

A Theological Model for Holiness Ethics:
Bonhoeffer, Webster and Levinas

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ABSTRACT

A Theological Model for Holiness Ethics: Bonhoeffer, Webster and Levinas

Dennis Lawrence

Through understanding modern applications of the historical “mark” of “holiness” of the Christian Church, Evangelical Christian disciples can find assurance that they are following God’s will, that their behaviour coincides with God’s revelation, and that they can advance the Church’s mission.

Drawing on insights gleaned from three thinkers, a model for the practical involvement of “holiness ethics” in the modern church is advanced. Each thinker offers a key component to the model. Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers a way of understanding the worlds that provides a positive environment for church work. John Webster offers an inclusive understanding of God’s holiness and how it flows to His human creatures. Emmanuel Levinas offers a manner of understanding how God’s holiness-carrying people can be certain of where they need to be active in the world. Combined, the insights comprise a model that is practical, encouraging, and highly descriptive of the activity of the historical and modern evangelical church.

One result of this thesis is to offer encouragement to active evangelical Christian Church participants. In clearly understanding their world, themselves, and their activity, Christians can be confident that they are doing the right activities toward the right people in the right place and at the right time. Greater certainty about their carrying holiness, which is rooted above them, can impel sounder Christian activity. Implications of the practical holiness ethics model are outlined in the final chapter.

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Introduction

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
two roads diverged in a wood, and I --
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

- Robert Frost

In beginning a journey, as this well-known poem affirms, one does not know the twists and turns of the road to be followed or clearly understand the impact of choices made at the many forks in the roads. It is only upon reaching the end that these become clear. As life is like this, so involvement in this thesis project has been entirely like this.

The journey began with what seemed like a simple question about churches that separate themselves from others and how and why they have done this over the centuries. Because of a personal four-decade long spiritual and church journey that involved such an isolated church, this question became significant especially over the past half decade.

The initial question was simply: “Why do some church bodies determine that they need to segregate themselves from the larger church and world community?” Sometimes, these churches consider themselves to be “the only true Church,” “the remnant Church,” or other similar appellations. This led to considering the theme of “holiness,” although from a far different perspective than eventually developed. Initial perceptions indicated that this process of separation, or isolation, occurred because such bodies perceive themselves to be different from- even better than- others in their pursuit of holiness. Because of a particular understanding of holiness, this leads to separating themselves from others to be clean and not sullied through touching the perceived uncleanness of the world or other churches that are seen as too close to the world.¹

While considering this subject, and initial impressions of a “separation mentality” regarding “holiness,” I discovered a short document in which a surprisingly diverse group of individuals reveals something about an effort afoot to reconcile Christian believers. This group, with each member firmly committed to his respective Evangelical and Catholic community, proposes a uniting of Christians around the subject of “holiness,” rather than continuing the process of splitting apart with self-righteous judgment of others regarding this subject. In March 2005, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” published a short article entitled “The Call to Holiness: A Statement of Evangelicals and Catholics Together.” In this brief but challenging article ECT affirms God’s calling people to holiness, along with the enabling and empowering of holiness that is offered as a result of Christ’s death and resurrection. This call and response, they contend, leads to conformity to Christ which “involves a radical love that is cruciform, requiring a profound gift of

¹ Many scriptural passages are taken to indicate such radical action, including Isaiah 52.11 and 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1, where the discussion is of Christians, holiness, and separation.

self.”² They decry the non-relational component of much that is seen as Christian holiness behaviour and underscore the reality that discipleship, with resultant discipline, is necessary in living the holiness exemplified by Christ. They declare that “[i]t is a great scandal that so many Christians of our day, while continuing to be identified as members of the Church, fail to respond to the call to holiness.”³ This group understands that the Church cannot be thought of as either a self-created or self-enclosed reality but as a body of believers that God gathers and sends on mission to the world, where they enter terrain that already has God’s mark of ownership on it “even though his dominion is not universally acknowledged.”⁴ While on this mission, they are to bear the fruits of holiness. They affirm the priority and pursuit of holiness and that, through responding to this pursuit, Christians have the distinct responsibility of advancing “a culture of life.”⁵

These concepts challenge previously held perceptions and beliefs about holiness as a unique quality characterized by exclusiveness. They challenge the idea that holiness might be possessed by only a relatively small number of people and that it might have to be sought through a process involving significant rigour. Additionally, these concepts point to an opportunity for the church in its quest for relevance and accessibility, which are important in the modern western Church milieu. This leads to considering the state of the contemporary Canadian church and how it might be effective in living and demonstrating “holiness” in the new millennium.

