HOLINESS & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Dialogue Report

Commissioned by
The Salvation Army and the Uniting Church in Australia

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Commissioned by
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Dedicated to the ongoing work of

The Salvation Army and the Uniting Church in Australia

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FOREWORD

Outwardly, the Christian traditions of The Salvation Army and the Uniting Church in Australia look very different. Of course, they do share a common Christian faith in the Good News of Jesus and strong historic links with the Methodist tradition; however they have each developed a distinctive way of living their Christian faith.

One of the exotic fruits of the movement for Christian unity is the surprising ways in which different communities are led to encounter each other. They are then moved to sit down and intentionally share their life and thinking to reveal a unity and sense of common purpose and action that had been unexamined, lost in the past or taken for granted.

Such is the case with this teaching document, *Holiness & Social Justice*, of the Uniting Church in Australia and The Salvation Army. These different communities have chosen to explore together two central themes from their common traditions – holiness and social justice – and provided a document that accomplishes three things:

1. Exploring these themes together produces a richer and more interesting document than if they had written it each by themselves.
2. It provides a commentary on holiness and social justice, themes that were not randomly chosen, but which have shaped them and given these communities their distinctiveness about how they live the Gospel.
3. The document helps them look in a fresh way at how holiness and social justice relate, and how they can continue to shape their lives so they can be of service and witness to the wider community

Both the themes of holiness and social justice are comprehensively covered – from Scripture, the theological traditions and from the lived experience of each community. Readers should note that the key issues are well introduced in the Small Group Study Guide which is an Appendix.

Holiness and social justice are a part of both the Uniting Church of Australia and The Salvation Army traditions; in this document they come into a dialogue. So this teaching document is directed to members of each community to help them understand their respective traditions and therefore to live their faith more authentically and intelligently. However, I also believe, this joint work gives witness to the wider Christian community and beyond, to help them to also ponder and understand these two key formative aspects of living the Christian life.

Holiness and social justice are intimately linked to the integrity of living the Gospel. They point to an integrity in who we are as Christians, both personally living our life in Christ in depth and an integrity in how we put into action a love of neighbour and a search for the common good. These two themes together function as a touchstone for the authenticity of our Christian witness to the Gospel.

While in the Christian understanding God is the ultimate source and guarantor of justice, we are called to put God's justice into practice. The wider Australian community expects to see us doing that. Caring for others and seeking the common good are what Christians do, even when uncomfortable words need to be spoken to the wider community about those who are forgotten and pushed to the edges of our society. Yes, that is what Christians do. The wider community also holds Christians to the same high standard when the Church fails to care or when it looks self-serving. 'Social justice' has some 'street cred'.

But what of 'holiness'? Unlike social justice, the word holiness strongly retains its rarefied 'churchy' origins. Yet it remains an inescapable word for Christians. While tracing holiness to God's own self, the document boldly affirms the holiness of God with us.

> *It is the mystery of Christian existence that human beings are invited to receive the life of God, in fellowship with Christ and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God. It is therefore possible to speak of holiness in people, where this invitation is accepted.*[1]

1 *Holiness & Social Justice*, 5.

Here the Christian's integrity is really put to the test. Not only are we called to do God's justice but also we are called to share God's holiness. Our own holiness cannot be replaced by action for social justice. As Pope Francis keeps forcefully reminding us, the Christian community is more than a 'non-government' social service organisation or justice advocate. He says, 'The Church is not a shop, she is not a humanitarian agency, the Church is not an NGO. The Church is sent to bring Christ and his Gospel to all… The Church must bring Jesus, the love of Jesus, the charity of Jesus.'[2]

Bringing social justice and holiness into dialogue and opening up these two keys to Christian identity are a real personal, searching challenge for members of The Salvation Army, for those in the Uniting Church in Australia and for each and every Christian. It is an invitation to be humbly courageous and not hide our light under a tub – to discern and put into practice God's justice and open ourselves to accept God's holiness into our lives.

This teaching document therefore moves beyond an ecumenical agreed statement or a common declaration and is a gift to us of two outwardly different traditions, as spiritual reading to empower not only our God-given mission, but ourselves as missionaries. It must also make us recall with deep thanks and wonder the men and women we have known who have embodied in their lives a determination to put God's justice into practice and have shone with God's holiness.

As a Roman Catholic it is not only a delight to be asked to write a Foreword, but a personal challenge to the integrity of my own faith. I hope, therefore, that *Holiness & Social Justice* will not only teach but also guide and inspire.

Fr. Denis Stanley

Episcopal Vicar for Ecumenism and Interfaith Relations
Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne

2 General Audience. Wednesday 23 October 2013.

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PREFACE

The Salvation Army (TSA) and the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) have engaged in official dialogue for some years, initially through TSA Southern Territory and the Christian Unity Working Group of the UCA Assembly. This earlier dialogue produced a report, *A Commitment to the Gospel* (2003),[1] which identified the absence of church-dividing issues between the two churches and the presence of a strong common heritage in the Methodist tradition. Shortly afterwards, there was an international dialogue between TSA and the World Methodist Council (WMC) which arrived at similar conclusions.[2] TSA Southern Territory and the UCA refreshed their dialogue teams in 2005 in order to review the 2003 Dialogue Report and to identify what more could be achieved. These meetings resulted in a recognition that both churches have a strong theological commitment to social justice as well as historical links to 'holiness' as a spirituality and as an understanding of Christian faith and life. As a result, the Dialogue was refreshed in 2012 with the invitation to TSA Eastern Territory to participate and the appointment of new teams, with the intention of creating a teaching document on 'Holiness and Social Justice'. The present document is the fulfilment of this intention.

TSA shares a common Methodist heritage with the UCA. While Reformed churches have generally preferred to use the terminology of sanctification rather than holiness, Reformed accounts of Christian living also have much in common with the teachings of TSA. The UCA *Basis of Union* 'heeds the Reformation witness in the Scots Confession of Faith, the *Savoy Declaration*',[3] as well as Wesley's forty-four sermons. Congregationalism's Savoy Declaration articulates the Reformed understanding of sanctification thus:

> *They that are united to Christ, effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection,*

1 The Salvation Army/Uniting Church in Australia Dialogue Report. *A Commitment to the Gospel*. 2003.

2 The Salvation Army/World Methodist Council Dialogue Report. *Working Together in Mission*. 2011.

3 *Basis of Union (BOU)*, 10. Reproduced in Owen, *Witness of Faith*.

are also further sanctified really and personally through the same virtue, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened, and mortified, and they more and more quickened, and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.[4]

The statement on sanctification concludes with the affirmation that 'through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome, and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God'.[5] In that statement there is nothing that today's Salvationist would reject. The TSA doctrinal statement on the subject is the essence of simplicity, avoiding a detailed explanation of sanctification, and is capable of more than one interpretation:

We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.[6]

The following broad themes of the doctrine of holiness, derived from the Scriptures, are carried in the DNA of both TSA and UCA:

1. Grace is not only God's gracious favour bestowed upon the undeserving; it is also God's empowerment, enabling lives that reflect God's holy character.
2. In both Old and New Testaments, love for God and neighbour is the characteristic mark of those who are holy.
3. 'Perfection' is not to be understood in the philosophical sense of absoluteness, but in terms of the loving character of God. It is not so much a moral category as a theological one.

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4 *A Declaration of the Faith and Order owned and practised in the Congregational Churches in England; agreed upon and consented unto by their elders and messengers in their meeting at the Savoy, 12 October 1658*. Chapter 13: Of Sanctification. Article 1. In Australia, the Congregational tradition was arguably the most 'liberal' in theology of the three churches entering into the Uniting Church, making it a likely place to look for tensions with traditional Methodist understandings.

5 *Declaration*, Chapter 13, Article 3.

6 *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*. Chapter 10: Full Salvation. The Doctrine of Holiness.

4. The gift of the Spirit, given to all believers, both demands and enables a new way of living.
5. Personal holiness can never be divorced from engagement with the world and has profoundly political dimensions.
6. The perfecting of human beings, so that by grace they become partakers of the divine nature, is but part of a broader perfecting of all creation in an eschatological renewal of the entire universe.

The Dialogue teams comprise four members each, with two members from each of the TSA Territories.[7] We acknowledge that we are all more or less Anglo-Australian in background, the significance of which has only dawned upon us slowly. Our common cultural experience has been at least as important as our common Christian commitment in allowing us to speak 'with one voice' in this document. Earlier drafts of this document spoke of 'indigenous Australians' and it was drawn to our attention that many Australian Aborigines prefer to be known as Aborigines, or as 'Kooris' or other local designations.[8] We therefore warn the reader in advance that, despite the frequent use of universal language, this document is best read as an Anglo-Australian perspective on holiness and social justice.

We are grateful to Commissioner Raymond Finger for his formulation of the initial task. A number of other people have assisted our work in producing this document. We thank in particular Sandy Crowden, Jason Davies-Kildea, Wayne Ellis, Arseny Ermakov, Anna Grant Henderson, Stuart McMillan, Geoff Thompson, Geoff Webb and Dan Wootton. We are grateful to the Salvation Army team that produced a full critical review of an earlier draft of this document. We are especially grateful to our Roman Catholic friend, Fr. Denis Stanley, for his affirmative and encouraging Foreword.

Beginning in 2013, we have met for eleven meetings in Melbourne and two in Sydney (each meeting for one day). A number of papers

7 The decision of The Salvation Army to form one Territory for the whole of Australia is now being implemented, though without impact on the course of this dialogue.

8 We have therefore adopted the older terminology of 'Aborigine' and 'Aboriginal Australians', knowing that not all of the peoples so designated prefer that terminology.

have been prepared for the dialogue and these papers have become the main elements of this document. We are grateful for the openness of our conversation and the mutual hospitality that we have enjoyed. We are grateful that we have been able to concur in a common text with a unified voice. We commend this document to our churches for further study.

1 GOD: HOLY AND JUST

Holiness is primarily to be defined in terms of the reality of God. There is no secure definition of holiness apart from this reference to the reality of God beyond human knowledge and even comprehension. For Christians, our understanding of holiness is mainly informed by the self-revelation of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and the whole covenantal history of Israel which allows Christians to refer to Jesus as the Christ. It is the mystery of Christian existence that human beings are invited to receive the life of God, in fellowship with Christ and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God. It is therefore possible to speak of holiness in people, where this invitation is accepted.

Holiness is primarily to be defined in terms of the reality of God.

Christians see in Jesus an image of the invisible God in the form of humble, self-giving love. This love is not limited and partial, as our loves mostly are. It encompasses the whole created order and holds all things in being. It maintains the harmony and unity of the whole, which we despise and break at our peril. This love is not quenched even by death. There is a place for us all within it, which challenges us to respect the myriad of places given to others.

Christians are addressed by God through the power of the Holy Spirit, calling us to recognise how we participate in the brokenness of the world and to turn to God for forgiveness and new life. Indeed, genuine holiness typically results in increased awareness of how radically we fall short of the glory of God and how dimly we recognise the loving way of God that opens up before us in each moment of life. We who write this text acknowledge that the holiness of which we write is not ours to name, except as we have been assisted by the Holy Spirit of God.

From our human perspective, we can accept the injunction found in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians: 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you to will and to work for his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:12).[9] This catches both the uncertainty of the life of faith (fear and trembling) and the secure divine purpose which we receive in faith. Holiness in God's people comes about through receiving and following the promptings of the Holy Spirit in each moment. This often seems to involve living into the solidarity that God has established between all creatures, which then provides the basis for good and moral behaviour.

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'Justice' refers to this harmony between creatures (and especially humans in society) originally intended by God at creation. It also refers to the need for restoration of justice where this has been broken. Due to our lack of understanding of God's order and our long history of living in ways that depart from it, we require the help of the Holy Spirit to discern the reality of injustice and remedies for it. 'Social justice' refers to dimensions of justice pertaining to the life of societies, both in creating and in addressing injustices. It includes the challenge to each individual to maintain and build up the common good of the society, within an open horizon which can extend to a care for the natural world and for future generations. In Christian understanding, God is the ultimate source and guarantor of justice.

'Holiness' therefore refers primarily to the being and activity of God in creation and redemption, with 'social justice' referring to the need for the restoration of God's good order after this has been disrupted and distorted. It follows that seeking to understand holiness in

9 Biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version. Copyright of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1989.

terms of observable human actions and attitudes will inevitably lead to misunderstandings and distortions. It also follows that, as Christians, we should not trust to human ideals of society as the main determinants of social justice, however helpful these may be as ingredients of our spiritual discernment. In biblical understanding, holiness is both a key feature of the mysterious reality of God and a central part of the calling that we have from God. 'The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy' (Leviticus 19:1-2). Holiness therefore comes onto our horizon as a possibility to be willingly received, in dependence upon the empowering activity of the Holy Spirit of God.

It is paradoxical that these proposed definitions and understandings are inevitably expressed in words that are easily questioned and contested, so that without some awareness of the realities to which they point, the words hang in the air. The journey into a positive understanding of these ideas does itself stand in need of the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Such assistance is from God. We should recognise that we need it and ask for it in prayer.

Ideas of holiness and justice that seek definitions in terms of ideal morality, exemplary piety or clever forms of social organisation tend to miss the mark, since the essence of both holiness and justice does not reside in human beings, but in God. Dwelling on our own virtues is a temptation to be resisted. Holiness and justice are non-manipulable. They depart if we attempt to use a reputation for holiness or justice in unworthy causes. They also depart when separated from the love of God. Holiness is our point of connection with God, making discernment of God's justice potentially available.

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In his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth (1886-1968) places his discussion of the holiness of God as a necessary counterpoint to the theme of God's grace, with both qualities seen as essential and uniquely

located in God and arising on the basis of God's love. 'We begin our consideration of divine love with a study of the concept of divine grace as it stands directly confronted with and controlled and purified by the concept of divine holiness'.[10] For Barth, holiness is virtually defined by its reference to the reality of God. 'God's loving is a divine being and action distinct from every other loving in the fact that it is holy. As holy, it is characterised by the fact that God, as He seeks and creates fellowship, is always the Lord.'[11] In similar vein, the righteousness, or justice, of God is set in connection to the mercy of God.[12] Mercy without justice is not of God, and neither is justice without mercy.

Barth's doctrine of God builds upon traditional lists of the attributes of God, with the novel and significant difference that these attributes or qualities are not treated as separate items, as if they all stood in the same relationship to the reality of God. Barth takes very seriously the oneness of God and even the simplicity of God. He writes of the being of God as the One who loves in freedom, which provides a way of explicating the basic belief that 'God is'. He then treats the attributes of God as 'the perfections of the divine loving', in three pairs (grace and holiness, mercy and righteousness, and patience and wisdom),[13] followed by 'the perfections of the divine freedom', in three pairs (unity and omnipresence, constancy and omnipotence, and eternity and glory).[14]

It is worth noting the conceptual clarity and depth that Barth achieves through these mutually complementary pairings of concepts. Abstract ideas are ours to deploy in ways that suit ourselves, but the pairing of conceptual contraries, such as mercy and justice, without a higher vantage point from which to adjudicate which might be superior in what circumstance, frustrates our grasp. We think that there is a similar value to the conjoining of holiness and social justice which sharpens and deepens the challenge of each of these concepts.

10 K Barth. *Church Dogmatics,* II:1, 353.

11 Barth, *CD*, II:1, 359.

12 Barth, *CD*, II:1, 368-405.

13 Barth, *CD*, II:1, 351-439

14 Barth, *CD*, II:1, 440-678.

We may ask what place this leaves for holiness and righteousness as attributes of people. Barth is quite explicit in teaching that there is no conceptual problem here. 'The holiness of this God demands and enforces the holiness of His people. It requires that His own divine confrontation of the world and all men [sic] should find a human (and as such very inadequate, but for all its inadequacy, very real) correspondence and copy in the mode of existence of this people.'[15] Barth, along with the Reformed tradition in general, prefers to speak of sanctification rather than holiness here, but this conceptual preference is more cultural than theological. Reformed caution can rightly extend to human claims concerning holiness, but not to the reality of God's holy work in human lives and human history.

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For Christians, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is normative for our understanding of the reality of God within our human history, calling and empowering us to receive and live out God's love through the ongoing action of the Holy Spirit. This allows us to recognise some important consequences for our understanding of social justice that are embedded in the reality of Christ. Jesus was executed by the Romans, on the urging of the Jewish authorities, for broadly political reasons, so that we see the presence of God in solidarity with the innocent victims of political authorities. Indeed, the holiness of Jesus can be seen in his steadfast acceptance of his fate at the hands of these authorities, in obedience to the will of God. Jesus himself was born in a stable, so that the trajectory of his life was from the margins to the cross, rather than with the dominant social groupings of the time.

God's justice is more than an ideal of disinterested love, whether considered individually or collectively. 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth' (Romans 1:18). God is the judge of all, including our human ideals and our (limited

15 Barth, *CD*, IV:2, 501.

and one-sided) recognition of truth. Paul's witness in this passage is to the judgement of God against idolatry and the resulting damage when disorderly passions gain control of our behaviour, but the point is even more general, that God's justice is what we ultimately have to face. As Christians, we hear the gracious promise of God that justice and mercy are one in the holiness of God. The real loss and damage of injustice can only be made good by humans in partial and limited ways. The possibility of real restitution beyond our human possibilities offers a tantalising vision of hope that God's justice cannot be so partial and inadequate.

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We need to move away from an individualist perspective which dissolves all relationships of solidarity, leading to the refusal of responsibility for caring for others and to an unbridgeable gap between the sufferings and death of Jesus and that of any other being. The early Christian preaching repeatedly emphasised that Jesus died 'for us'. Whatever else this means, there is a solidarity with our lives and our destiny asserted here that makes sense if we are found in this relationship. This is a central part of what we understand by the reality of God, as it is ultimately God who guarantees the reliability of this solidarity and of our redemptive relationship with Jesus, leading to real solidarity with each other. Our own standing before God is somehow altered by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

We also need to avoid an over-emphasis upon our own individual redemption. The healing of the estrangement of humanity from God achieved by Jesus is not simply for each individual who accepts it. All our relationships are reset by God's action so that we return to our proper solidarity with each other. The holiness of God stretches to include all creatures, once again, in the harmonious solidarity of the peaceable kingdom (Isaiah 11:1-9), God's *shalom*. Holiness is based in the reality of God, who is one. The idea that our world is a created reality also allows us to see it as unified, as deriving from the one creator. This provides a secure basis for solidarity between creatures, non-human as well as human.

The apparent discrepancies between this exalted vision of God's shalom and our human history were already a cause for lamentation prior to the time of Jesus. 'O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen? Or cry to you, "Violence!" and you will not save?' (Habakkuk 1:2). The oppressive violence of Assyrian armies subjugating all before them casts a fatal shadow over the vision of the peaceable kingdom which Habakkuk invokes (2:1-3, 14). The response from God to the prophet's cry tells of the downfall of the Assyrians at the hand of the Babylonians, and the subsequent judgement on the Babylonians, as brought about by God. The prophet desists from his lament: 'But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him' (Habakkuk 2:20).

