liked most about that? What would you say has been the more difficult or challenging aspects?
9. In what way does the word 'holy' help or hinder your thinking about your journey of faith?
10. What kind of teaching or learning about holiness have you had in the past?
11. In what way has your thinking about holiness evolved because of your participation in hagios/fellowship band/house groups?
12. If you were to offer a definition of holiness, what would you say?

*A Brief account of how the nine co-writers were selected*

The previous minister at Village Road had formed a network of house groups that had, over time, changed and expanded. Though published resources were sometimes used, more frequently the minister had written notes for the Village Road house groups to use. The gap between the previous minister leaving and myself not fully settled in my new context necessitated including others in the writing process. I sought to build on this collaborative approach, sensing the significant benefits to the discipleship of those involved in writing house and, therefore, the continuing ministry of Christ through the church.

The church was in need of a topic for the September to December 2015. I took soundings through pastoral conversations and leadership meetings as to how the church would feel about its next series of house group notes being themed around holiness. I felt a study on holiness would benefit the church and it would also be of immense value for my own research. The church leadership was aware of my research and had already sanctioned an exploratory survey during the community festival in May 2015. The wide consultation and slower pace of travel produced a more positive response than the hagois initiative and at every level the idea received a warm welcome. My sense was that people were intrigued by my enthusiasm for the theme.

Through the conversations that emerged I noticed those who were enthusiastic towards the initiative and who might be open to expressing their vocation as part of the church in a fresh way. Two people had been consistently part of the writing team for house group notes during my ministry in this church. Another two people had occasionally been part of the writing team. One person who was theologically and educationally trained approached me to offer to help and I approached another three people who I felt might have interesting insights, experience and expertise to offer.

The team first met on 28 April 2015, excluding two members: one who had another engagement and another who had a serious illness which would exclude him from writing, though he remained integral to the formation of ideas. I expressed my willingness at this stage to base the notes on any subject but that I did have something to bring, which I had highlighted to them in an email prior to the meeting. I explained that everything was provisional but that if they felt it was a good way forward then I would hand on an information sheet and would need them to complete a consent form to cover the ethical requirements of my course. I handed out a draft outline for a study series on holiness. We spent a few minutes silently reading those notes. Afterwards we had a wide-ranging conversation on holiness during which, when prompted, I offered my own insights and enthusiasm about holiness.

The group warmed to both my angle on holiness and the way I presented it, however it would be incorrect to view the group as uncritically compliant or unable to be fully themselves. Queenie argued that the material started in the wrong place: theologically it needed to start with God not with us. Edie argued that it was important to start where people are and then lead them forward. There was also nervousness, particularly among those newer to the house group writing team, and I suggested that we root each session in a Bible reading, an approach that Village Road had taken recently when writing house group notes. Furthermore, I felt uneasy when Oliver agreed to write the session on Christian Perfection, as I had only recently come to understand the doctrine. It felt particularly difficult to release this topic into his hands as I was worried that Oliver would root his writing in his own previously formed conceptions rather than looking at scripture afresh. It was only when the rest of the group challenged me that I realised that Oliver had looked at scripture afresh and it was me who was overly influenced by previous formed conceptions. I apologised.

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