Different paths presented themselves, including those found in writings of several outstanding thinkers, which led to understanding and formulating a model for thought

² “The Call to Holiness: A Statement of Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” *First Things*, 151.1, March 2005, 23.

³ *The Call to Holiness*, 24.

⁴ *The Call to Holiness*, 25.

⁵ *The Call to Holiness*, 26.

about “holiness ethics” that is very encouraging and affirming for the contemporary church. Through the process of this formulation, however, it became clear that the topic of “holiness” is large and multi-faceted; it is important to neither be simplistic nor pretend to be comprehensive in this single document. Throughout the centuries, theologians have wrestled with “holiness” and its applications. In the twentieth century alone, much was discussed springing from a revival of the topic in Rudolph Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy*; this volume “popularised the use of ‘the holy’ as a noun [in the English-speaking world], and introduced a catena of concepts- ‘mysterium’, ‘tremendum’, ‘fascinans’”⁶ which continued the often advanced concepts of separation, mystery, and distance as primary thoughts connected with holiness. Jenson writes of the ongoing importance of the events of Sinai to both Christians and Jews and of how they are seen as “authoritative grounding for all subsequent developments in language and theology.”⁷ In his examining the priestly writings from Exodus 25 to Numbers, “holiness” as including ‘separation’ and ‘wholly other’ cannot be ignored; these have been commonly incorporated into models of thinking about the subject. Outcomes from this manner of thinking about “holiness” have included personal insecurity about one’s relationship and standing with God and even hostility to God, seeing the stipulations of Sinai as requiring separation and exclusivity.⁸

The New Testament life and ministry of Jesus Christ, however, offers abundant encouragement to understand that other perspectives on the subject must be considered. In Jesus’s day, behaviours surrounding holy living were firmly entrenched in the national

⁶ Colin Crowder, “Rudolf Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy Revisited*,” in *Holiness Past & Present*, (ed.) Stephen C. Barton, 22.

⁷ Philip Jenson, “Holiness in the Priestly Writings of the Old Testament,” in *Holiness Past & Present*, (ed.) Stephen C. Barton, 93.

⁸ See discussion about the contribution of Walter Brueggemann and J. Wellhausen in Philip Jenson, “Holiness in the Priestly Writings of the Old Testament,” 113, 120.

and religious culture of the area, yet Jesus's teaching and example forced people to reconsider commonly held beliefs and practices. In a religious culture where excluding those who were not physically and mentally fit was commonly accepted, Jesus directed that His disciples ought to invite the blind, maimed, and lame to community meals.⁹ Jesus openly objected to the Pharisees' purity concerns in such matters as hand-washing, healing on the Sabbath, and 'harvesting' grain on the Sabbath. He challenged the religious elite in one teaching occasion by elevating a despised Samaritan above both a priest and a Levite. In addition, Jesus gladly accepted the accusation that he received sinners and ate with them through his affirmation of the need of the sick to have necessary care. In short, throughout his ministry, Jesus called for giving a higher priority to moral purity than to ritual purity. Even though some examples of exclusion still appear in the New Testament record, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, the primary message from Jesus, and those who immediately followed him, encourages looking differently at the subject of "holiness" than had been traditionally done.

The complete biblical record, consequently, presents different perspectives on the subject of "holiness." With the present focus on "holiness" being within the context of the contemporary church, Jesus's radical alternate approach offers permission and encouragement for considering different possibilities than those of separation and exclusion. In this context, the model to be presented developed.

In the unfolding of this model through this thesis, sociological, theological, and philosophical sources will be accessed and referenced in order to discuss issues surrounding practical holiness ethics, beginning with the sociological condition of the

⁹ James D.G. Dunn, "Jesus and Holiness: The Challenge of Purity," in *Holiness Past & Present*, (ed.) Stephen C. Barton, 181.