Whatever else it is, social justice is about justice. For Christians, justice, or righteousness, is of God. Therefore holiness points us to God, the source and judge of all the world. This should lead us to recognise that human ideas of justice, while important, are not ultimate. God's justice is holy and is not to be presumed upon by us. The prophetic claim to speak the word of the Lord, particularly in judgement on wrongdoing, is a most risky business. A Christian understanding of social justice therefore requires a recognition of the essential relevance of the theme of holiness to a proper approach to the theory and practice of social justice.

Biblical Foundations of the Doctrine of Holiness

The idea of 'the holy' as that elemental 'otherness' before which we stand in awe, reverence and fear, predates both the Hebrew and Christian religions. In such a concept there is no explicit connection with an understanding of God as a loving Creator or a personal Being. In the covenantal theology of the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, the 'otherness' of God is revealed as coexisting with God's love and creativity, making our access to God possible. In older approaches to the Hebrew Scriptures, the idea of 'holiness' was not seen as carrying any necessary moral or ethical implications and the term was understood to refer primarily to a state of exclusion from the ordinary.[16] The Hebrew words *qadosh* and

16 MD Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, 146.

qadesh and their Greek equivalents *hagios*/*hagiosyne* were thought to have had reference only to a status of cultic separation. This sharp division between the ritual and the moral aspects of life reflects modern thinking and fails to appreciate that ancient peoples wove the ritual and moral aspects of life into a more seamless whole.[17] A careful study of Leviticus 19, for example, shows that the ritual codes of Israel were linked with identity, belonging, personal morality, and justice. The command 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy' (Lev. 19:1) frames the ritual codes that follow as they require such things as honesty, hospitality and respect for others. In the New Testament, the people of God are defined as the 'holy ones' (*hagioi* – saints) because they belong to God (they are God's 'set apart ones'). But at the same time these set apart ones also reflect God's own holy character as they receive and live out of the love of God which can be seen in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Pet. 2:9). God is the loving creator whose purpose for the world is fullness of life. Several persons are said to have reflected the holy character of God by walking closely with *Yahweh*. These include Noah, described as a man blameless among the people of his time (Gen. 6:5-9), and Abraham, called to walk with God and be blameless (Gen. 11:31-12:4; 17:1).[18]

> *[The Old Testament] understands holiness as something ultimately grounded in the moral character of the God of Israel, whose chief attributes of unfailing love, mercy and forgiveness mark him off as different from humankind, yet which are intended to transform humanity into what it is unable fully to achieve itself.*[19]

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17 We acknowledge the helpful contribution of Arseny Ermakov to our work in this section, particularly around this point. See the collection of essays in AB Latz and A Ermakov, (eds.). *Purity: Essays in Bible and Theology*, which considers the role of purity as an organising social norm in ancient societies.

18 The Authorised Version's translation of the Hebrew word *tamim* to refer to these patriarchs as 'perfect' (e.g. Gen. 6:9; Job 1:1) is somewhat misleading. They were certainly not without fault in the absolute sense, as their recorded behaviour makes clear. *Tamim* indicates completeness, or soundness . To be 'perfect' in the Old Testament sense was to be a blameless person of integrity who walked closely with God.

19 J Rogerson. 'What is Holiness?' SC Barton (ed.). *Holiness Past and Present*, 21.

In Deuteronomy, holiness is based on God's covenant-making with Israel. God's love for Israel and Israel's love for God provides the basis and the substance of God's covenant with Israel (Deut. 5:1-4). The characteristic stamp of cosmic orderliness in Deuteronomy requires eternal and unalterable maintenance of the divine order, giving life and substance to this love between God and Israel. The *shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 lies at the heart of the Old Testament and continues to be recited in the Jewish synagogue. 'Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.' This, said Jesus, was the first and greatest commandment, followed by the second, invoking Leviticus 19:18, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:29-31). The prophetic tradition of the 8th century BCE continued the idea that God's holiness is closely associated with God's righteousness and provides the standard by which the nations are judged and by which Israel in particular is both judged and called back to its covenant relationship with God, in which real participation in God's righteous holiness is possible (Hosea 6:1-6, Amos 5:1-7).

In the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, while there is direct continuity with Old Testament concepts of holiness, there is also radical reinvention. For one thing, the location of holiness is moved.[20] Holiness looks different now; it looks like Jesus.[21] In the holy character of Jesus, there is a power present to make holy all who come within its influence. Craig Blomberg refers to this as 'contagious holiness'.[22] Kenneth Walters sees the heavenly realm encroaching upon the earthly realm in Jesus so that 'where contact with God once meant destruction

In the holy character of Jesus, there is a power present to make holy all who come within its influence.

20 SC Barton. 'Dislocating and Relocating Holiness: A New Testament Study'. SC Barton (ed.). *Holiness Past and Present*, 197.

21 Barton. 198.

22 C Blomberg. *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*. Blomberg uses the terms 'contagious' and 'invasive' holiness. The idea of holiness as 'contagious' is not foreign to the Old Testament (e.g. Ex. 29:37), though it becomes more definitive when applied to Jesus.

for any earthly being or object, contact with God in Christ now means sanctification and life'.[23] The inapproachability of the Holy God should not be overstated. Destruction usually came because of some breach in the established patterns of approach, such as in the story of Nadab and Abihu who offered 'unauthorised fire' before the Lord and were consumed (Lev. 10:1-14). The receiving of Isaiah's prophetic commission shows that contact with Yahweh could also mean the removal of guilt and preparedness for service (Isaiah 6:1-8).[24]

... holiness should be perceived in terms of 'presence' rather than 'withdrawal'.

The presence of Christ and his transformative impact on those who encounter him challenges concepts of holiness as 'separation' or 'withdrawal'. These concepts have led to practices of sanctification that emphasise distance from the wider society and culture.[25] Holiness in the Scriptures has never been exclusively equated with God's withdrawal or absence. On the contrary, the language of holiness consistently refers to the presence of God in the human or heavenly realms. Therefore, the notion of separation should not be seen as the primary meaning for holiness in the Scripture. Rather, holiness should be perceived in terms of 'presence' rather than 'withdrawal'. The idea of holiness understood as powerful, contagious, transformative and inclusive presence, as exemplified in Jesus of Nazareth, moves us away from presenting holiness as a static category of status or separation and towards a more dynamic and dialectical concept that embraces both notions of presence and being set apart.[26]

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23 KL Walters, 'Holiness in New Testament Perspective.' KW Mannoia & D Thorsen (eds.). *The Holiness Manifesto*, 52.

24 Johnson argues that God's primary purpose in making people holy is participation in the restoration of creation to its divine purpose. A Johnson. *Holiness and the Missio Dei*.

25 In a response to an earlier draft of this document, Lieutenant-Colonel Geoff Webb commented that holiness understood as separation contributed to a narrowly individualistic understanding in the mid 20th century (a 'long dark flea-hunt of the soul'), that blunted any earlier emphasis on social justice as part of our understanding of holiness.

26 This paragraph draws upon A Ermakov, 'Separation or Presence? Re-imagining the Biblical Theology of Holiness'. J Broward & TJ Oord (eds.). *Renovating Holiness*, 148-152.

Perhaps nowhere in the New Testament is the language of holiness more confronting than in the teaching of Jesus that the children of God shall be 'perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect' (Matthew 5:48). The word *teleioi* (translated as 'perfect') cannot, of course, mean perfection in any absolute sense since only God is absolutely perfect, however we understand that. Perfection for human beings means mature, fully grown persons who have reached an appointed end or purpose (*telos*), who are functioning according to an intended design. A relative perfection, or maturity, defined in terms of love, is the goal and focus of Christian experience. Where we are victims, the challenge is to forgive those who persecute us. Where we are perpetrators of injustice, however unwittingly, the challenge is to acknowledge our wrongdoing and seek restitution for those we have wronged.

The Apostle Paul developed a theology of holiness that was profoundly aware of the moral confusion that could arise when Gentiles became part of a formerly Jewish church (*ekklesia*). The word *hagioi* ('holy ones', 'saints') is Paul's favourite term for believers. He addresses them as such in the greetings of four letters (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Philippians) and on twenty-one other occasions. In Paul's earliest letter, 1 Thessalonians, holiness is both the property of (4:8) and the activity of (4:3-4,7) the Spirit. The faithfulness, hope, steadfastness and love that characterise the Thessalonians as God's holy people are the fruit of the Spirit's indwelling. But this Spirit is very closely associated with the Son in whose steps the Thessalonians follow, becoming like him as they face adversity. In Galatians, the Spirit is 'the Spirit of the Son' (Gal. 4:4-6) who 'gave himself up for our sins' (Gal. chapters 1-2) 'to deliver us from the present evil age' (Gal. chapters 5-6). In Paul's theology, holiness takes a cruciform shape – it is crucifixion to the flesh and the world (Gal. 5:25; 6:14) and with Christ (Gal. 2:19-20).[27] The

… holiness takes a cruciform shape – it is crucifixion to the flesh and the world (Gal. 5:25; 6:14) and with Christ (Gal. 2:19-20).

27 MJ Gorman, 'You Shall Be Cruciform for I Am Cruciform: Paul's Trinitarian Reconstruction of Holiness'. KE Brower & A johnson (eds.). *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, 148–166. Also K Brower. *Living as God's Holy People: Holiness and Community in Paul*.

Father's dual gift of the Spirit and the Son fulfils the promise of God to include the Gentiles in the covenant community (Gal. 4:4-6). The fruit of the Spirit is the result of the indwelling in believers' hearts of the Spirit of God's Son (Gal. 5:22-25).

In Romans, believers have 'died to sin' and so can no longer continue to walk in it (Rom. 6:3). Believers are 'dead to sin' and yet the struggle with sin goes on. They are not, through faith in Christ, made sinlessly perfect. How can this be explained? Are believers dead to sin and alive to it at one and the same time? While sin still exists in a Christian's life it is no longer to rule (Rom. 6:12). Believers may sometimes be overtaken and overcome by sin, but sin is no longer the ruling force of their lives. Sin is not their master precisely because they are not under law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14). Grace is not only God's gracious favour bestowed upon the undeserving; it is also God's empowerment and enabling.

In the book of Hebrews, holiness is no longer about purity and impurity but about solidarity.

In the book of Hebrews, holiness is no longer about purity and impurity but about solidarity. Believers stand in solidarity with the humanity of Christ, by his sharing in their flesh and blood, accepting the defilement of death and overcoming it. 'Both the one who makes holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So, Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters' (Heb. 2:11). Through the death of Christ, believers are themselves consecrated as priests to offer up an acceptable sacrifice of praise to God. He is holy, and we are made holy through his sacrifice. This holiness, often called 'positional', refers to the status of a person before God, which does not focus on qualifications for this status other than the decision of God for the person. This holiness is also primarily corporate, referring to the gathered body of the Church rather than to individual persons. On the basis of this corporate and positional holiness, exhortations will be given later in the epistle to individual behaviours that honour God and thus reflect this corporate identity.[28] While the note of positional holiness on the basis of Christ's finished work is strong in Hebrews,

28 Walters, *The Holiness Manifesto*, 38-56, esp. 42-44. Walters asserts that the corporate and individual aspects of holiness are inextricably interrelated.

there is also a call to moral and spiritual discipline developed through the fires of persecution.

The mainstream Protestant tradition, following Luther, has often tended to overlook the canonical witness of non-Pauline themes such as are found in the Book of James. Yet this little epistle includes such important themes as concern for the poor, the search for purity of heart, the shunning of double-mindedness, a vision of Christianity as a way of life in the wisdom tradition, the conviction that faith without works is dead, and that orthodoxy without heart religion is vanity.[29] In 1 Peter, God's elect are strangers in the world scattered all over the Mediterranean and 'chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood' (1 Pet. 1:1-2). Peter draws on Leviticus when he urges believers 'as obedient children [not to] conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: be holy because I am holy' (1 Pet. 1:14-16, cf. Lev. 11:44-45). Peter extends into the New Testament era the Old Testament concept of the people of God as a holy nation; 'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' (1 Pet. 2:9 cf. Ex. 19:6; 22:31). The holiness Peter envisages does not, however, involve physical separation from the world or seeing unbelievers in an adversarial manner; it does involve engagement, 'the hammering out of the good news within the lived realities of ordinary life'.[30] The Gospel is not just a matter of getting one's sins forgiven. It involves participating in the very nature of God, being transformed more and more into the image of God (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

There is little room for a morally flabby religion in the words of 1 John 3:3-11. 'None who are born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning because they have been born of God.' The insertion of the word 'habitual' so that the sense is 'they cannot sin habitually' rather than 'they cannot sin at all' is illegitimate on any linguistic grounds. It is, however, helpful in distancing the teaching of 1 John from the idea that there is no place at all for any

29 DW Dayton. 'The Holiness Witness in the Ecumenical Church'. *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 23:1-2 (Spring Fall 1988), 92-106.

30 JB Green. 'Living as Exiles: the Church in the Diaspora in 1 Peter'. KE Brower & A Johnson (eds.). *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, 324-25.

Since 'love' is a relational term, we ought not to understand 'perfection' here as something static but as a dynamic quality growing toward fuller completion.

kind of sin in believers, a possibility that has already been conceded (and provided for) in 1 John 2:1. What the epistle seems to teach is that while sin is a possibility in the life of the Christian it is the exception rather than the rule. Sin does not characterise the life of the Christian, though it may at times mar it. It is not possible, at least in the theology of 1 John, that anyone born of God, who walks in the light as God is in the light, and who loves as God loves, could live a life controlled by sin and characterised by disobedience. 1 John 4:16-18 refers to 'perfect love' as a quality that 'drives out fear'. Since 'love' is a relational term, we ought not to understand 'perfection' here as something static but as a dynamic quality growing toward fuller completion.

The Book of Revelation is pervaded with a sense of the holy, for the Holy One is at its centre, and a numberless crowd of holy people (the saints, *hagioi*) gather with similarly numberless angels to glorify this God in endless praise. At the heart of this final New Testament book is a conquering Lamb who shares his victory with saints described as having been made pure; they have finally overcome and now take their place in the heavenly court eternally praising their deliverer (Rev. 7:9-17). Here, as elsewhere in the New Testament, the word 'saints' refers to 'persons who are holy because of God's gracious choice of them, [those] who have a new ground of existence, who have been oriented away from the world and turned toward God, and not primarily to persons who are morally and ethically perfect'.[31] Yet again, we see the complementary nature of a positional holiness that has actual holiness as its necessary concomitant. The saints of Revelation

… we see the complementary nature of a positional holiness that has actual holiness as its necessary concomitant.

31 GF Hawthorne. 'Holy, holiness'. RP Martin & PH Davids (eds.). *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Development*, 488.

are those 'who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus' (Rev. 14:12). It is not 'righteousness' forensically conceived that is in view here but righteous actions appropriate to a holy people.

In the Book of Revelation triumph over evil is not only accomplished on the personal and individual level. The view of holiness in Revelation provides a model for contemporary political theology that involves the critique of entrenched powers.[32] Revelation therefore is in one sense a holiness tract announcing the final downfall of evil through the triumph of the Lamb, a triumph shared with his holy ones. The witness of the saints to the triumph of the Lamb and their denunciation of the Empire makes the holiness of the saints something dangerously political.[33] The symbol of the New Jerusalem points beyond both the personal and the political toward a universal cosmic renewal – 'the invasion of earth by heaven, thereby finally entirely sanctifying the earthly realm'.[34]

Biblical Foundations of Social Justice

God's holy nature is revealed in his righteousness, justice, steadfast love and faithfulness (Psalm 89:14, Isaiah 5:16). Throughout the Bible there is a recurrent call for God's people to live justly (Genesis 18:19, Amos 5:21, Micah 6:8, Psalm 82, 3-4).

The biblical view of humankind created in the image of God presents us with the obligation to treat every human being as a person of worth with a right to be treated justly (Genesis 1:27), as well as a responsibility to care for 'God's garden' (Genesis 2:15).

In the New Testament, social justice is integral to life in the Kingdom of God and is in fact evidence of God's reign. It is a dominant theme in the ministry of Jesus, who chose Isaiah's prophecy of good news to the poor and release of the captives as the clearest way to express the nature of his own ministry (Luke 4: 18-19). Jesus affirmed that the righteousness of his disciples should exceed that of the scribes

32 See the discussion of Revelation as a critique of the Roman system of power in R Bauckham. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 35-39.

33 Bauckham, 91-92.

34 B Witherington. *Revelation*, 277.

and pharisees who have 'neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith' (Matthew 23:23). The strongest motivation for both the life of holiness and action toward social justice comes from Jesus' summary of the commandments in terms of the need to 'love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind … and love your neighbor as yourself' (Matthew 22:37), because 'on those two commandments hang all the law and the prophets' (Matthew 22:40).

We conclude that the roots of Christian understandings of social justice are to be found throughout the biblical text.

We conclude that the roots of Christian understandings of social justice are to be found throughout the biblical text. Although this is most unmistakable in the prophetic literature, these understandings permeate all of the Old and New Testament material. Throughout the biblical material, social justice is clearly linked to holiness – both the holy nature of God and of God's call on our lives, and the human striving for holiness, frequently expressed as the individual's walk with God. This can be seen in Micah 6:8:

> *He has told you, oh mortal, what is good,*
> *And what does the LORD require of you*
>
> *but to do justice,*
> *and to love kindness,*
>
> *and to walk humbly with your God?*

The Hebrew word *mishpat*, translated here as 'justice', is not a purely legal term. In its original usage, it referred to the restoration of a situation or environment which promoted equity and harmony, or *shalom*, in a community. This concept expresses a sense of care and concern for all of the community, primarily manifesting as a concern for those less fortunate in society, for those without protection or security: the widow, the orphan, strangers in the land. Fundamentally, this is an expression of love for the neighbour.

'Kindness' is often a weak word in English, suggesting little more than friendliness or a pleasant disposition. The semantic range of the Hebrew word *hesed* is much stronger. It is used to describe the steadfast love

of God, that love shown by God for the human world and the whole of creation. Loving kindness – or loving kindly – means loving with that steadfast love and faithfulness, that deep and passionate caring and concern that God holds for the whole of creation.

So Micah's first two components effectively express the two great commandments, the love of God and the love of neighbour, which are understood to be the essence of the commandments and the law in Deuteronomy as well as in the New Testament. Both of these elements – acting with concern for those less fortunate, and embracing steadfast love and faithfulness – are foundational parts of what we would see as a commitment to social justice. Here these two are linked clearly to concepts of holiness as being 'what is good', 'what God requires of us'.

The third linked component is the individual's walk with God, a common Hebrew description of an individual's seeking to live a holy life. It is usually translated as above, 'to walk humbly with your God'. The word normally translated as 'humbly', however, presents challenges to translation; it is a *hapax legomenon*, a word which is used only once in the Hebrew scriptures, and no clear cognates exist in other languages. Interestingly, this renders the word essentially untranslatable, and the usage of 'humbly' probably indicates more the manner in which the translating community thinks one ought to walk with God than any indication of the original meaning. Early translators do use the word 'humbly', but many other translations are suggested: 'with preparation', 'skilfully', 'craftily', 'shrewdly', 'carefully', 'fearfully', 'in wisdom', 'wisely', 'in purity', 'secretly', or 'privately'. This is a fascinating range of possibilities, showing how different people at different times viewed this command, and essentially, how they viewed holiness itself. 'Walk in purity' or 'walk purely with your God' is a later Jewish translation, reflecting second temple concerns; 'walking secretly' (or privately) with your God is also a later Jewish translation, one from a time of oppression when the practice of faith was outlawed and radically dangerous.

We think and translate 'humbly' in this text partly because we think that this is the proper way for we humans to walk with God, and partly because we have now become so used to this translation that it can be hard to consider it differently. How else might one walk with

… this holiness … is tied together with a clear call to a striving towards steadfast love and a just society.

God? From this passage, this is an open question. How will we walk this way of faith, in what manner will we walk with God? In different lives, at different times, a faithful walk with God will have different characteristics, but what is of most importance here is the understanding that this holiness, however open this is to interpretation, is tied together with a clear call to a striving towards steadfast love and a just society.

The book of Micah is a part of the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. These are writings in which calls for justice in society are particularly strong. The earliest form of 'prophetic' literature is found in the historical narratives, and the concerns we would identify as a basis for social justice run throughout the narratives of the history of the Kingdoms. The books of Samuel contain elements of national discussion and disagreement about the move from temporary leadership in the Judges to a fixed and hereditary leadership in the kings, 'like other nations'. There are portrayals and warnings about the ways of the king, many of which we would identify as raising basic social justice concerns. The king will raise taxes and call on people for forced service; the structure of a kingdom will create social inequalities (1 Sam. 8:1-22). The role of the prophets within the kingdom grows with the rising strength of the concept of kingship. It seems that kingship in Israel could not exist without the counter voice also growing in strength. Samuel's challenges to Saul (1 Sam. 15:1-35, 16:1-13.), Nathan's challenge to David concerning Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:1-27, 12:1-15), and Elijah's to Ahab over Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-29), are all examples of the distinctive role of the prophetic voice within Israel, and its unique ability to challenge the power of the king.

The 6th to 8th century prophets present another step in this development. In a time of social change and rising social inequality, the voice of the prophets addressed not only the individual actions of kings but the state of the whole nation. The social justice concerns were not the only concerns of these 'writing prophets', but this element is strongest in these prophetic writings. When the challenge

was raised to a societal level, the link was clearly made between right actions, just actions and proper religion. Amos presents a scathing dismissal of religious practices in favour of a call for justice (Amos 5:21-24); 'Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream'. Particularly in 19th century interpretation, this was frequently seen as a dismissal of religion and sacrifice altogether, in favour of an 'ethical monotheism'; the idea was that social action for justice could replace cultic or religious behaviour. This is not, however, an understanding that would have made sense in the ancient world, and it is not the prophetic message. For Amos, religious practice is compromised by unjust social practices which are incompatible with holiness.

For Amos, religious practice is compromised by unjust social practices which are incompatible with holiness.

Walter Brueggemann uses the term 'prophetic imagination'[35] to express the way that the prophetic voice in Israel has the ability to bring into focus both the social corruption in their world, and to bring to clear expression the harm this corruption does to the relationship with God, emptying these religious practices of meaning. To Amos, the lack of justice in society is expressed as a disdain for the poor and the weak, to those socially vulnerable. It can be seen in intimidation in legal proceedings (Amos 5:10-13), in a corruption of the legal system through unjust fines (Amos 2:7-8), in dishonest business practices (Amos 8:5) and in abuses of debt slavery (Amos 8:6). Clearly there are legal and moral principles here which are being abused (either flouted or misinterpreted) in order to oppress the weak, raising what we would see as social justice issues. In the prophetic message, the very nature of God, God's holiness, stands against these corrupt practices.

The Old Testament legal texts show a significant level of concern for the vulnerable of their society. This, however, was not unique to Israelite law. Concern for the vulnerable is common in ancient near eastern legal texts, with a frequent expression of concern for the

35 W Brueggemann. *The Prophetic Imagination*.

The Holy One of Israel cares for the poor and the needy, giving them an unparalleled guarantor of their place in society.

poor, for widows and for orphans (quite literally, for the fatherless). Examples exist in Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Ugaritic texts.[36] In all traditions, the concern for the care of the vulnerable is laid at the foot of the king: care of the poor, the widow and the orphan was the concern of the highest authority in the land. Although the concerns of the biblical writings lie within the general social concerns of the ancient world, the biblical texts are distinctive in emphasising the strong connection with the being and purposes of Israel's God. The Holy One of Israel cares for the poor and the needy, giving them an unparalleled guarantor of their place in society.

Old Testament laws do not teach what to do in every situation. Rather, they provide moral standards or principles that reflect God's holy love. The law 'does not so much tell us what to do as it teaches us how to think about what to do'.[37] God's love is the basis for the particular concern for the poor shown, for example, in the prohibition on charging interest on loans (Exod. 22:25), and requiring the return of a cloak taken in surety on a loan before sunset (Exod. 22:26). This recognition of the nature and purposes of God as the basis for laws exhibiting social justice can also be seen in Sabbath laws. The Exodus version of the Decalogue models the Sabbath rest on God's rest after creation. However, Exodus 23:12, and Deuteronomy 5:12-15 call for the Sabbath rest also for slaves, servants and aliens, with the motive clause being the reminder to the people of their slavery in Egypt, from which God delivered them. The memory of their servitude, together with their covenant relationship with God, calls the people to special concern for the slaves and the aliens in their midst.

Some notes of caution must be sounded. It is not clear that all of the biblical legal codes were ever consistently applied, or enforced.

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36 *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 407-410; 412-419; 421-424; 441-444.

37 PJ Haas. 'The Quest for Hebrew Bible Ethics'. DA Knight (ed.). *Ethics and Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, 153.

For example, legal codes do not play a significant role in biblical narratives exploring situations of injustice, such as Elijah's response to Ahab's expropriation of Naboth's Vineyard, or Nathan's exposure of David's adultery. Neither of the prophets in these cases call upon biblical law in making their cases against the king. It is also clear that the biblical law codes that have come down to us are not a complete law code. Many situations can be envisioned relevant to the ancient world that are not covered in the legal codes of ancient Israel. Also, we cannot be unaware that the biblical laws, like those of their near eastern counterparts, envisage a world very different to our own, with social understandings that we find alien in many ways.

We are not comfortable with much of the legal structure in the Old Testament. Slavery is not even questioned, let alone abolished, even if considerable protection is provided to slaves compared to other laws in neighbouring cultures. There are gender-based inequalities. Women are scarcely legal persons in the world of the Old Testament; concern for the 'widow and the fatherless' is, in essence, concern for those without the effective male protection of either husbands or fathers. That this is an accurate description of the most vulnerable in this society is clear, though the gendered nature of this vulnerable group passes without notice in the Old Testament world. Literal implementation of Old Testament law runs the substantial risk of returning us to unacceptable patterns of social relationships and inadequate standards of mutual caring. Nonetheless, the Old Testament legal code does present principles of reasoning and the motive clauses that are basic to our reasoning about social justice. These are all grounded in the nature of God, God's call and compassion, God's saving actions towards God's people. Our connection with Old Testament law is through recognition of how the loving purposes of God challenge and correct the culture and practices

Literal implementation of Old Testament law runs the substantial risk of returning us to unacceptable patterns of social relationships and inadequate standards of mutual caring.

of our own society, as they challenged and corrected the culture and practices of ancient Israel.

The Wisdom literature is often thought to be problematic for understandings of social justice. It is true that much of the Wisdom literature (in Proverbs especially) consists of prudential teaching to the rich on how to rule. There are certainly elements within the Wisdom writings which offer an Old Testament version of prosperity theology, the understanding that riches and prosperity are a sign of God's blessing. However, taken as a whole, the Wisdom writings are more nuanced than this. There are clearly admirable as well as unjust ways that lead to wealth. The admirable paths to wealth include heeding the teaching of the wise (Prov. 1:2-9) and being diligent and hardworking (Prov. 6:6-11). Unjust ways include robbery, fraud (Prov. 13:11) and charging interest to the poor. Laziness and selfishness are seen as causes of poverty, but so also are injustice and oppression (Prov. 13:23).

… showing contempt for the poor shows contempt for their maker, whereas those who are kind to the needy honour God.

The Wisdom writings are very clear that wealth is not of ultimate importance. Wisdom is more valuable than wealth (Prov. 3:14-15). It is better to be righteous with few possessions, than possess great wealth with injustice (Prov. 16:8). The Wisdom literature sets out its own vision for a just world, calling for just dealings in business, in courts, in land dealings. It also sees attitudes to the poor and the needy reflecting attitudes to God: showing contempt for the poor shows contempt for their maker, whereas those who are kind to the needy honour God.

The more philosophical Wisdom literature of Ecclesiastes and Job also offers teaching relevant to social justice. Ecclesiastes presents honest depictions of social realities, particularly the reality of inequity. Overall, it encourages a middle way between wealth and poverty, supporting the enjoyment of the good gifts of God, but recommending a lack of excess and the fear of God. All of this is placed, however, within a pessimistic worldview; the writer's recurring

sentiment is that all is 'vanity', or perhaps emptiness. This pessimistic worldview can lead to a mindset where any action to bring about change is undervalued, as all attempts to change the world are regarded as futile.

The book of Job presents deep questioning concerning suffering and inequity in the world, and about God's inaction in the face of injustice and innocent suffering. Further, Clines calls attention to the ways in which Job presents us with a view of poverty, suffering and injustice from the eyes of the rich and privileged.[38] Job and his three or four friends can spend days in discourse about the nature of his injustice – but are not faced with violence while they talk. They do not seem to need to find work or to worry about from where their next meal is to come. These observations suggest a limitation of perspective in the exploration of injustice and suffering in the book of Job; nonetheless, the book does present deep questioning of God's inaction in the face of injustice, and a struggle with the question, 'Why do the innocent suffer?' Job's friends rehearse the general truths of human fallibility, sin, and God's justice, but in the end their arguments are to no avail. The concepts of prosperity as an outcome of good behaviour and suffering as inevitably caused by sin are discredited when Job's innocence is vindicated. God's answering speech to all of the speeches of Job and his friends reframes the issues in ways that seem to set aside Job's concerns. It is clear that God is at work maintaining creation and upholding justice within creation: Job's plight is not the centre of the universe and he is commended for his insistence on addressing God.

The concepts of prosperity as an outcome of good behaviour and suffering as inevitably caused by sin are discredited when Job's innocence is vindicated.

The theme of the breaking in of the kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels, as well as the book of Acts, offers a foundation for Christian

38 D Clines. *Job: A Commentary*. Vols. 1-3. He focuses both on what the book of Job is, and on what it does to the reader.

understandings of social justice. For example, Luke can accurately be described as the gospel of good news for the poor, and is clearly based on prophetic texts, especially Isaiah. The account of the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (Luke 4:18-19) presents Jesus reading the passage from Isaiah which proclaims good news to the poor and the release of captives. There is some question about the identity of the 'poor' in Luke's gospel. It could well be that the poor in Luke are especially those on the outskirts of society. This can be seen particularly in the beatitudes (Luke 6:22-26), where 'the poor' and 'the rich' are not defined only in terms of material poverty and wealth, but also in terms of social inclusion and exclusion.

This links the breaking in of the kingdom to concrete results for those in need.

In Luke 7:18-23, the question from John the Baptist provokes a particular reflection about the nature of the breaking in of the kingdom, which is to be seen in particular acts and events: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the deaf hear. This links the breaking in of the kingdom to concrete results for those in need. Further examples from Luke's Gospel – the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:25-57), the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), the importunate widow (Luke 18:1-8), and the Magnificat on the lips of Mary (Luke 1: 46-55) – all emphasise the Gospel's concern with concrete acts to bring about the kingdom, to bring justice to all. This theme continues into the book of Acts, particularly as the Church is shown living out the teaching on justice. Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37 speak of the sharing of possessions and caring for those in need in the Early Church. This is a utopian vision, and not without its problems. Nonetheless, this early Christian concept of living out the faith as taught by Jesus remains a challenge to us, and to our ideals for social justice.

In his writings, Paul brings to expression his vision for the Christian community, addressing many social issues of his time within the context of this community. Paul's writings address the realities of the Roman world, which was a profoundly asymmetrical one. The culture and economy of Roman society were highly dependent on slavery, and there was enormous inequality between the slave and the free. There were distinctions of similar significance between Romans and

non-Romans, and between men and women. This social world is addressed clearly in Gal. 3:26-29, where, through the putting on of Christ, these very asymmetries are denied their particular force within the Christian community. This does not eliminate race, slavery or gender distinctions within the community; such distinctions are neither removed nor overthrown, but they are not seen as having the same force as before. This basic understanding permeates Paul's writings. Distinctions between Jews and non-Jews are not removed, but they are kept from having any functional importance within the community. The 'useless' slave Onesimus is sent back by Paul to Philemon, but now, as a Christian, he is sent back as a brother to Philemon, with the exhortation that he be treated as such.

Distinctions between Jews and non-Jews are not removed, but they are kept from having any functional importance within the community.

Paul presents a vision of a Christian community that is radically different from the Roman world, involving a transformation of social norms and expectations. It is not a call for a revolutionary overthrow of the Roman world – but it is a revolutionarily transformed world within the Church. This is expressed in many ways, notably in the care within the community for those disenfranchised by the Roman world, particularly widows. It is also expressed in care between the Christian communities, with calls for support for parts of the Church that are suffering hardship. It is even expressed through respect for differences of culture, including moral culture, within the Church. The judgement of the Council of Jerusalem, which exempted Gentile Christians from the expectation that they would live according to the requirements of the whole Jewish law (Acts 15:19-29), shows that the Early Church deferred to the guidance of the Holy Spirit upon each church (and potentially, each Christian person) rather than to formulated law alone.

The closing book of the New Testament presents again the prophetic link between social justice and holiness. The Revelation of John should be read as an ideological critique of Roman power. It proclaims God, not Rome, as the sovereign and eternal one. Revelation's vision of the heavenly throne and the Lamb seated on it is a critique of both Roman

religion and the Roman socio-political structure. This is not an explicit call for a program of social reform, or even of care and concern for the vulnerable, the poor and the widows; it is rather a critique of the root of social injustice, pointing to the arrogation of God's power and sovereignty, and the corruption of the ideals of God's society. Roman exploitation, injustice and the false worship of Caesar, through the imagery of Babylon and the whore, is contrasted with the vision of the New Jerusalem, presented in chapters 21-22. This, echoing the earlier utopian vision to be found in Isaiah 65, is a godly, holy, peaceful and just city. In this city, all have access to abundance, all pain, sorrow and want are removed. John's vision of the holy city calls on the Christian community to hold to their close relationship with God and to strive towards a just community, a just world, one that is the antithesis of the dominant culture.

Revelation's vision of the heavenly throne and the Lamb seated on it is a critique of both Roman religion and the Roman socio-political structure.

2 ENCOUNTERING GOD

The 'Second Blessing'

William Booth (1829-1912), founder of TSA, had been a Methodist New Connexion minister until 1861 when he resigned in order to carry out a less restricted mission to the poorest of London's poor.[39] He took his Methodist theology with him, remaining a lifelong follower of many of John Wesley's principles, including a commitment to his teaching on holiness. While Booth's understanding of holiness was grounded in Wesley, he was also influenced by William Cooke, the New Connexion theologian who trained Booth for ministry in 1854, and subsequently by representatives of the American holiness movement, notably the Irish American evangelist James Caughey and the New York Methodist socialite Phoebe Palmer. Both William and Catherine Booth were influenced by Palmer's 'shorter way' to holiness, which included the idea of a 'second blessing' known as 'entire sanctification', an experience to which the Booths testified in 1861. Though holiness as a 'second work of grace' has its origins in the theology of John Wesley, it underwent modifications in the 19th century that tended to place the instantaneous appropriation of the blessing in the spotlight and throw into shadow the more progressive side of growth in grace. This approach also had its casualties as some adherents tried in vain to find the experience. Harry Ironside recounts the intense psychological pressure cooker of one Salvationist who experienced a near mental breakdown in an attempt to obtain 'the blessing'.[40] John Cleary, while affirming that TSA in Australia does

39 For a good recent biography of Booth, see RJ Green. *The Life and Ministry of William Booth: Founder of the Salvation Army*.

40 HA Ironside. *Holiness: the False and the True.*

… holiness as a 'second work of grace' … underwent modifications in the 19th century that tended to place the instantaneous appropriation of the blessing in the spotlight and throw into shadow the more progressive side of growth in grace.

hold strongly to the doctrine of entire sanctification, sees holiness teaching as leading it closer to 'internal theological uncertainty' than any other issue. 'Typically, Army suspicion of doctrinal excess has stopped the issue detracting from its central evangelical thrust.'[41]

For many years, TSA in Australia, as elsewhere, held two Sunday meetings. The 'Holiness Meeting' was held in the morning and was explicitly designed to bring people into the experience of entire sanctification as a second blessing and the 'Salvation Meeting', held in the evening, was an evangelistic meeting. The method of the 'altar call' was enthusiastically embraced by the Army and each work of grace was provided with its own piece of furniture – a low kneeling bench known as the 'Mercy Seat' for those seeking salvation, and the 'Holiness Table' for those seeking holiness as a distinct blessing. The use of two distinct services is rare today and in the corps where they have been retained, the morning meeting, even if still referred to as the 'Holiness Meeting', is likely to include general exhortation to consistent Christian living rather than a focus on entire sanctification as a second work of grace.

In spite of such changes, TSA continues to have a deep commitment to holiness as a distinguishing feature of its theological identity. The 2010 *Handbook of Doctrine* takes a careful and balanced approach to the doctrine. Chapter 10 on 'Full Salvation' deals at length with Salvationist understanding of holiness doctrine and experience.[42] It warns against sinless perfectionism, understood as 'the elimination of all possibility of sinning'. At the same time it warns against the view that sinning is inevitable for believers.[43]

41 J Cleary. *Salvo!: The Salvation Army in the 1990's*, 115.

42 *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, 191-222.

43 *TSA Doctrine*, 201.