Evangelical Christian Church in Canada and concluding in that same environment after having considered theological ideas brought to a model for holiness ethics in writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Webster, and Emmanuel Levinas. The underlying goal of the thesis and the developed outcomes will be to seek assurance for modern Christian disciples involved in the evangelical work of advancing the Kingdom of God through the modern Christian Church. As long as participants in this work have confidence¹⁰ that the framework of activity is correctly understood and that the activity that arises in interactions with others is appropriate, such modern-day disciples will continue to work energetically, even when apparent success is sparse, because they understand that not all who sow have the privilege of reaping the results.¹¹ These Christian disciples appreciate the need that exists but may not be recognized in people's lives¹² but need assurance for their own lives, as well.

In Chapter 1, the thesis begins with a discussion of reasons for anticipating more successful evangelical activity in the future than currently exists in the Protestant Evangelical Church in Canada. Research that indicates the potential for the continuation and rejuvenation of the Canadian church despite a great deal of sentiment against this potential will be considered. Drawing on longitudinal sociological research and observations, several authors will be considered who affirm that secularization is a myth. Spirituality is very much a concern for many. The increase in the involvement of teenagers in religion is a surprising, but real, development. Additionally, the fact that an

¹⁰ "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life." (Proverbs 13.12, NKJV).

¹¹ "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." (1 Corinthians 3.6, NKJV).

¹² This understood need provides the impetus for evangelical Christians, of all Christian traditions, and is expressed, at its most primeval by St. Augustine: "our heart is unquiet until it rests in you." St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, 39.

unexpectedly high number of individuals of all ages affirm their receptivity to greater involvement in the churches, and that few are abandoning established groups in favour of such options as New Age or no religion, offers positive messages about the environment in which the pursuit of holiness ethics is to occur. Most Canadians continue to address the big issues of life with significant numbers not only believing in God but talking with God and believing they receive answers from Him. Even those who would be considered unreligious indicate that they might not be entirely as they state. Canadians' hopes for their churches will be seen, along with areas in which prognosticators about the death of the church have been wrong.

Following this introduction and establishing the factors with which a holiness theological ethics must wrestle, the model will be unfolded through, in turn, examining insights offered by Bonhoeffer, Webster, and Levinas.

In Chapter 2, Bonhoeffer offers the first critical element for the model which is an important insight about correctly viewing reality and the world. He calls on Christians to not compartmentalize their lives but to live lives that are completely integrated. Holiness is an important theme in his discussions of how humans are to live for God as they live in the world. He challenges 'two sphere' thinking where people, including Christians, think in terms of spiritual and physical, spiritual and secular, and heavenly and worldly as opposing realms. This thinking keeps matters of God isolated from matters of the world and leads to difficulty in reconciling matters of faith with an understanding of the human position in the world. The reality of Christians' functioning in a single sphere offers the first key concept for the model developed in this thesis and Bonhoeffer's contribution involves presenting a correct model of reality within which Christians "live and move

and have our being”¹³ and which must be understood in order to live in the confidence of mission that Protestant Christians have sought from the beginning of the Reformation.¹⁴ Holiness must be lived in a practical manner; in reality, as reality resides in the realm of God, no pursuit is more practical than that of holiness. His uniting the often considered separate domains of the spiritual and secular provides a vital starting point for considering living discipleship holiness in the world in a way that can have a marked impact on assurance felt within the various branches of the Christian church.

In Chapter 3, John Webster’s contribution to the model is that of a Christian understanding of God and the way in which the individual carries God’s holiness into the world. In *Holiness*,¹⁵ he systematically develops the idea of holiness, beginning with the subject of theology, then considering God, the church and the individual participant of the church. He grounds the entire subject in God’s holiness and the unity of the Trinity, returning, time and again, to the reality of the Father’s initiating interaction, Jesus’s carrying out the necessary work, and the Holy Spirit’s continuing the outreach of God’s holiness in human lives. This holiness is not limited to a lofty and heavenly realm but is realistically present in all environments that God touches. Christians must understand who they are and have the confidence that they are, in fact, agents of God within the realm of the single sphere of God’s activity. The second component of the model of holiness ethics offers this assurance.

¹³ Acts 17.28.

¹⁴ “Luther uses very vivid images to speak of our being joined now to Christ, and this does in fact necessitate a way of attending to that presence (ascetical theology) and an accounting of the signs that we are in that presence (mystical theology).” Urban T. Holmes III, *A History of Christian Spirituality: An Analytical Introduction*, 126. (Emphasis mine.)

¹⁵ John Webster, *Holiness*, 2003.