The holiness teaching of John Wesley (1703-91) is also part of the Methodist heritage of the UCA and was an important part of Australian Methodist discourse from the Church's colonial beginnings through to its growth and consolidation in the late 19th century. Though certain features of Wesley's teaching were left behind in a process of over-simplification, key insights were retained such as the theme of empowering grace and of holiness as perfect love. This interest in 'Christian perfection' was an expression of Methodist confidence in grace-enabled love for God and neighbour. Even such a Methodist moderniser as Edward Sugden, the first Master of Queen's College, was a keen exponent of entire sanctification as a central doctrine of Methodism, though he, like others in the early 20th century, attempted a reformulation of the doctrine on the basis of newer insights. The result was an acceptance that God meets us in many ways and that the particular experience of assurance of forgiveness, a clean heart and a distinct experience of the gracious presence of God came to be a less central expectation. By the 1940s, an emphasis on entire sanctification had all but disappeared from Australian Methodism except for a very small number of 'holiness' enthusiasts.

This interest in 'Christian perfection' was an expression of Methodist confidence in grace-enabled love for God and neighbour.

The term 'perfection', referring to the result in us of a God-empowered life, is open to much misunderstanding and did not, in Wesley's teaching, refer to perfection in any absolute sense. His *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* went to great lengths to show that there is no state attainable in this life that delivers believers from the human frailties and imperfections that require a continued dependence on the grace of God. 'I believe,' he wrote, 'there is no such perfection in this life as excludes…involuntary transgressions, which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorances and mistakes inseparable from mortality. Therefore sinless perfection is

a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself.'[44] For such reasons the Wesleyan theological tradition has usually qualified the word 'perfection' by the addition of words such as Christian perfection, evangelical perfection, or even relative perfection.

Wesley and his fellow Methodists taught that a definite experience of 'entire sanctification' should be sought by believers.

Wesley and his fellow Methodists taught that a definite experience of 'entire sanctification' should be sought by believers. This 'second work of grace' subsequent to conversion was understood to cleanse the heart from the remains of sin and fill the recipient with perfect love for God and neighbour.[45] Though Wesley was impressed by a large number of professions to entire sanctification among Methodists in the 1760s and '70s, he never testified to the experience and in fact denied that he himself lived up to the picture that he drew of the entirely sanctified believer.

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) criticises Wesley's teaching on perfection as misunderstanding the real achievement of the forgiveness of sin. '[Wesley] regards justification in essentially Augustinian terms: as forgiveness for sins that are past; and he thinks of sanctification as the higher stage of redemption.'[46] For Niebuhr, sin is rooted in our freely chosen separation from God, leading to bad behaviour. We inevitably come to recognise sin in the bad behaviour before we recognise it in its spiritual source. So any doctrine of perfection that seeks to justify itself by looking at our behaviour must miss the essential point. The same misunderstanding can arise with respect to the idea that the Holy Spirit cleanses the heart of the believer from sin without the possibility that sin will again manifest itself. This shows up in a view of sanctification that, separating itself from justification, sees it as this state of a clean heart. For Niebuhr, the Holy Spirit gives us the ongoing invitation of God to holy living, an

44 J Wesley. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 44-45.

45 H Lindstrom. *Wesley and Sanctification.* KJ Collins. *The Theology of John Wesley*, 195-235, 279-312. R Maddox. *Responsible Grace*, 157-91.

46 R Niebuhr. *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. Vol. 2, 174.

invitation that we remain free to refuse or pervert. The common ground between Wesley and Niebuhr is the recognition that God is the source of the real overcoming of sin and that we are set free by experiences of forgiveness. Niebuhr would seem to be essentially correct in identifying our freedom as the arena in which sin arises, which can happen at any stage of life (and in more and more subtle forms), but that we continue to rely on God for finding the good way. He is less clear about the results of Christian formation in us than is Wesley. It is also doubtful that Wesley taught what Niebuhr rejects, whatever may be true of later Methodists.

For Niebuhr, the Holy Spirit gives us the ongoing invitation of God to holy living, an invitation that we remain free to refuse or pervert.

The sources of Wesley's doctrine of holiness are many and include the spirituality of the Early Church period, Eastern Orthodoxy, the Catholic mystical tradition, Puritanism and the holy living tradition within Anglicanism. His ideas about perfection have not always sat comfortably within the Augustinian/Calvinist tradition in Protestantism. Reformed thinkers in particular have exhibited a concern for forensic and legal concepts in their doctrine of salvation. The Lutheran and Calvinist reformers alike operated on a dialectic of works-faith, nature-grace, and law-gospel. Wesley operated rather on the paradigm of a divine/human synthesis, a congruent approach that was less open to antinomianism. Steve McCormick sees Wesley drawing on the Eastern Orthodox concept of *theosis* (being made divine) as the organising principle of his *ordo salutis* (order of salvation). We are pardoned (the Western Latin and Protestant concern) in order to participate (the Eastern Greek concern) with the result being a 'faith filled with the energy of love' (the Wesleyan synthesis of the two).[47] The idea of a co-working of God with us points to the general truth that we encounter God in and with all our human encounters and relationships, despite the hidden nature of this encounter.

47 S McCormack. 'Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm of Faith and Love'. *The Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 26:1, Spring 1991.

The Christian journey involves deepening experiences of sanctifying grace subsequent to conversion, preparing for an eschatological perfecting as the end goal of human development.

For the most part, contemporary Methodists have left behind the concept of holiness as a second work of grace or second blessing. Even the Wesleyan Holiness churches that were established to champion such an experience, though they continue to affirm the doctrine in their confessions of faith, have struggled to find a convincing articulation of the older view. Yet valuable insights remain. Limits should not be placed on the capacity of God's grace to further moral excellence in believers. Salvation is more than forgiveness; it necessarily involves the transformation of character. There is no imputed positional righteousness that is not accompanied at the same time by an imparted and actualised goodness. The Christian journey involves deepening experiences of sanctifying grace subsequent to conversion, preparing for an eschatological perfecting as the end goal of human development.

Sanctification

The Reformed tradition places special emphasis on grounding any understanding of holiness in the holiness of God. It is only as God is present in our human activities that we have any chance of participating in holiness. We may indeed be made holy through the power of God's grace working in us, but the truth of this is hid with Christ in God, so that the claim to holiness itself can only be justified by the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. God encounters us. The regular way in which this happens, in Reformed (and also Methodist) understanding, is through public worship, in which we hear the Word of God and receive Christ in our hearts through the Word and through the sacraments, especially the Lord's Supper. There are, of course, a myriad of further ways in which God encounters us, but our intention to turn to God is made actual through prayer and through the given means of grace (Scripture, sacraments, Christian fellowship).

Holiness is something given, never achieved. It is a gift. To speak of 'achieving' any level of holiness is to speak out of human pride and self-sufficiency. In this the Reformed and Wesleyan traditions share common ground. Perhaps most characteristically of all, the Wesleyan understanding of holiness interprets it as the perfecting of love. Holiness is Christlikeness; God is Christlike; and God is love. Though both Wesleyan and Reformed traditions have sometimes been debilitated by rules-based and behaviourally-based measures, holiness is not perfect performance but pure motive, given through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is not far from what the Puritans referred to as 'gospel sincerity'. A heart that is enabled by grace to seek God with sincerity may be said to be a 'perfect heart' even if it is far from perfect in any absolute sense.

Though the Reformed tradition has normally rejected 'second blessing' teaching, there are shared common concerns with Wesleyans. It is often thought that the doctrine of predestination stands at the centre of John Calvin's *Institutes*.[48] Arguably, however, it is the mystical union of the believer with Christ through the Spirit that stands at the centre of that work. Certainly Calvin (1509-64) should be seen as the theologian of sanctification par excellence among the 16th century Reformers. The Calvinism to which Wesley was most implacably opposed in his day was an extreme antinomian form to which Calvin himself would have strongly objected. Wesley was deeply immersed in the English Puritan tradition and shared its conviction that justification necessarily led to sanctification. For this reason Puritan writers, with their emphasis on dying to sin (mortification) and living for God (vivification), were over-represented in the reading lists and publications he prepared for the theological education of his preachers. Martyn Lloyd Jones even found in the Puritans a 'second blessing' of sorts in the doctrine of a 'baptism of the Spirit' that brought a deeper sense of religious assurance and a more

Certainly Calvin (1509-64) should be seen as the theologian of sanctification par excellence…

48 J Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

dynamic and fruitful Christian experience.[49] The 19th century Keswick Convention movement took the Wesleyan idea of a second blessing and modified it so that it appealed to its Reformed constituency.[50]

Reformed theologians are characteristically interested in how we can recognise genuine holiness. John Webster points out that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is needed for us to be able to receive revelation and that human reason is not a neutral faculty unaffected by the human condition (and especially the influence of human sinfulness).

> *A Christian theology of holiness is an exercise of holy reason. Christian theology is an aspect of reason's sanctification; the founding condition for theological reason is reason's separation by God and its being taken by God into his service. Like all other aspects of human life, reason is a field of God's sanctifying work.*[51]

It follows that the role of prayer in doing theology is a request for necessary help, not an incidental exercise of piety. In Reformed understanding, a true perception of holiness is not possible without the presence and direct assistance of the Holy Spirit.

> *Ecclesial holiness is grounded in the work of the Holy Trinity in electing, redeeming and consummating a holy people who are the covenant partners of God and the fellowship of the saints. The church's holiness is thus always an alien sanctity: gift, not possession; grace, not achievement. It is, moreover, visible in the primary act of the church, which is confession – that is, acknowledgement or recognition of the sheer majesty, transcendent worth and goodness of God.*[52]

This theme applies even more strongly to Webster's account of the holiness of the individual Christian.

> *At the level of individual sanctification, holiness is the creature's renewal by the work of the Holy Trinity, in which*

49 DM Lloyd Jones. *Joy Unspeakable: Power and Renewal in the Holy Spirit*.

50 DW Bebbington. *Holiness in Nineteenth-century England*, 73-90.

51 J Webster. *Holiness*, 10. Italics in the original.

52 Webster, 100-01.

the creature is emancipated for the active life of fellowship with God. Through sanctification, the creature is reintegrated into the movement of God's history with us. All holy activity flows from faith, but faith is active in the baptismal pattern of dying and rising with Christ, that is, in mortification and vivification, through which holiness is shaped as freedom, obedience and love.[53]

… the Reformed tradition is quite reserved about claims concerning holiness.

This 'alien sanctity' is not an unreal, fictional sanctity. It is 'alien' only in being of God in its origin and goal, not in being anything unreal or without practical expression. Webster's account makes it clear why the Reformed tradition is quite reserved about claims concerning holiness. God alone is holy and there is no holiness that is not derived from God and no valid knowledge of holiness outside of God's revelation. It might be thought that this understanding confirms the idea that holiness is far removed from anything human, so that holiness can be defined as what is wholly other than us. Yet this also is not so. The mystery of Christian faith is that we recognise that God has come to us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The 'wholly other' is revealed to the eyes of faith as not distant at all, but fully human. Yet this revelation itself requires the presence and activity of the Holy God through the power of the Holy Spirit. The sovereignty and initiative of God are affirmed at every point. This very sovereignty and initiative are expressions of the holiness which is integral to the being and nature of the triune God.

Reformed scepticism about human claims to holiness would seem to be a necessary corrective to traditions which locate holiness in particular practices and attitudes. Any form of behaviour can be copied without the inner dispositions and relationships which are the spiritual basis for claims to holiness. Even attitudes can be assumed without inner commitment or integrity, as is presupposed in the very act of staging a play. The sincerity of any person cannot be infallibly identified by another person, though we should recognise that spiritual discernment

53 Webster, 101.

… some tension between this Reformed reserve about our knowledge of holiness and the Wesleyan testimony to Christian assurance …

is possible with the help of the Holy Spirit. This discernment is not infallible (and is marked by uncertainty, by fear and trembling), but it can supply a sufficient basis for action. We refer to (and pray for) the assistance of the Holy Spirit for discernment and for strength to follow divine guidance, but it seems that a degree of uncertainty as to the reality of God's presence and assistance may not disappear even as we receive guidance and discernment that is assisted by the Holy Spirit. There remains some tension between this Reformed reserve about our knowledge of holiness and the Wesleyan testimony to Christian assurance as a distinct witness of the Holy Spirit to the reality of God's love for us while we were yet sinners. We consider this tension to arise from a difference of emphasis, and therefore, not to be an irreconcilable tension.

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Reformed accounts of holiness is the affirmation that any theological consideration of holiness is itself necessarily an exercise in the practice of holiness. Unless our reason itself is open to the Holy Spirit of God, we lack something essential. This should lead us to ask what is involved in the sanctification of reason. It is people, rather than ideas, whom God loves. Where we hold to our ideas of others with no openness to their self-understanding, we risk being misled by our own ideology. The unholiness of reason can be seen in every self-serving rationalisation proffered in extenuation of bad behaviour, in the use of propaganda as a tool of power and in the ideological categorisation and oppression of whole groups of people by those with the power to do so. It is largely due to the distorting influence of elements such as these that dogmatic theology has sometimes been given a bad name. Reason, in the search for truth, will always want to know more, not less. The Reformed understanding of holiness provides a critical challenge to any Christian understanding of holiness as a natural human possibility and thus offers a corrective to any domestication or triumphalism in Christian life and self-understanding.

Those in the Wesleyan theological tradition, including TSA, continue to speak of believers seeking to live a holy life, but have largely left behind the older 'second blessing' form of the teaching. While deepening experiences of sanctification are sought and welcomed, it is generally understood that nothing substantive is added that is not already present in the believer's status as a child of God who has received the Spirit in believing. The Basis of Union calls upon the Uniting Church to 'listen to the preaching of John Wesley in his forty four Sermons'.[54] It cannot do this without coming up against his ideas about holiness. Paragraph 6 confesses that Christ, by the gift of the Spirit, 'awakens, purifies, and advances in [us] that faith and hope in which alone [the] benefits [of new life and freedom] can be accepted'.[55] The way stands open for both the UCA and TSA to refresh their understanding of the major New Testament doctrine of holiness, informed by their Methodist and Reformed antecedents but also open to contemporary theological discourse and fresh articulation.

The way stands open for both the UCA and TSA to refresh their understanding of the major New Testament doctrine of holiness…

The Idea of the Holy

Today, we live in a culture that is frequently characterised as 'post-Christian'. Many aspects of Church culture and language have made their way into secular usage, often with subtle or blatant changes in focus and meaning. Business corporations now have their 'mission statements' and schools have their 'pastoral care' agents. There are secular ideas of holiness that fall into two main groups. One group carries negative connotations, where holiness is understood as a (dubious) claim made by those refusing some social practice, implicitly suggesting that they are morally superior. The other group of ideas of holiness focuses on special experiences of a spiritual nature, whatever the content.

54 *BoU*, 10.

55 *BoU*, 6.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the adjective, 'holy', in three ways. The first, 'dedicated to God for a religious purpose', would seem to be original and primary. The second, 'morally and spiritually excellent', can be seen as derivative from the first, indicating a result in ourselves of closeness to God. The third, often called profane, refers to exclamations of surprise or dismay and is trivial.[56] Holiness is therefore generally understood to be an essential attribute of God (or of the divine), and secondarily as an attribute of humans to the extent to which we share in the life and activity of God. This leads us to recognise that, as there are many ideas of God, there will also be many forms of life claiming to be holy. In Christian terms, where there is idolatry, we should anticipate that there will also be demonic and even evil forms of life that see themselves as holy and just and good. Our investigation of the general idea of the holy can therefore be expected to shed light on the chaotic nature of religious fanaticism as well as on religious and specifically Christian ideals of faith and practice.

… as there are many ideas of God, there will also be many forms of life claiming to be holy.

Perhaps the most widely influential study of the general idea of holiness in 20th century theology was *The Idea of the Holy* by Rudolf Otto (1869-1973).[57] The subtitle of the book is *An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*. Otto was concerned to distinguish clear and distinct ideas of God (or, 'the Holy'), which he identified as rational (meaning that they are concepts which we understand) from those aspects of God which we do not and probably cannot understand, but which we may somehow apprehend through feeling, intuition, or in some other way.[58] It is to Otto that we owe the now common English word 'numinous', which refers to the distinctive otherness of experiences of 'the Holy'.

56 COED, 680.

57 R Otto. *The Idea of the Holy*. The German title was *Das Heilige*, first published in 1917. Rudolf Otto was a Lutheran theologian. Even though he develops the idea of the holy in terms of human experience without explicit reference to particular theological ideas, the experiences on which he draws are understood from within a Christian cultural understanding.

58 Otto, 3.

A rational understanding of holiness might focus on the benevolent behaviour and pious practices of a person which are attributed to the presence and assistance of the Holy Spirit of God. The danger identified by Otto is that this can lead to a domestication of our idea of God, reducing God to an explanation for ethically impressive lives. The antidote proposed by Otto is to reconnect with those experiences of the otherness of God in which we are not at all in control, experiences which he designates as 'numinous'.[59] What makes an experience 'numinous' is what Otto calls the *mysterium tremendum*.[60] This could be called the 'too-much-ness' of God and simply points to our awareness that God is always too much for us, above and beyond us in all ways.

It is to Otto that we owe the now common English word 'numinous', which refers to the distinctive otherness of experiences of 'the Holy'.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) famously identified the feeling of absolute dependence upon God as central to Christian experience. Otto agrees that this experience, which he calls 'creature-feeling', is numinous. He criticises Schleiermacher's account of the experience on two points – that it is not identified properly as a difference of kind from other experiences of dependence and that it is too preoccupied with our human self-evaluation.[61] Otto discusses the idea of the *mysterium tremendum*[62] in terms of awefulness (full of awe), overpoweringness (*majestas*) and urgency. We should note the central role of individual personal experiences of an extraordinary nature here, which Christians have traditionally understood in terms of epiphanies, or encounters with God.

Having emphasised the wholly other reality of God, Otto then points out the fascination of the *mysterium tremendum*. In a manner of which we can only be dimly aware, this wholly other engages with us and

59 Otto, 7.

60 Otto, 12-24.

61 Otto, 8-11.

62 Otto, 13.

Such encounters do not exclude what we can call the demonic.

catches our attention by addressing our very being. This element of fascination shows us that the hidden meanings and purposes of our lives are somehow addressed in this encounter. Such encounters do not exclude what we can call the demonic. There is no rationalising the strangeness of human attachment to that which is objectively hurtful to ourselves. Otto points to the role of this potential for self-destructive attachment, 'the Dionysiac-element in the numen',[63] as an indication of our collective recognition of the transcendent nature of what is holy. He goes on to trace the movement from this deeply threatening kind of encounter to the blissful experience of divine grace suddenly appearing in a time of trouble, as this movement shows up in biblical stories and the history of religions.

This juxtaposition of the demonic with the divine is a deep ambiguity in Otto's idea of the holy which he accentuates rather than resolves. Paul Tillich (1886-1965) gives an account of holiness which shows why this ambiguity is not to be resolved by human thought.[64] For Tillich, genuineness in religion can only be established from beyond the finite human level. Finite realities have religious significance only as they point to ultimate reality beyond finite, created things. 'The holy is the quality of that which concerns man [sic] ultimately.'[65] Tillich sees his account as a development and clarification of Otto's insights, particularly in explaining how something holy can become demonic.

> *Such a concept of the holy opens large sections of the history of religions to theological understanding, by explaining the ambiguity of the concept of holiness at every religious level. Holiness cannot become actual except through holy 'objects'. But holy objects are not holy in and of themselves. They are holy only by negating themselves in pointing to the divine of which they are the mediums. If they establish themselves as*

63 Otto, 31

64 P Tillich. *Systematic Theology.* Vol.1, 238-39.

65 Tillich, 239.

holy, they become demonic. They still are 'holy', but their holiness is anti-divine.[66]

'The demonic' results from a split between the medium and the source, allowing the medium to set an agenda distinct from and sometimes contrary to that of the source.

Tillich's concept of the demonic is instructive. He understands the divine as identical with the one God of Judeo-Christian faith, the creator and ground of being. 'The holy' refers to our encounter with this divine source, typically mediated through impressive aspects of the created world. Experiences of 'the holy' therefore contain at least two elements, the created medium of the experience and the uncreated source. 'The demonic' results from a split between the medium and the source, allowing the medium to set an agenda distinct from and sometimes contrary to that of the source.

As an example, we can say that even the idea of holiness itself can become demonic. John Armstrong[67] develops an account of the idea of holiness which would seem sufficiently negative to be characterised as demonic. His critique focuses on the tension that he discerns within the Judaeo-Christian tradition between an understanding of God as the giver of this-worldly blessing and as the wholly other, a transcendent and mysterious governing power. 'The blessing' refers to the flourishing of ordinary human life.[68] This is a thoroughly this-worldly concept, in full harmony with the common sense of most human cultures. It can be found today in prosperity theology, which takes worldly success to be a sign of God's favour. This strand of Hebrew thought informs what Armstrong calls the 'humane response'.[69] It is in contrast to this benevolent idea of the blessing that Armstrong develops his account of holiness.

66 Tillich, 239

67 J Armstrong. *The Idea of Holiness and the Humane Response*.

68 Armstrong, 4.

69 Armstrong, 60 ff.

> *Holiness is before all else a sovereign power, which has no need to consult other powers in man, or lowlier creatures and natural forms, and one located in a special centre. The basic principle of holiness is divorced from ordinary human nature and ordinary life. From the first, the heightened psychic strength which it denotes is the prerogative of heroic and pre-eminent supermen – the mighty warrior, the great chieftain, the prophet and priest – and that typically in brief visitations of quite exceptional forcefulness, radically discontinuous with their normal performance, and associated with ritual isolation from everyday life.*[70]

Armstrong points to the similarity between this separation from ordinary life of the Holy God and that of the centralised power of empires. This close relationship then suggests a critique of Hebrew sacralism as nothing more than a worship of power and dominance.

> *The Hebrews overwhelmingly sought sheer psychic strength and potency, yielding the martial prowess necessary for the gaining of land and political status. For they soon emerge as a people dominated by consuming territorial and self-aggrandising ambition, having origins perhaps in lack of soil of their own and the wounds of servitude, who are empowered to win territory through conquest and eviction, by a national god whose main role is to confer land and greatness.*[71]

Armstrong paints a persuasive picture of the role of an exalted conception of the holiness of an imperial God in setting aside concerns for ordinary human wellbeing. His discussion highlights the way in which the idea of the Holy God shapes the resulting human culture, both for good and for ill. Where God is understood to be a

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70 Armstrong, 6.

71 Armstrong, 12. This analysis is all in preparation for the main historical question addressed by Armstrong, as to why there is not a more obvious humane response in the priorities chosen by leaders of the Christian churches when Christianity was adopted as the religion of the empire after the conversion of Constantine I in 312CE. It is the teachings of Jesus himself which leads Armstrong to expect Christians of whatever kind to have a humane response to human need and to make this the focus of their collective life, and thus to his puzzlement at its apparent absence.

'Lord of Hosts', it becomes likely that holiness means, first and foremost, strength in battle. Where God is pictured as an imperial governor of the universe, any departure from loyal (even abject) service is seen to merit punishment. Where God is understood to be a loving Father, holiness can be seen in loving and redemptive action towards outcasts and strangers. When we cease to look for correction for our all-too-human ideas of God, in all their narrowness and inadequacy, a demonic energy against everything that falls outside this narrow circle is not far away.

Where God is understood to be a 'Lord of Hosts', it becomes likely that holiness means, first and foremost, strength in battle. Where God is pictured as an imperial governor of the universe, any departure from loyal (even abject) service is seen to merit punishment.

There is little room for arguing with the person who has become convinced that God has spoken and given the instruction to murder specific groups of people. This is quite problematic when dealing with demonically inspired individuals. It is much more difficult when dealing with organised groups that are similarly inspired, usually at the behest of charismatic leaders. Fanatical religious fervour linked to military discipline and weaponry is a fearsome thing, as we have seen with the emergence of the Islamic State from the shadows of rebellion in Iraq and Syria. The behaviour of Jewish settler groups who seize and occupy Palestinian lands, sometimes with violence and with contempt for the rights of those they remove, is another example of a cult of holiness gone wrong. Christian crusaders past and present frequently display the same kind of one-sidedness. The very existence of such groups should be a challenge to our understanding of God, as we cannot avoid dealing with what we believe to be a distorted image of God that legitimates the behaviour of these groups in their own eyes.

Politically speaking, our current ways of dealing with the challenge posed by religious extremism do not seem to amount to more than 'leave it to governments to restrain them'. This would seem to be a counsel of despair, more likely to inflame the situation than to provide

true relief. We are impelled to support strengthening the influence of moderate religious voices and to be open to dialogue whenever the opportunity arises. Yet our actual opportunities for influence seem to lie more in restraining the understandable reactions of our own people, lest we find ourselves in a war with no clear goals (unless the eradication of enemies is deemed an acceptable goal). Our idea of God needs to expand to include whatever is true in the ideas of our enemies. This is required by the reality that God's world includes us all and that God's will is for the redemption of the evildoer.

Our idea of God needs to expand to include whatever is true in the ideas of our enemies.

We have therefore thought it proper to expand our focus to include these more dubious forms of holiness because they prompt us to a more clear commitment to the real holiness of God that empowers loving action. There is a long history of rulers in many different societies achieving legitimation for their rule from the support of priests speaking on behalf of the deity. Where this is the case, there is a seemingly inevitable tendency for the person of the ruler to be set apart, protected and elevated above the common herd. We may think of this as 'holiness as taboo'. It is the specifically Christian understanding of holiness that the supposedly distant and untouchable God has chosen to come among us for purposes of friendship and redemption. It is this understanding of God which legitimates the idea that holiness implies attitudes and behaviour of benevolent love, empowered by a universal solidarity, leading to a general commitment to social justice.

3 SOCIAL JUSTICE

Historical Roots of the Idea of Social Justice

Human thinking about justice goes back to the earliest forms of social life. As soon as humans became capable of making judgements about the behaviour of others, questions of right and wrong behaviour awaited recognition and attention. The earliest systems of law bear witness to the concern of early societies for justice.[72] It may seem a small step to ask for criteria by which to judge the fairness of the system of law itself, but while there are early proposals of criteria for justice in society,[73] the language and concerns of social justice are a modern phenomenon. Christian thinking about justice has been in no way separate from this wider cultural history and has, particularly through the Roman Catholic Church, made a distinctive contribution to its development and transmission. Protestants have also contributed significantly, though the widespread use of the language of 'social justice' is recent.

> *When the Basis [of Union] was finding its final form, during 1968, Protestant churches did not talk about social ethics in terms of 'justice'. That was the language of the Catholic Church which, since 1891 when the papal encyclical 'Rerum Novarum' was published, had developed a rich tradition of ethical analysis around the theme of 'justice'. Protestant ethics on the other hand tended to pursue the theme of 'responsibility' – the individual's responsibility to lead their*

72 We could think of the Code of Hammurabi and the laws of the Greeks and Romans, as well as the Torah, not to mention the practices of countless tribal societies, in this connection.

73 A salient example is Plato's *Republic*.

life in a way that reflected their trust in the Gospel and, at a political level, the pursuit of a 'responsible society'.[74]

While the word 'justice' does not appear in the UCA Basis of Union, the reality of God's justice is firmly in mind, referred to as 'a new order of righteousness and love'.[75]

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The earliest Christians did not seek to reform the Roman empire but to live out an alternative moral and social ethic that made them recognisably different from pagan society. The New Testament is filled with exhortations to care for the poor and the Early Church took these commands very seriously. At a time when there was no social security, and no welfare state, the Church offered help to the poor, the sick and the needy. In Roman society, infanticide was very common and Christians would gather discarded infants from the alleyways of the cities, baptise them, and raise them as Christians. As the office of the bishop developed, it was part of the bishop's special responsibility to support the poor.[76]

According to sociologist Rodney Stark, the Church grew in the early Christian centuries partly because of its compassionate ministry and its alternative morality.[77] Venereal disease was rife in pagan society and abortion was very common. Christians, on the other hand, practised sexual abstinence except within marriage and were opposed to abortion. They also avoided the culinary excesses of pagan society and were overall in a healthier condition. This

74 A Dutney. 'Does the Basis of Union call us to do justice?'

75 *BoU*, 3. The increasing adoption of the language of social justice by Protestants is perhaps influenced by ecumenical dialogue and by the relative marginalisation of churches in Australian society.

76 The story is told of Pope Gregory the Great (c.540-604) standing daily to deliver bread to the hungry.

77 R Stark. *The Rise of Christianity*. Stark is not without his critics among historians, some of whom challenge his use of evidence in support of his claims. His descriptions of the compassionate service of the early Christians, however, are well based.

meant that they lived longer and produced healthier and more stable communities. During times of famine when the sick were often simply dumped in the streets as people fled infected areas, Christians stood by the sick and tended to their needs. Though there was no effective cure for plagues, survival rates increased through the simple actions of bedside presence and the provision of water. Though many Christians died as a result of infection in connection with such ministry, many others survived because of the basic care provided by fellow Christians. Pagans who survived as a result of Christian compassion sometimes converted out of gratitude and admiration. Stark suggests that Christianity flourished by outliving a more decadent pagan society, producing more children, and ensuring more survivors during pandemics.

As Christianity flowered in the medieval period, its tradition of charity toward the poor also developed and was institutionalised. Radical new monastic communities emerged in the 13th century with a special concern for the poor. The threefold vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience that had been the hallmark of the earlier Benedictine spirituality was applied by the Franciscans to be for the sake of the poor. The outcasts of society, including lepers, were the special concern of Francis of Assisi and his band of brothers ('friars'). Francis's friend Clare founded a woman's order in 1215 to carry out the same kind of work. Of course, the Church itself grew phenomenally wealthy during this period, which sometimes led to a failure to address the needs of the poor. The story is told that St. Thomas Aquinas was shown the vast wealth of the Vatican treasury by the Pope, who commented: 'You see Brother Thomas, no longer need the church say, "Silver and gold have I none".' Aquinas replied, 'That is true, Holy Father; but then again, no longer can she say, "In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk".'[78]

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Catholic religious orders continued to mushroom throughout the

78 The reference is to Acts 3:1-10, which tells of Peter and John healing a beggar at the temple gate.

medieval period and the Catholic Reformation of the 16th century (the Jesuits being arguably the most significant). Though some orders were contemplatives, withdrawn from the world, most carried out an active ministry among the poor and needy, believing that this was the example set by Jesus. The Protestant Reformers also addressed the needs of the poor through systematic works of charity. Though they advocated for the poor, neither Catholics nor Protestants called for any revolutionary change to the structure of society that might address the causes of poverty. A few Anabaptist communities practised the community of goods until they were put down by military force. Such challenges to the social causes of poverty gained more solid support during the age of reason, revolution, and revival.

One aspect of medieval thinking and of the Protestant Reformation which should be remembered as a contribution to the modern idea of social justice is the matter of authority. Where the ruler, national or clerical, is seen as the embodiment of the society and as such, an agent of God, it is very hard to view all people as equally subject to law.[79] The recognition that society has a being of its own is a valuable idea, particularly when we see where the denial of this idea leads (excessive individualism, for example). But there is also a danger in slogans such as, 'My country, right or wrong' or 'Enemies of the king must die'. Healthy societies exhibit the yeast of freedom and fresh initiatives from (potentially) all members of the society. Medieval thinkers struggled with the question of how to deal with the unjust rule of a tyrant. The Protestant emphasis upon the authority of Scripture (as the voice of God) meant that everybody, including the ruler, was equal before God, however unequal in other respects. These ideas provided powerful support to the view that the order of society instigated

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79 This can also be true where democratic equality of persons is assumed. 'The law is the true embodiment of everything that's excellent. It has no kind of fault or flaw and I, my Lords, embody the law.' The Lord Chancellor, *Iolanthe*, an opera by Gilbert and Sullivan.

by rulers could come under judgement, not only from God, but eventually also from their subjects. Today, our liberal democratic proposal (or should that be 'claim'?) is that any person has the capacity and the right to raise questions of social justice and that all people should be equal before the law. There is commendable idealism in this proposal, however much it has been rejected in theory and in practice, both in liberal western societies and in most other societies.

John Wesley is often referred to as an 'Evangelical Reformer', and indeed the moral and spiritual reform of the nation were among his most deeply held passions. But he was not a political reformer or any kind of radical revolutionary. He saw no need to reform the political system of constitutional monarchy, since he believed its finely tuned balance of power between king, parliament and people needed only to be preserved in order for genuine liberty to prevail. He lived in an age of revolution and of rising democratic sentiment but his word to the political radicals of his time was a word of warning and rebuke. In Wesley's view, to fail to fear God and honour the King would be to invite disaster. In the 19th century, Methodists in both Britain and America would struggle to hold together these early conservative views of the founder with a much more radically democratic outlook. Most of the church splits in 19th century Methodism would be over the demand for more democratic representation of the laity in the face of what were considered the dictatorial powers of the Conference.

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Wesley's social outlook was fully in keeping with his conservative political views. He believed that Christians should submit to constituted authority, pray for the king and the Parliament, obey the law of the land, pay their taxes and live a quiet life. Though he was radical in his views on Christian perfection, there was nothing radical in his social outlook. Wesley's staunch loyalty to the king may be difficult for us to accept today, in a world where representative democracy is so highly valued. Our attitude to the secular authority of the state should not be uncritical, though Wesley's view that

civil authorities are instituted by God and ought therefore to be respected is a biblical one. Historically, many churches have shown an unwarranted loyalty to dictatorial and oppressive governments. In a similar vein, independence movements (e.g. in Africa) were often resisted by the churches as rebellious, thus entrenching colonialism. Yet challenge need not mean disrespect or resistance to authority. At the grassroots level, liberation theology has rightly encouraged people movements, both in and beyond churches, that have called for resistance to unbridled authority.

Wesley's focus on personal holiness was not individualistic, and his message of the new birth gave a previously lacking agency to ordinary people to work for the betterment of society. The transforming grace of God in Jesus Christ is profoundly personal but it must have a social conscience. The term 'social holiness,' which has come into vogue in recent years, is actually based on a misquotation. Wesley wrote in 1739, '"Holy solitaries" is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than "holy adulterers". The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness.'[80] In other words you cannot be a Christian on your own; it is a profoundly social or communal business. However, the expression 'social holiness' is widely extended today to refer to the more modern Wesleyan social conscience and to the idea that commitment to social justice is a necessary outcome of our faith.

Wesley was too consumed with his work as an evangelist and as the organiser of a radical new religious movement to be a political activist in the mould of parliamentary Evangelicals like William Wilberforce or Lord Shaftesbury.[81]

80 J&C Wesley. *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, Preface.

81 Wesley did, however, offer firm support for opposition to the slave trade. In a letter of encouragement to Wilberforce, he wrote: 'Unless the divine power has raised you up… I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.' The full text can be found at: https://gbgm-umc.org/umw/wesley/wilber.stm

Wesley's preaching may well have contributed to a change in the tide of opinion against slavery but it would be 1807, sixteen years after his death, before the slave trade was finally declared illegal in Britain. A number of Wesley's political tracts dealt with issues of economy and trade and the impact of these upon the population. For example, his 'Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions' (1773) provided an interesting response to the impact on the poor of a downturn in economic conditions.[82] While he was no economist, Wesley nonetheless understood the systemic impact of economic and trade practices on the general population. He had no objection to prosperous commercial enterprise (in fact he celebrated it as part of the strength of Protestant Britain's maritime dominance of the Atlantic world), but he did argue against luxury among the wealthy, along with distilling, which he saw as leading causes of the inflation in prices, a rise in unemployment and a shortage of foodstuffs. His economic advice may be open to criticism but he did at least offer practical solutions designed to ease pressure on the poor. The idea of 'social holiness' challenges us to stand for what is right without regard for popularity or timing.

For Christians, the longstanding concern for those who are poor eventually led to a recognition that the Christian gospel itself provides a standard of justice by which other standards (and the behaviour flowing from those standards) are to be judged. Societal arrangements that were based upon inherited class distinctions or racial prejudice suddenly appeared unacceptable when viewed from the standpoint of God's unconditional love for all. More broadly, Christian ideas of social justice are linked to an idea of society as having both a collective reality and a basis in human persons, each with their own dignity, needs and rights. It is thereby capable of resisting ways of thinking that reduce all human reality to broad social forms (as can occur in sociological and anthropological analysis) or to overly individualised analysis (leading to classic selfishness). Solidarity between very different groups of people does not show up in a typical sociological analysis or in an individualised morality. Care for the

82 J Wesley. 'Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions'. *Works*. Jackson (ed.). Vol. 11:53-59.

Care for the whole society, specifically including the weakest and most vulnerable members, is needed.

whole society, specifically including the weakest and most vulnerable members, is needed. Concern for this kind of care is at the heart of social justice.

Our understanding of social justice has a Protestant influence in the Social Gospel movement. Evangelical Protestantism rose to the status of a de facto state religion in the United States during the 19th century and came to hold a position at the centre of the culture, a position which was mirrored also in Britain and its dominions. The churches had a good deal to say from this privileged position about addressing social evils. While some Evangelicals influenced by Premillenialism began to lose interest in addressing social problems, Liberal Evangelicals took very seriously the challenges of urbanisation, poverty, education, and working conditions. The Congregationalist pastor Washington Gladden and the Baptist Walter Rauschenbusch were among those who made significant contributions to the 'Social Gospel' movement, with its insistence that Christianity could not be limited to the sphere of personal piety. They were convinced that the prayer 'Thy kingdom come' must find practical expression through direct action toward the amelioration of social evils and the construction of a new and better society. Though only lasting a short time as an explicit movement, and losing much of its energy after World War I, the Social Gospel movement shaped the outlook of mainline Protestant denominations throughout the 20th century. The life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. can be seen as embodying and extending this tradition.

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)[83] turned away from the Social Gospel movement as an answer, judging it to be infected with self-confident human utopianism. He did, however, continue their quest to discern God's dealings with communities and nations as much as with individuals, thereby drawing on the heritage of the Hebrew prophets.

83 God is at the centre of R Niebuhr's socio-political analysis. Due to our separation from God, socio-political dynamics do not have the power to bring about a completely good and just state of society. This is already clearly presented in R Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. It is magisterially presented in R Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*.

A great critic of human hubris (pride), he presented an account of human sin in terms of separation from God which infects all aspects of life. The relatively beneficial aspects of life can still become demonic when pursued apart from God. Overweening national self-assertion demonstrably follows from an idolatry of our own ideals. He showed the ironic discrepancies between the intentions of rulers (for good and for evil) and the actual outcomes.[84] He therefore counselled 'Christian realism', a policy of seeing as clearly as possible and pragmatically doing your best for amelioration of manifest evils. His perspective came under criticism as being too enmeshed in the dominant culture of the USA, particularly in contrast to the liberationist perspectives of women, native Americans, African Americans and minority cultures in general. For groups without power, sin can manifest as despairing weakness rather than as pride.

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Liberation theology emerged in the 1960s, partly as a response to the claim that theology must be carried out from the perspective of the marginalised.[85] In the teaching of the Hebrew prophets and of Jesus it is clear that God has shown a preferential option for the poor. Just as God had liberated the Israelites from Egypt, so a new exodus was required for oppressed and persecuted communities all around the world. Poverty could no longer be attributed to the weaknesses and mistakes of those who were poor. They needed deliverance from unjust capitalist social structures that kept the rich in positions of privilege and power and the poor in their subservient place where their labour could be exploited. 'Base communities' (the gathering of believers into small groups for prayer and action) were to some extent

84 R Niebuhr. *The Irony of American History*. In this work, Niebuhr provided a blueprint for the containment policy central to the Cold War between the USA and the Soviet Union, which both guided and reflected US policy in this period.

85 The established churches have been suspicious of liberation theology. The El Salvadoran martyr Archbishop Oscar Romero (1917-1980) once famously quipped, 'When I feed the poor they call me a saint; when I ask, "Why are they poor?" they call me a Communist!'

set over against the institutional church, which was often seen as too closely aligned with established powers of oppression.

For liberation theologians, poverty is not only a sociopolitical matter. Gustavo Gutierrez names poverty as an affront to the will of God .

> *Life, a gift from God, is also the first human right. The poverty and insignificance in which many people live violates that right. In effect, poverty means death, both physical death that is early and unjust, due to lack of the most basic necessities for life, and cultural death, as expressed in oppression and discrimination for reasons of race, culture or gender. Theologically speaking, poverty is the negation of the significance of creation.*[86]

Most of the early liberation theologians have been Latin American,[87] though theological movements elsewhere, such as minjung theology in Korea and black theology in the USA and South Africa, are also liberationist. The explicitly Marxist orientation of the earlier liberation theology is now recognised as a cultural/political, rather than theological, option, but a renewed interest in the social and political application of the Gospel to societies in which inequality is glaringly obvious has given these theologians' voices a fresh resonance. Jose Bonino argued that the doctrine of prevenient grace re-humanises us to a Christian obedience that requires concrete action and that Wesleyan theology has a focus on love for and toward the poor.[88] Theodore Runyon argued that Wesley's thought must be freed from individualism and refocused on the theme of the kingdom of God, so that its underlying liberating potential

Sanctification deals not only with personal, but also with social, political, and ecological transformation and is especially good news to the poor.

86 G Gutierrez. 'Memory and Prophecy'. DG Groody (ed.). *The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology*.

87 Latin American liberation theologians include Gustavo Gutierrez (Peruvian), Leonardo Boff (Brazilian), Archbishop Oscar Romero (El Salvadoran) and Juan Luis Segundo (Uruguayan).

88 The Argentinian theologian Jose Míguez Bonino (who died in 2012) was a leading Methodist voice in liberation theology.

can be clearly seen.[89] The restoration of the divine image to humanity has been applied to the whole of creation, looking for a universal cosmic renewal. Sanctification deals not only with personal, but also with social, political, and ecological transformation and is especially good news to the poor.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, people spoke of 'social reform', and of the 'reformation of manners'. We have been helped by the radical abolitionists of the 19th century and the social gospel teachers and liberation theologians of the 20th to see that, beyond the 'reformation of manners', we need to address systemic evil. Compassionate aid addresses presenting human need but justice asks questions about the causes of such need and seeks to address larger systemic problems. Reform usually deals with a single issue at a time – alcohol abuse or rates of divorce – whereas justice asks questions about the systems that give rise to social evils and about how we might change the systems.

The Idea of Social Justice

Imagine that you are seconded from Australia to teach in the theological college of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. You live in close community with the students you teach. A promising student, about to graduate, secures a place in an Australian theological college for further study. He tells you that, when he went to inquire about a visa to study in Australia, he was told that the non-returnable fee for applying for a visa was $800, where a few months previously it had been $50. On further investigation, you discover that this is correct and that this change was a response to the frequent overstaying of Tongans in Australia at that time. The fee is simply for the application rather than the visa, so that mistakes on a form could render a new fee payable for a second application. You ask yourself, 'Is this fair?'[90]

This story encapsulates many features of a social justice issue. Perhaps most basically, social justice concerns typically arise as a question

89 T Runyon. *Sanctification and Liberation*.

90 This story is based on actual experience, though the precise reality of Australian visa policy and practice in the relevant period would need to be confirmed before the final question could be answered.

… social justice concerns typically arise as a question rather than as a definitive judgement.

rather than as a definitive judgement. Further investigation is always needed. It is also noteworthy that most Australians would have no knowledge of policies and practices overseas unless the story is told in the media. Government policy needs to aim for equality of treatment for people in similar situations so that the question of fairness can be more readily answered. In this case, there is inequality over time, as well as the usual inequality between citizens of Australia and non-citizens. The immediate problem can be resolved through charity, if more money can be found to cover this unexpected and unduly burdensome cost. The response comes into the field of social justice when the policy itself is brought into question. More detailed questions would include the issue of the amount of the fee, which indicates a major change in the calculation of costs, and the imposition of the non-refundable nature of this fee, potentially with no extension to cover failures in form-filling. This story makes it plain why those who think from the stance of administration and power have reason not to like social justice.

We can offer an initial and tentative account of social justice from this story, in terms of the relationships involved. Injustice that results from unfair treatment in dealings between representatives of a society and individuals or groups of individuals prompts the social justice question. Social justice issues invite a concerned response from citizens of the society who bear a responsibility, however tenuous and even marginal, for that injustice. We should feel responsible for what is done 'in our name'. A 'social justice' response to the situation in the story would be for us, as Australian citizens, to seek a change in government policy, usually through lobbying and, eventually, political campaigns. Non-citizens are also free to challenge the policy, though primarily as advocates for those negatively affected. There is also the response of charity available, where we seek to assist the student to find the $800. This is itself a benevolent response, though it does nothing for others who will be similarly affected by the policy.

Charity has acquired something of a bad name in situations such as this, because it is seen as a failure to address the main cause of the

problem. Yet charity is benevolent and should be seen as an important component of a caring response. If we want to see the student studying in Australia in the coming year, there would not be time for the political campaign (possibly needing a change of government at some future election) needed to clear his way. Generosity is good, though our ability to be charitable might prompt questions about an unjust distribution of wealth. Money, while a salient feature of this case, is not the only relevant resource. Time and effort in communicating are also important resources in addressing social justice issues, resources that are potentially available to all people. Social justice issues and practical needs mix in with each other in confusing ways that require discernment and multi-level responses.

Our modern concept of social justice comes to us in large part from Roman Catholic social teaching, whose general understanding is that 'social justice includes all other social virtues that are demanded by the common good of society'.[91] The Roman Catholic tradition has maintained a vision of society which resists the simpler and less personalist concepts that underlie both capitalist and socialist visions. The reference to the common good of society is a critical marker for discussions of justice, not only because the boundaries of inclusion in what counts as 'society' are porous, but also because human need is manifold and the common good has a myriad of elements. It is probably appropriate to understand this idea of the common good as a secular phrase that indicates the wellbeing of all that God has made, including humanity. We should resist attempts to measure the common good in monetary terms, as health, wellbeing and human flourishing are also involved. The phrase does open us to both inclusion as beneficiaries of the common good and as contributors to it through virtuous actions. If there is indeed a necessary theological aspect to what is covered by this phrase, it becomes appropriate to concede that the idea will resist

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91 CE Curran. *Catholic Social Teaching*, 189.

precise definition. Questions about the common good should bring to mind the perspectives and needs of others, particularly marginalised and dispossessed people.

In seeking refinement of this general concept, Curran identifies three types of justice, namely commutative,[92] distributive and legal justice. He explains that these correspond to three different types of relationships.

> *Commutative justice involves the relationship between physical individuals or moral individuals such as corporations…*
>
> *Distributive justice governs the relationship of society or the state to the individual. How should society distribute its goods and burdens fairly among people? …*
>
> *Legal, social or contributive justice governs what the individual owes to society. The older word 'legal' referred primarily to the obligation to obey the just laws of society as the minimal requirement of the common good. The newer word 'contributory' is in keeping with the present emphasis on the need for persons to actively participate in and contribute to the common good of society.*[93]

Commutative or exchange justice refers to justice in relation to contracts and to all dimensions of interpersonal relationships that involve mutual obligations and interactions. Distributive and legal justice are both oriented to the relationship between individuals and the whole society, which leads us to ask why they need to be treated as distinct categories rather than as different dimensions of the same relationship. In any case, this language is valuable in orienting us to the kind of relationship in which injustice is being discerned. Curran's broad areas of distinction overlap. It is part of the common good that we have a system of law (enacted and backed by society) to protect the abuse of contracts by which the powerful exploit the weak. There is an open texture in these concepts which challenges us to listen

92 From Latin *commutate*, meaning 'exchange'. Commutative justice is therefore focused upon contracts and other mutual obligations between persons or organisations considered as if they were persons.

93 Curran, 190.

to the particular details of any case before reaching judgements concerning justice.

> *Even Catholic commentators still do not agree … about the exact meaning of social justice as what is required by the common good. Some understand social justice as bringing together distributive and legal justice. Others regard it as a new type of justice that properly orders all societal institutions to facilitate the practice of commutative, distributive and legal justice. The more common opinion identifies social justice with legal justice – what the individual owes to the common good.*[94]

None of these options seems compelling, as social justice seems to be based on an ideal standard of social relationship that challenges all existing societies as to their moral health and economic fairness. To invoke social justice is to make space for critical interrogation of existing practices and arrangements. This imprecision flows from the implicitly theological origins of the concept of social justice and is to be maintained and defended.

John Rawls (1921-2002) offers us a theory of justice (which Curran might consider a theory of distributive justice) in which justice is understood primarily as fairness.

> *Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust. Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override.*[95]

Justice is here understood as an essential dimension of a well-ordered society which protects the position of each and every member of that society. It rightly points out that the good of society as a whole cannot ignore the rights inherent in each person. This functions as an ideal to which we should aspire, but is hardly a realistic assessment of actual societies. Dominant groups hold tenaciously to power,

94 Curran, 189

95 J Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*, 3.

… even relatively just and well-ordered societies are riddled with compromises and ongoing inequities.

however unjustly. Perceptions of injustice require the acquisition and exercise of political power if reform is to become possible. Social co-operation brings about improvements of life for all, but how these improvements are distributed is unlikely to be fully equal for all citizens. Rawls rightly proposes that existing inequities be judged by a standard of fairness, though this leaves us facing the need to make changes that are against the perceived interests of the dominant groups. In reality, even relatively just and well-ordered societies are riddled with compromises and ongoing inequities.

Rawls suggests that there are two very general principles that can be used to assess the justice of distributive arrangements in societies and that these would be affirmed by any rational person:

> *… the first requires equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties, while the second holds that social and economic inequalities, for example inequalities of wealth and authority, are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, and in particular for the least advantaged members of society.*[96]

The idea of equality before the law is a necessary legal fiction that society should uphold as an ideal to be realised, even when the law itself displays dubious biases. Rich and poor might be equally forbidden by law from sleeping under bridges,[97] though with obviously differential impact. The idea in earlier times that all males between the ages of 18 and 45 were subject to requirements of military service in time of war was widely (if sometimes grudgingly) accepted as fair, particularly once conscientious objection was recognised as a possibility. This became less widely accepted when Australian males were conscripted for military service in Vietnam if their birthday fell on a date that was arbitrarily chosen by ballot.[98]

96 Rawls, 14-15.

97 This observation may have originated with Andre Gide.

98 This was the situation with Australian conscription for the Vietnam War.

In practice, subgroups arise whenever authorities regulate existing forms of life (for example, in the setting of minimum wages and conditions of employment). Indeed, the determination of how relevant subgroups are defined is one of the more significant powers of government legislation.

The second principle suggested in the above statement is required because of the unreal aspects of the first principle. If we are to accept that it is not just to remove existing inequalities of wealth within a society by taking away private ownership (and thus creating new inequalities between those with the power to control how the collective wealth is allocated and those without this power), there need to be strong mechanisms for softening the effects of the inequalities of wealth. Taxation is one obvious answer to this need, at least when the taxes are used in part for services that less wealthy citizens can use. Rawls goes on to argue that these two basic first principles can be seen to be the best rational choice for all members of society. He asks us to imagine that we are making this choice without knowledge of where we personally will be located within the social system. It would then be rational to make sure that the least advantaged are as well looked after as possible because we may end up being one of them. Of course, most people will find a way to remember their actual social location when making choices that may threaten their own interests.

A concern for equality is one dimension of social justice, but hardly a complete formula. Imagine three young people trying to watch a cricket match from the other side of an opaque fence. One is tall enough to have a good view while the other two are not. Now imagine that there are three equal-sized boxes on which they might stand. If we distribute according to an ideal of equality, we might want to give one box to each. The result of this is that the middle-sized person can now also see over the fence while the short person cannot. A more just solution would be achieved when the short person is given two boxes so that all three people can watch the game (or, the revolutionary option, when the fence is remade to allow all to see). An inappropriate application of the principle of equality, however, is not the only way in which an unjust outcome can be achieved. Imagine that the tall person chooses to take over two boxes

in order to be able to sit down and watch the game, leaving only one box for the other two!

For Christians, it is God's justice which provides the overarching frame for a right understanding, even as we acknowledge how little we understand about God's justice. The ideal of fairness as expressed by Rawls can readily be affirmed by Christians because we accept that God cares completely for each and every one of us. Each person is of ultimate importance in the sight of God, giving us both value and equality with each other. Similarly, the notion of the common good can be affirmed by Christians because God does not deal with us only as individuals, but also as collectives. The whole history of God's dealings with Israel, as recorded in the Old Testament, is focused on the people of Israel, collectively considered. In Christian perspective, concern for social justice follows from the love of neighbour commanded by God.

… concern for social justice follows from the love of neighbour commanded by God.

Many authors reject the idea that there can be an objective standard of social justice. Moral relativists, non-cognitivists, moral skeptics, moral nihilists and logical positivists all espouse theories that squeeze out the possibility of establishing objective standards of justice. This leads to the view that all such proposed standards are nothing more than rationalisations by the powerful in support of a status quo from which they benefit. Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992) goes so far as to reject the whole idea of social justice.[99] Hayek limits injustice to the unjust acts of agents and the remedy for injustice to specific laws which prohibit these unjust acts. This amounts to a refusal to accept any concern for justice between members of society except where criminal wrongdoing can be identified. Justice for Hayek seems to be 'what the current law requires', without regard for the potential unfairness of many laws. Christians should never be content to ignore concerns about the justice of laws in addition to the justice of actions under the laws, as human justice is always subject to the judgement of God. It is the reality of God that prompts Christians to

99 F Hayek. *The Mirage of Social Justice*.

resist the rejection of social justice proposed by Hayek and others. We need a robust sense of social justice because it at least allows us to question unjust laws, harmful attitudes and practices that keep powerless groups powerless and downtrodden. Deep injustice often results from laws that are narrowly framed and administered without recognition of the areas of disability and discrimination suffered by disadvantaged groups. A precise definition of social justice continues to elude us, but the usefulness of the concept does not depend upon a precise definition.

The Roman Catholic reference to the common good encapsulates what Hayek is missing. We need a concept of the whole of society as a frame of reference for individual rights and obligations, just as we have a need for the concept of ecology as the necessary frame for understanding the interactions of the myriad of species and processes of all the beings with whom we share this fragile earth. Every physical intervention into ecosystems has many consequences, mostly unintended. The same is true for actions within society. The health of an ecosystem, or a society, is hard to judge in terms of the experience of individual elements within them. Recognition that justice concerns the common good is an important challenge to views of justice that prefer to see no possible injustices other than breach of contract. 'The U.S. ethos often resists the demands of distributive justice and wants to understand all justice in terms of commutative justice.'[100] Reference to the common good immediately removes the assumption that I don't owe anything to anyone unless I have a contract with them. Christians recognise an equality before God in people by virtue of the reality that 'from one blood [God] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth' (Acts 17:26). Many people will recognise the cogency of basing equality on our common humanity, though it does remain unclear what specific obligations our common humanity might give us toward others. At least the idea of our common humanity makes appeals for help possible and the existence of over-rewarded privilege a cause for concern. Concern for social justice is deeply embedded in this awareness of our common humanity.

100 Curran, 191.

The Stance of our Churches

The Australian Context

Modern Australia was founded as a British penal colony.

Modern Australia was founded as a British penal colony. There was no clear negotiation with the Aboriginal nations, the first peoples of this land. Aboriginal communities were driven from their land and their culture broken. This remains a deep, unhealed wound in the foundations of Australian society. Calls for reconciliation, for treaty and for a national 'voice' for Aboriginal peoples point the way forward, but without a more wholehearted commitment by the 'second peoples' to this way, the hope remains unfulfilled. As members of the 'second peoples', we cannot speak of the Australian context with the full confidence and authority that we would wish.

Prisons are perhaps the ultimate 'us and them' form of society, with mutual antagonism between jailer and jailed, with the power residing with the jailers. If we add to this the stratified class structure of Britain that was built into Australia from its origins, we can see how a vision of a classless society would be appealing, but also how far would be the journey to achieve it. Today, it can be argued that the former dominance of the British aristocracy has largely been replaced by the dominance of the wealthy and the faceless corporations, national and multinational. The fact of democratic politics notwithstanding, egalitarianism in Australia could be a wave that has been recently receding. Parliaments are quite beholden to the wealthy and the corporations, though we should acknowledge the continuing role of trade unions and various kinds of people movements.

Western cultural patterns of land use have yet to become fully sustainable in Australia. Environmental degradation is now of proper public concern, though we have yet to deal appropriately with non-sustainable industries such as coal-fired power stations and water-hungry agriculture in our more arid areas. The impact of our wastes, such as carbon emissions in the air and plastics in the ocean, requires more urgent action than we collectively provide.

It is ironic that a society dominated by 'boat people' should struggle to welcome the next generation of boat people, but the widespread fear of dispossession is not unexpected from people who know themselves to have come into their present benefits at least partly through the dispossession of others. Granted the extraordinary number of asylum seekers in the world, no one country can carry the burden of resettlement alone. This is all the more reason why Australia should return to its former policies and practices of welcoming and integrating refugees.

It is ironic that a society dominated by 'boat people' should struggle to welcome the next generation of boat people …

Our inherited British culture has been markedly patriarchal. Restricted roles available to women and the criminalisation of homosexuality have been two lingering effects of this heritage. Sexuality remains a contested and fraught arena in Australian public life, though respect for the freedom and dignity of each person has made significant gains in recent years.

Australian churches have had significant public credibility for their widespread provision of social services. Recent revelations of the horrors of child abuse within all too many church institutions (and other institutions, of course) have shamed us all. Restitution and reconciliation with survivors remains a work in progress, now largely under government supervision.

Granted the totally unpromising origins of Australia, it is remarkable that Australian society has achieved widespread generosity in the face of disasters and respect for each other across differences of religions and culture that have led to wars elsewhere. The prosperity that has been enjoyed for generations has not only come from theft of the land, but also from hard work and effective co-operation. Christianity has played a positive role in these achievements, particularly where churches have allowed themselves to be oriented towards the freedom and the love so evident in Jesus.

The Stance of TSA

For TSA, there is an essential nexus between the life of holiness and social justice. The link is clearly discernible in Scripture, made explicit in TSA doctrine and exemplified in its history. Concentration on social services through much of the 20th century may have muted the cry for justice, but in recent decades there is evidence that TSA has recovered its voice at international and local levels. The Salvation Army *Handbook of Doctrine*, following the internal logic of Scripture, draws the themes together and makes the link between holiness and social justice explicit in a series of statements.

For TSA, there is an essential nexus between the life of holiness and social justice.

> *God is holy, awesome in his majesty and in the beauty of his character. His children are called to reflect his holiness, and be dedicated to his service, becoming like him in character.*
>
> *The life of holiness is not mysterious or overwhelming or too difficult to understand. It is becoming like Christ who is the true image of God. He is the truly holy one, who revealed the holiness of God in the wholeness and fullness of his human life and in the manner of his self-offering to God.*
>
> *As we follow Jesus, who came to seek and save the lost, we sense the call to serve others in Christ's name. We build relationships with the lost, the abused, the forgotten and the powerless. In them we see Christ. We are drawn to search for truth and justice and the righting of wrongs in the name of Christ.*
>
> *Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of all that Old Testament law had promised and anticipated. He taught that the Law was, in fact, fulfilled in love (Mark 12: 28-31). … This transformation is what makes social holiness possible and what enables us to live by the radical ethic of love.*
>
> *The mission of God's holy people encompasses evangelism, service and social action. It is the holy love of God, expressed*

in the heart and life of his people, pointing the world to Christ, inviting the world to saving grace, serving the world with Christ's compassion and attacking social evils. Holiness leads to mission.[101]

The *Handbook of Doctrine* includes a commentary on the official doctrinal statements called 'For further exploration'. This statement appears under the heading 'Human worth':

The Salvation Army's international mission statement affirms that 'its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and meet human need in his name without discrimination'. This statement implies the worth and dignity of all of humanity as made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).[102]

The establishment of TSA International Social Justice Commission (ISJC)[103] in New York in 2007 is evidence of a renewed commitment to social justice advocacy. The ISJC has provided a major impetus and a point of international co-ordination for social justice issues. As TSA's strategic voice to advocate for human dignity and social justice with the world's poor and oppressed, it speaks on behalf of the powerless in the international public arena, particularly the United Nations, and works to address social injustice in a manner which is consistent with TSA principles and purposes. In addition, it encourages and offers guidance to territories throughout the world in addressing social issues in a local context. The ISJC has five strategic goals:

Raise strategic voices to advocate for the world's poor and oppressed.

Be a recognised centre of research and critical thinking on issues of global social justice.

Collaborate with like-minded organisations to advance the global cause of social justice.

Exercise leadership in determining social justice policies and practices of The Salvation Army.

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101 *TSA Doctrine,* 192-98.

102 *TSA Doctrine*, 49.

103 Internet access to the ISJC is at: www.salvationarmy.org/isjc/partner

Live the principles of justice and compassion and inspire others to do likewise.[104]

The ISJC fully supports the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Representatives attend regular meetings at United Nations Headquarters in New York and reports are updated monthly on the ISJC web page. The Sustainable Development Goals are used as the context in which to frame the reports. Each report specifies the goals it reflects. The knowledge gained guides TSA's international development programmes and projects.

In Australia, Social Justice Departments have been established in both Territories. The two departments work closely together and will merge when The Salvation Army becomes one territory at the end of 2018. The Eastern Territory Department[105] based in Sydney operates on four foundational concepts:

- Social justice is the Kingdom of God on earth. (Rather than working to a specific definition of social justice, they address social ills and problems that are clearly not consistent with God's Kingdom on earth.)
- Social justice is integral to our holiness, reflecting the life of Christ.
- Social justice is not a list of issues, but a lifestyle.
- Social justice can be lived out by using four principles of justice seen in the way Jesus lived.

These four principles are:

- including the excluded;
- challenging cultural principles;
- confronting the powerful;
- advocacy for the oppressed.

The Department currently works in the areas of education and resourcing, advocacy, engagement (networking with other agencies) and responding to current issues.

104 MC MacMillan, D Possterski & JE Read (eds.). *When Justice is the Measure*, 109.

105 Its website is www.salvosocialjustice.org

The Southern Territory Department[106] works with similar motivation toward social justice awareness and action to impact the mainstream operations of the Army. Divisional social justice co-ordinators in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and the Northern Territory connect with the Territorial Department to address issues. The department has given leadership and provided resources for action and advocacy concerning poverty, human trafficking, refugees and asylum seekers, indigenous and women and children's issues.

While William Booth showed concern for the poor from his youth in Nottingham, his primary focus through the years of the Christian Mission and the earliest days of TSA was evangelism. When explaining the name change from 'The Christian Mission' to 'The Salvation Army', Booth wrote: 'We are a Salvation people – this is our speciality – getting saved and keeping saved, and then getting somebody else saved.'[107] The first organised social service of TSA occurred not in London, but by Salvationists in Melbourne when a halfway house for released prisoners was opened in December 8, 1883 by Major James Barker. Booth sent an officer from London to assess the work to see if it could be applied in England. A similar scheme was then later developed near Wandsworth Gaol.[108]

The first social centre of the TSA in London, the Hanbury Street Women's Shelter, was established by October 1884, through the efforts of Mrs. Cotterill (who had taken women into her own home in Whitechapel for a few years) and Catherine Booth. At this time, the age of consent in the United Kingdom was 13. TSA successfully campaigned for the raising of the age to 16. Juvenile prostitution was rife and girls were trafficked as sexual slaves overseas. W.T. Stead, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, published four articles entitled 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon'. TSA had provided the proof of the appalling practices of the brothels. A petition to the Government demanding legislation for the protection of children was promoted in every TSA centre in the country. In less than three weeks it was signed by 393,000 people. When the sheets were joined up the petition was

106 The webpage is justsalvos.com

107 W Booth. 'Our New Name'. *The Salvationist*, January, 1879.

108 R Sandall. *The History of The Salvation Army*, 7.

two and a half miles long. Eight cadets carried it into the House of Commons and placed it by the side of the table near the mace. As a result of the widespread protest, the 'Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 for the protection of women and children and the suppression of brothels' became law. General Booth wrote: 'The bill is only an instalment of justice due to women; still it is a very substantial one.'[109]

By the end of the decade, Booth had become fully convinced of the importance of the social ministries for the Kingdom. There is evidence of this in the publication of 'Salvation for Both Worlds' (1889) and particularly *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890). In 'Salvation for Both Worlds', Booth said that it had come with growing clarity that 'I had two gospels of deliverance to preach – one for each world, or rather one gospel which applied to both. I saw that when the Bible said "He that believeth should be saved", it meant not only saved from the miseries of the future world, but from the miseries of this also.'[110] The following year he published *In Darkest England and the Way Out*. While it reveals a burning social conscience that rails against poverty, prostitution, drunkenness, sweat shops, unsanitary conditions resulting in the death of children, unemployment, homelessness and many other social evils, Booth insisted in the preface:

> *… my only hope for permanent deliverance of mankind from misery, either in this world or in the next is the regeneration or remaking of the individual by the power of the Holy Ghost through Jesus Christ. But in providing for the relief of temporal misery I reckon that I am only making it easy where it is difficult and possible where it is impossible, for men and women to find their way to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*[111]

The corollary of this kind of thinking is that feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, caring for the sick, or showing unconditional regard for the prostitute or drug addict are deeply spiritual acts like the spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting. It also mitigates against

109 W Booth. *The War Cry*. August 15, 1885.

110 W Booth. 'Salvation For Both Worlds'.

111 W Booth. *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, Preface.

the dualism of dividing body and soul and relegating the physical to a position of limited relevance. Booth uses the language of justice in describing the 'submerged tenth' of England as being defrauded, robbed, enslaved, victimised and disinherited. With rhetorical flourish he describes the consequence of a procession of homeless starving people who marched to Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's and Trafalgar Square asking for work and bread. 'But Lazarus showed his rags and his sores too conspicuously for the convenience of Dives and was summarily dealt with in the name of law and order.'[112] Although never using the term, he advocated for the unemployed on the basis of 'human rights'.

> *It is always work that they ask for. The Divine curse is to them the most blessed of benedictions ... As well as discussing how these poor wanderers should in the second Adam, 'all be made alive', ought we not to put forth some effort to effect their restoration to that share in the heritage of labour which is theirs by right of descent from the first Adam?*[113]

One of the first enterprises of the Darkest England Scheme was an attack on two examples of social injustice in the manufacture of matches. Because of the use of yellow phosphorus, employees' health was badly affected through touching and inhaling the substance. Often the necrosis of the tissues resulted in loss of teeth and disfigurement called 'phossy jaw'. In addition, the employees were grossly underpaid while the largest firms were making 28% profit. In 1891 Booth opened a match factory making 'safety' matches without phosphorus and paying the employees up to 60% more than the industry standard. The Darkest England matchboxes became a familiar sight throughout England and by 1900 the large factories were compelled by public opinion to change their methods of production. In 1901 the factory was taken over by the British Match Company.

An Act of Parliament in 1908 made it illegal to make or sell matches which contained the kind of phosphorus formerly used.[114]

112 Booth, 39.

113 Booth, 39.

114 Sandall, 124.

Bramwell Booth strongly supported the Darkest England Scheme in straightforward terms of social justice. Quoting Micah 6:4, he says, 'To admit an injustice and not to seek to repair it, is to relapse into barbarism.'[115] He then outlined the injustice of laws affecting women, the 'poor laws' and the orphans who were sent to paupers' schools where they were abused. Bramwell saw the social services as 'Christ-life-ness',

> *The carrying on of the very life of Christ, and bringing its principles and power right down to the miseries of today, just as at first he came down to the miseries of Judea and touched them and relieved them and healed them.*[116]

Similar examples of social justice action occurred in other countries. In Japan, TSA raised public awareness of the plight of prostitutes held in brothels to pay off excessive loans, eventually resulting in a change of law. In 1900, 12,000 young women obtained their freedom because of this action. The closure of Devil's Island, the penal colony in French Guiana, owes much to the work of Commissioner Charles Pean and other French Salvationists over many years. Finally in 1945, TSA was given the task of repatriating the last of the liberated men who had survived the cruel and unjust system.

Not all efforts of TSA for social justice were as clearly benign as the examples quoted above. Looking for employment for the indigent of England, TSA accepted a grant of land in the colony of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The land given to TSA consisted of a 3000-acre farm and two smaller allotments. The Mazoe Valley farm was never used for the Darkest England Scheme because of insufficient funds, and Booth had to jettison the plan. The farm was eventually developed into a church, primary school and medical clinic. This story is a reminder of how even the most compassionate of people can be blinded to justice by the dominant culture of the day. Perhaps the most distressing example of this blindness occurred in South Africa. In its confession to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, TSA said:

115 B Booth. *Social Reparation*, 20.

116 Booth, 56.

> *While we did care for body and soul, we ought more strongly to have attacked the evil which wrecked both bodies and souls in the first place. Professing an apolitical stance, we used this to avoid the kind of protest for which the early Salvation Army was known.*[117]

The policy of being non-aligned to any political party has had the unfortunate result of silencing the Army's voice of protest when injustice needed to be challenged. Non-alignment, however, need not mean silence. The Social Policy and Parliamentary Units (SPPU) of TSA in Victoria and New Zealand have reported annually on children, work and incomes, housing, crime and punishment and social hazards. Recommendations have frequently been incorporated in government policy. The SPPU experience shows that it is possible for TSA to receive government funding for social services and still provide a robust critique of government social policy.[118]

Another possible reason for the reduction of social justice activities is the internal rhetoric about the primacy of evangelism which makes social justice at best a secondary concern. TSA is endeavouring to articulate a theology of salvation that holds what General Booth called 'temporal' and 'eternal' salvation together. The Spiritual Life Commission was convened in 1996 to 'review the ways in which The Salvation Army cultivates and sustains the spiritual life of its people'. In *Called to be God's People* which is a report on The Spiritual Life Commission, Commissioner Robert Street quotes Major Campbell Roberts:

> *We who have received complete love from Christ are called to give transparent witness to justice, peace, equality and holiness through actions which redeem and reorder the world. We need to follow our Lord in starting with suffering of the poor and outcast, and expanding the scope of neighbourly love through the barriers of culture, religion, gender and nation. When proclamation and action match, the attractiveness and power of the Gospel take hold.*[119]

117 MacMillan, 29-30.

118 MacMillan, 73.

119 R Street. *Called to be God's People*, 57.

Occasionally tensions surface within TSA regarding mission priorities. It has been noted that the allocation of resources has frequently favoured either evangelism, social services, or social justice to the detriment of the other two. Sometimes programmes are assessed by the actual or potential number of conversions recorded. Usually these issues are resolved by the rhetoric that evangelism and social involvement are carried out alongside each other. A more productive approach may be to reinforce the strong bond between holiness and social justice. Holiness is often described as Christlikeness, which inevitably means living out the values of the Kingdom of God in this life. A holy individual and a holy church will endeavour to integrate proclamation of the Gospel with the demonstration of Gospel values to all who are unjustly treated. Social involvement has evangelistic consequences as Christians bear witness to the transforming grace of God.

Holiness also implies sacrifice. Jesus expressed this in his prayer to the Father. 'As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so they may also be sanctified in the truth' (John 17: 18-19). In this context, 'sanctification' means that Jesus set himself apart for death. For the Church, the essential expression of holiness includes compassionate sacrificial service to meet human need and active participation in the just righting of wrongs in this world. William Booth's words from his final public address in the Royal Albert Hall still inspire Salvationists today:

> *While women weep as they do now, I'll fight;*
> *While little children go hungry as they do now, I'll fight;*
> *While men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight;*
> *While there is a drunkard left,*
> *While there is a poor lost girl upon the streets,*
> *While there yet remains one dark soul without the light of God,*
> *I'll fight – I'll fight to the very end.*[120]

The Stance of the UCA

120 H Gariepy. *Christianity in Action*, 84.

Social Justice has been a central concern for the UCA from its inception. Cynthia Coghill and Elenie Poulos have edited a book, *For a World Reconciled*,[121] which includes 146 official statements of the UCA Assembly which address social justice issues, mostly quite specific and topical at the time the statement was made. There are four statements to the nation (1977, 1988, 1997 and 2012). The next grouping is headed 'A Destiny Together: Justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples'. Other groupings cover war and peace, human rights, a just and inclusive society, environmental issues, justice for people beyond Australia and living justly as church. A solid and detailed account of UCA commitment and activity in the area of social justice can be found in this collection of statements.

Social Justice has been a central concern for the UCA from its inception.

The inaugural Assembly of the UCA (June 1977) delivered a 'Statement to the Nation'[122] which sets out this commitment in general but detailed terms. The 'Statement' is short, comprising eleven paragraphs. The first four paragraphs announce the formation of the UCA, affirm that its union as one church is a sign of the reconciliation that is needed by the whole human race, acknowledge the legacy of the churches from which the union has been formed and recognise the responsibilities of the UCA within Australia and beyond, particularly in South East Asia and the Pacific. The final three paragraphs affirm the primary loyalty of the UCA to God and pledge the UCA to seek the welfare of all and to proceed under the inspiration of God's self-giving love. The four paragraphs in the middle address specific areas of concern which comprise the social justice agenda of the UCA at its inception, as follow:

» *We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the*

121 C Coghill & E Poulos (eds.). *For a World Reconciled*.

122 *Theology for Pilgrims*, 617-18.

community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race.

- *We pledge ourselves to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occur. We will work for the eradication of poverty and racism within our society and beyond. We affirm the rights of all people to equal educational opportunities, adequate health care, freedom of speech, employment or dignity in unemployment if work is not available. We will oppose all forms of discrimination which infringe basic rights and freedoms.*
- *We will challenge values which emphasise acquisitiveness and greed in disregard of the needs of others and which encourage a higher standard of living for the privileged in the face of the daily widening gap between the rich and poor.*
- *We are concerned with the basic human rights of future generations and will urge the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for their use and enjoyment.*[123]

Social justice as expressed in this Statement can be seen to move between general values and principles on the one hand and a myriad of specific areas of injustice on the other. The general principles assist us to recognise injustice as it shows up in everyday life, particularly in the systemic arrangements of society, such as in the widening gap between rich and poor. The rising awareness of environmental issues in 1977 is shown in the salience of intergenerational fairness as a major component of social justice.

The Statement is quite general in scope and uncompromising in its commitments. There is, however, one fundamental assumption in this 1977 Statement that would not be accepted uncritically today. The idea that the values espoused by liberal Protestant churches are fully congruent with the values of liberal democracies no longer seems self-evident. The Statement locates the Church as an institution within the nation, without apparent qualification.

123 Statement.

> *Notwithstanding the immediately preceding explicit and proper claim that the church may well be called into conflict with the rulers of the day, the statement declares: "But our Uniting Church, as an institution within the nation, must constantly stress the universal values which must find expression in national policies if humanity is to survive."*[124]

This link between the Church, the nation, and universal values is almost a classic statement of liberal Protestantism's alliance with modern liberal politics which uncritically assumed its own particular values to be universal.[125]

This alliance between liberal protestantism and liberal politics is still evident today, but developing differences in understanding and application of broadly liberal values are now also evident. We might suggest that it is the reality of holiness (understood as the outgoing love of God) that is the most obvious cause of disturbance for the traditional Protestant alliance with the liberal state.

While the theme of holiness does not get an explicit mention in this Statement, it can be seen as a foundational assumption throughout. The Statement is addressed to the Australian nation, so the focus is on what will be more readily understandable to secular Australia. Yet the basis for UCA involvement in national affairs is not secular. 'A Christian responsibility to society has always been regarded as fundamental to the mission of the Church. In the Uniting Church our response to the Christian gospel will continue to involve us in social and national affairs.'[126] The theme of holiness can be discerned in the final affirmation, 'In the spirit of His [Jesus'] self-giving love we seek to go forward.'[127] While there is an explicit commitment to basic values and principles which are common intellectual currency in national policy debates, divergences in priorities highlight the importance of discernment. Even good values and principles can be corrupted through misinterpretation and biased application. It is explicitly acknowledged that acquisitiveness and greed regularly lead

124 Statement.

125 G Thompson. Forthcoming book. Personal communication.

126 Statement.

127 Statement.

to the corruption of values and principles. Practices of prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit for discernment are very near the surface in this Statement.

It is instructive to look at the institutional forms that have arisen in the life of the UCA as a result of the commitments expressed in this inaugural Statement and subsequent statements. At the Assembly level, there have been three agencies in particular (UnitingJustice, UnitingWorld and UnitingCare) which have carried institutional responsibility for these social justice commitments,[128] though they are of course not absent from any of the Assembly agencies. UnitingJustice has dealt explicitly with social justice principles and with UCA assessment of potential areas of injustice in national life. UnitingJustice identified the key areas of its work under the following seven headings:

> *Just and Sustainable Economy, Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Environment, Human Rights, Justice for Indigenous Australians, Uniting For Peace and Society, Religion and Politics.*[129]

The role of UnitingJustice, like the continuing role of Synod-based justice groups, was that of identifying social justice concerns and then resourcing and promoting responses to injustice, as is documented in *For a World Reconciled*. Through more recent organisational change, the national justice focus of the UCA is being carried on through the Assembly and in particular the Assembly Resourcing Unit, working in collaboration with Synod and Agency-based staff.

UnitingWorld is the international mission agency of the Assembly of the UCA. It is responsible for missional relationships with partner churches overseas and with practical projects of co-operation in disaster recovery and community development, where concern for justice is always a major factor. A central aspect of its charter is to stand in solidarity with UCA global Church Partners in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific.

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128 UCA Assembly website, 12-5-2015. Unfortunately, this document is no longer available on the UCA Assembly website due to the restructuring of the work of UnitingJustice.

129 UCA Assembly website, UnitingJustice. Accessed 12-5-2015

We work for a world where lives are whole and hopeful, free from poverty and injustice.

Because every person matters. Because every person is beloved by God and invited to enjoy the rich blessing of abundant life.

As an agency of the Uniting Church in Australia, we are a channel for connecting Australian people to God's work in the wider world.[130]

One of the dangers of a social justice commitment is the idea that our judgement as to what is just is actually correct. UnitingWorld begins with the commitment to working in partnership with churches and church agencies overseas. There is a vision of transformed communities where peace and justice reign, but it is clearly recognised that those communities are themselves the main agents in this transformation. As their partners, we share something of the joy and sorrow of the journey, but as assistants and fellow travellers rather than as leaders. This stance arises in part from the recognition that the earlier understanding of Christian mission held by western Christians was deeply flawed by the assumption of the superiority of western culture, so that mission to Australian indigenous communities could be couched in terms of civilising before evangelising. There is some necessary repentance built into this formulation of Christian mission in terms of partnerships.

UnitingCare is the Assembly agency which has oversight of the large network of UCA social service agencies within Australia, which includes responsibility for co-ordinating the ongoing dialogue with governments concerning social policy.

UnitingCare Australia's Mission is to express God's love for all people through the Uniting Church's commitment to supporting individuals, families and communities through advocacy and the enhancement of community service provision.[131]

130 UnitingWorld website. Accessed 4-6-2018. There is much more detail there of the specific approach adopted by UnitingWorld.

131 UnitingCare Australia's website. Accessed 4-6-2018.

UnitingCare has set out its understanding of its mission in the document, 'Faith Foundations',[132] beginning with the above statement. It comprises three sections. Part A sets UnitingCare within the mission of the UCA, referencing the *Basis of Union* and the 'Statement to the Nation'.

> *Engaging the church with the world through community services provides us with opportunity to live out the Christian vision. The Christian vision is inclusive, all-encompassing, and looks for the equality of opportunity for individuals, communities and peoples.*[133]

Part B lists twelve commitments under the headings 'Foundational Concerns', 'Defining Characteristics' and 'Specific Roles'.[134]

Part C refers to the parable of the Good Samaritan and also the Magnificat as grounding for an expression of commitment.[135] UnitingCare places a strong emphasis upon advocacy for the needs of the poor and marginalised. This advocacy is based upon solidarity with poor and marginalised communities through the work of its service agencies. Yet it is also recognised that it is the voice of poor and marginalised people themselves which carries the most power, so that advocacy is seen to be an interim requirement. Empowering the powerless is always the main game.

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132 The document, 'Faith Foundations', can be downloaded from the UnitingCare website.

133 *Faith Foundations*.

134 *Faith Foundations*. **Foundational Concerns:** The Common Good, United Australia, A Just Society, One World.
Defining Characteristics: Human Rights, Social Good/Natural Harmony, Pluralism, Reconciliation
Specific Roles: Advocacy, A Prophetic Voice, Service, Shared Responsibility.

135 *Faith Foundations* UnitingCare Australia, therefore, commits itself:
To honour the dignity and freedom of all those who bear the name Australian and to enable the free expression of their hopes and dreams.
To speak out for people who are voiceless, poor, rejected or marginalised, people with disabilities or who are dislocated members of our community, and to make possible their full participation in the life of Australian society.
To create an equitable society of justice and peace and to affirm, wherever possible, the human struggle for meaning and fulfilment.
To be a prophetic voice, where such a voice is required, to remind all citizens of that unifying vision whose end is an inclusive and reconciled community.

There are many further dimensions to the social justice work of the UCA. Perhaps the most instructive aspect of attempts by the UCA to live out its 1977 social justice commitments can be seen in the relationship between the Aboriginal section of the UCA (the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, [UAICC]), and the UCA itself. UAICC was established by resolution of the UCA Assembly in 1985 and is part of the UCA, but determines its own goals and objectives and decides its policies and priorities. Concern for social justice has required a covenant to be established between the UCA and the UAICC in order to address properly respectful ways of relating. Explicit in this covenant is a recognition of the historic injustice that Aboriginal communities in Australia have suffered since the arrival of the British colonisers. This recognition of historic injustice has led to the adoption at the 2009 Assembly of a new Preamble to the UCA Constitution. This Preamble tells of the relationships between First Peoples and those who have come to Australia since 1788 as an essential part of the formation of the UCA. The Preamble affirms that the First Peoples had already encountered God before the coming of Europeans, as well as acknowledging the dispossession and destruction of culture experienced by the First Peoples in this process.

> *The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways.*[136]

While this affirmation is still being digested by many in the UCA, it has been officially accepted by each of the synods and by forty-one out of forty-three presbyteries (at that time) across Australia and is thereby accepted as part of the Preamble to the UCA Constitution. It offers a valuable model to the current national conversation about recognition of this history in our national constitution, as one step

136 UCA Assembly website, The link for the Preamble is: assembly.uca.org.au/resources/covenanting/item/668-the-revised-preamble On 4-6-2018, the Preamble could be accessed via the Assembly website through Resources/Covenanting/Revised Preamble.

towards reconciliation. It is testimony to the importance of truth-telling in addressing longstanding historic injustice. It would seem to be a significant example of the intersection of holiness and social justice in the life of the UCA.

Historic injustices have not infrequently been perpetrated by people of goodwill because of cultural blind spots, as we, with the wisdom of hindsight, can see. Some evils, such as the widespread child abuse now documented by a Royal Commission, were known to be wrong at the time of their occurrence, though knowledge of this wrong was not enough to bring about justice for the victims in all too many cases. Our discussion should make us sensitive to the existence of awful practices not recognised as unacceptable at the time, such as slavery in the ancient world, in more recent centuries, and even in our own time (e.g. in cases of human trafficking). We should ask ourselves what practices of our time which we tolerate will be judged as heinous by future generations. For Christians, this question arises from the fact that we look to God for the final judgement, with an expectation that much will be revealed that is shameful. It is a matter of faith that the judgement of God, while utterly radical and unanswerable, comes from the same loving God who is our maker and redeemer as well as our judge.

CONCLUSION

Social Justice and Holiness

God is present in the empathy which recognises injustice …

Recognising injustices that are endemic to economic, political and social arrangements does not automatically lead a person to the question of holiness. If the question of God arises in this context, it is most frequently in the form, 'Why does God allow such inequities to continue?' The seriousness and longevity of social injustices and historic exploitation are agonising for those who suffer from them and also for those who recognise the injustice and care about those most affected. For Christians, God is present in the empathy which recognises injustice and makes the suffering of others our own, as well as in the relationships, however damaged, that cause the suffering. God allows the injustice because we, who live unjustly, are thereby given more time, presumably for repentance and amendment of life. In Christian understanding, the deep roots of injustice are an affront to the holiness of God as well as a prompt to seek to serve the mission of God for fullness of life with true justice.

While it has been our conviction throughout this work that holiness and social justice are intrinsically related, this relationship is ultimately in God rather than in ourselves. As humans, we tend to focus on the aspects of God's redemptive mission with us which form our personal calling. Yet God is one and so all that we have said above shows that holiness is essentially involved in the true pursuit of social justice, while a 'holiness' that has no sense of the importance of social justice has not travelled very far with God, at least as Christians understand God in Christ.

Christians should endorse the therapeutic understanding that the first requirement for addressing injustice is a truthful accounting of the circumstances deemed to be unjust and a judicious assessment of possible ways of ameliorating the situation. Most of us live with one-sided perceptions of our own situation which become a part of the problem when inadequate notice is taken of the suffering of those around us. Christians identify a spirit of objectivity and truth-seeking as an aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit of God co-working with our spirits. Discernment is needed if we are to see the real situation when there is conflict and divided opinion. For this discernment, holiness is essential.

The second requirement for addressing injustice is solidarity, first with and between the victims of injustice and then with those in the wider society with resources for ameliorating the situation. Solidarity between people is a good gift of God, flowing from the presence of God with us. It shows up in the reality of shared interests – indeed, our common use of earth as our home – and in caring for one another. Living from this solidarity gives depth and focus to holiness. The potential solidarity that does exist between the victims of injustice and those benefiting from the injustice is another consequence of the omnipresence of God. Solidarity is broken where there is injustice, so that restoring this lost solidarity is an important aim of justice-seeking and conflict resolution. Ideologies which deny or resist solidarity are frequently involved in maintaining the injustice.

It is tempting to think that if only we had the power, any injustice could be magically brushed aside. This is actually a temptation rather than a real solution, though some people do need to find the power to speak and to call for change. Also, those with power need to use their power with responsible integrity, for the purposes of the wellbeing of all. Genuine social change comes about when there is recognition of injustice on all sides and a commitment to make and support the required changes. Respect for those on the other side of the situation is needed if really positive ways forward are to be found. For Christians, the love that we need to find for our enemies, who do treat us unjustly, is the surprising requirement from God. The miracle is that, when wrongdoers repent, enemies can start the journey into friendship. Once again, we sense the track of the Holy Spirit co-working with our spirits.

The pain of the human condition derives from the brokenness of our history, along with the mysteries of illness, loss and mortality. Injustice thrives within this brokenness. There is common cause between people of goodwill in seeking to overcome injustice. Yet it does not seem to be within our human resources to overcome injustice in any but a partial and unsatisfactory fashion. The victims of robbery may have the material value of their loss returned, but trust in the benevolence of the wider world can never be completely restored. Even more impossible is the restoration of murder victims to their families. When situations become serious, our limitations become obvious. To refer to injustice in describing deep aspects of the human condition can be to rationalise the mysteries of evil and loss and death, perhaps unhelpfully. Ideals of justice become hollow when they manifestly cannot be delivered.

… it is when our human resources run out that God meets us.

In biblical faith, it is when our human resources run out that God meets us. This situation is reflected in Psalm 107.

> *Some wandered in desert wastes,*
> *finding no way to an inhabited town;*
> *hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.*
> *Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,*
> *and he delivered them from their distress;*
> *he led them by a straight way,*
> *until they reached an inhabited town.*
> *Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,*
> *for his wonderful works to humankind.*
> *For he satisfies the thirsty,*
> *and the hungry he fills with good things.*
>
> (Psalm 107:4-9)

The psalm repeats this pattern of humans getting into trouble, calling on God and being delivered to a safe state in three further scenarios, of imprisonment, sickness and a storm at sea. The critical moment is when the people in trouble recognise that they are bereft of solutions and cry out to God for help. The good news is that God is there. This suggests that our times of desolation are an antechamber of the holy,

the threshold of the encounter with God. Indeed, this is the deep pattern that we see in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. There is a special holiness surrounding suffering and death which Christians recognise as the nearer presence of God.

AFTERWORD

We wish to record our gratitude to those in our churches who appointed us to this task in Dialogue. We have appreciated the opportunity of meeting together and finding words to express common and not so common understandings of God's work among us, particularly in our various histories. We all feel that we have learned much from each other and from our various traditions.

We feel that we have identified what the Reformed and the Wesleyan understandings of holiness and social justice have in common, but also where their limitations become more clear. It was something of a breakthrough to recognise that the Methodist term 'holiness' and the Reformed term 'sanctification' cover very much the same semantic territory. It was also significant that we found it impossible to identify a social justice teaching that could be expressed in terms of a political or social blueprint for an ideal society. Our best intuitions concerning social justice follow the track of God's redemptive mission to the lost and the least, in their particular forms of loss, victimisation and oppression.

Perhaps our most important finding is that what we have in common is the reality of God in Christ, which somehow reconciles the various points of knowledge and experience, codified in traditions, which in human terms seem hard to reconcile.

To God be the glory!

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SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Session 1

Exploring Holiness

'The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:
Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.' (Lev. 19:1-2).

Holiness emanates from God, but also seeks us out. In exploring the very idea of holiness, we come close to the point where God encounters us and lays claim to our love and loyalty. God is beyond us, leading to ideas of holiness as separation, but for Christians, holiness is seen in Jesus, who has brought the unknowable God close to us in love.

Prayer

O Lord, you have searched us and known us. We ask that your Holy Spirit will illumine our hearts and minds, so that we come to see the world and ourselves as you see us. Stir up in us the gift of your love and your calling, that we may live in the power and the truth of your presence and your purposes.

Amen

Questions for discussion:

In what ways do you see God's presence in the world?

How might we recognise 'the holy' in people of other faiths?

What might second peoples learn from Australia's first peoples about holiness?

How does God encounter us when we meet people who are shockingly other than ourselves?

How do we respond to those whose concept of holiness leads them to kill innocent people in the name of God?

Possible hymns:

Holy, holy, holy (TiS[137] 132, SASB[138] 31)

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer (TiS 569, SASB 27)

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart (TiS 547, SASB 573)

Session 2

Exploring Justice

'He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' (Micah 6:8).

God's justice involves mercy and kindness as well as real fairness in all relationships. Human laws are important, but justice requires a discerning formulation of the laws to avoid legal oppression of powerless groups and an equality of all before the law. God's justice looks to the promised fulfilment of loving relationships in the Kingdom of God, so that restoration after breakdown is as important as equality.

Prayer

O Lord, you are ever loving and ever merciful, even in the face of our wrongdoing. Show us the way to live under your rule in all things, even as we fulfil our earthly responsibilities and duties. Help us to be agents of your redeeming forgiveness, that makes amendment of life available to all.

Amen.

137 Together in Song

138 Salvation Army Song Book

Questions for discussion:

In what ways might we see God's holy presence at work when we recognise injustice in our world?

How is God active in the world for the establishment of justice?

What do we name as injustices from which we cannot walk away?

How do we go on in the light of our historic failures?

God heard the cries of his people in Egypt. Whose cries might God be hearing today?

Possible hymns:

What shall I do my God to love (TiS 122, SASB 631)

Brother, sister, let me serve you (TiS 650, SASB 1005)

O Lord, whose human hands were quick (SASB 1003)

What does the Lord require (TiS 618)

Session 3

Exploring Pathways

'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect' (Matt. 5:48).

The Greek word translated here as 'perfect', *teleios*, is better understood as 'goal-oriented', with a sense of completing or reaching the goal. When we are on the way to our goal, signposts and markers are helpful. Our denominational and spiritual traditions function as signposts, as does Scripture. We cannot receive the forgiving presence of God in our lives without becoming more loving ourselves.

Prayer

O Lord, you accompany us on our earthly journey, helping us not to lose our way. Keep us aware of those who need our solidarity and give us the strength to raise our voice against all injustice.

Bring us to that maturity of discipleship in which no sacrifice is too great when you call us.

Amen.

Questions for discussion:

In what ways do you see your church (congregation/denomination) connecting holiness and social justice?

In what ways do you see a shared heritage in the areas of holiness and social justice between The Salvation Army and the Uniting Church?

What factors might make it difficult to understand social justice as a dimension of holiness?

Which voices from the past speak most powerfully to you about the connection between holiness and social justice?

How do we recognise abuses of power, by ourselves as well as by others?

Possible hymns:

God of grace and God of glory (TiS 611, SASB 815)

All my hope on God is founded (TiS 560, SASB 530)

For the healing of the nations (SASB 1000)

Community of Christ (TiS 473)

Session 4

Exploring Our Response

' "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered: "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ' (Mark 12:28b-31).

Holiness has traditionally been understood in terms of separation from the everyday. Christian understandings of holiness recognise the paradoxical truth that the holy and unfathomable God has come to us in love, seeking to catch us up into fullness of life. Holiness therefore involves loving participation in God's mission of redemption for the whole world.

Prayer

O Lord, you dwell in majesty and mystery, yet you knock on the door of our hearts, seeking entry. May we never lose sight of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who shows us the way and calls us to follow, not on our own, but in the company of all the saints and with open hearts to all whom we meet.

Amen.

Questions for discussion:

How do we grow in holiness?

To what social justice issues are you most deeply committed (and why)?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of social media in dealing with injustice?

In what ways do you see our concept of holiness becoming distorted?

Can we leave caring to the professionals?

Possible hymns:

Love divine, all loves excelling (TiS 217, SASB 262)

Dear Father, Lord of humankind (TiS 598, SASB 456)

Every moment children perish (SASB 999)

O God of love, whose heart is ever yearning (TiS 614)

Holiness and Social Justice has been written by the members of dialogue teams representing The Salvation Army and the Uniting Church in Australia, meeting from 2013–18, in satisfaction of the request for a teaching document bringing together holiness and social justice. While all members have contributed to this work, the contribution of individual members can be noted from the papers mentioned in the bibliography, many of which formed the basis for certain sections of this book. This process, including final editing, has been coordinated by Sandy Yule.

This book demonstrates how much holiness and social justice support and purify each other in practice. Readers are encouraged to test this in the light of their own experience.

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