Understanding that God operates in a single sphere and that the individual Christian is a bearer of God's holiness leaves one final part of the model to be developed as an important question remains, "How can Christians correctly understand where and how they are to operate as a bearer of God's holiness?" This has been a matter of concern from early in the Protestant Reformation as Luther's understanding of the "ministry of all believers" began to unfold; the biblical imperative of this "ministry" includes a great sense of responsibility for carrying what one has experienced in relationship with God outwardly to others.¹⁶

In Chapter 4, Emmanuel Levinas, whose philosophical ideas are most fully expressed through his understanding of the calling of 'others' and, through that calling, their awakening responsibility in individual subjects, provides insights to assist in understanding how Christian disciples can fulfill their responsibilities toward others. Discussion of how Levinas intersects the subject of holiness and the encounter with God, whom he refers to as the "Otherwise than Being," will occur. Levinas writes of the "Other," using this term to refer to those who are other than any particular subject and who intersect the life of a subject through their crossing the path of one's life. It is the responsibility and opportunity of all individuals to respond to others and to be responsible in, and for, that response. Levinas goes a step beyond this and understands that a subject receives a call from God through the unsolicited encounters with 'others' and actually encounters God. As will be evident in the thesis, this integrates with Webster's proposal about God's holiness as it resides in all that God touches and Bonhoeffer's thoughts

¹⁶ In discussing the "priesthood of all believers," Senn comments on Luther's understanding, writing, "All life belongs to God and therefore work which serves neighbor and society is as pleasing to God as the work of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments...Justified by faith, the Christian is liberated to perform all kinds of service to God and to his fellow human beings simply for the sake of doing it." Frank C. Senn (ed.), *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, 28, 31.

about the single sphere of God's activity, and builds depth into the model that develops so there can be confident expression and expansion of holiness into the world. An entire way of thinking that is outward and non-controlling is vital, involving thinking and living that is not attempting to force all to conform to one's vision of things but which is open to being changed by encounters with those 'others'; these encounters lead to both encountering and propagating holiness.

Chapter 5 will draw conclusions arising from the model developed and the intersection of insights gained. Suggestions for the church's advancing and discussion of how Christians can confidently carry their responsibilities as holiness-bearers to those for whom holiness is not, yet, an issue in God's single sphere of activity will be offered.

This thesis will begin and end using the theological functional specialty of communication. Between the introduction and conclusion, however, the functional specialty of systematics will take priority as significant theological insights will be considered. According to Lonergan, writing about the functional specialty of systematics, "This specialty presupposes doctrines. Its aim is not to add a further proof ...but to promote understanding...Its task is to take over the facts, established in doctrines, and to attempt to work them into an assimilable whole."¹⁷ This, consequently, will be the principal genre of the thesis. The focus will be on the ability of a model of holiness ethics to suggest common meaning relevant to the doctrine of God, His salvific working in the world, His holiness, the gospel, and the people of God. How can these cohere in a society that is post-modern, and still in need of searching for God but where most are unaware or, at best, uncertain of that need?

¹⁷ Bernard Lonergan. *Method in Theology*. 336.

The challenges and various paths encountered during this journey have been traveled with gratitude. Some were pursued for awhile, and then abandoned, as others presented themselves with greater potential for speeding the journey forward. Some perceived side-roads presented themselves as major routes after a small amount of exploration. The inclination toward a pastoral focus began early and the fruit borne, personally, has already been very significant and fulfilling. Indeed, as Robert Frost indicated, the taking of a path not previously traveled makes all the difference; without question, regarding the theme of holiness, this could not be truer than it has been for this project.

Chapter 1

Holiness Ethics in the Church environment

Holiness- Difficult Subject for the Christian Church

Holiness, as a theme for significant discussions, does not occupy a central position in modern western culture,¹⁸ including our Canadian society, even though it is one which is important in scholarship and church life.¹⁹ John Webster, professor of systematic theology at the University of Aberdeen, has even suggested that persuading society that holiness might be of significant importance to its well-being might involve a task requiring heavenly effort.²⁰ Many people would find it difficult to remember when they last heard holiness discussed in ‘normal’ society and, even within the circles of the Christian church in Canada, holiness, as a major theme, does not receive the focus that might be expected considering that it is understood to be one of the four primary “marks” of the Christian church.²¹ The imperative, in both the Old and New Testaments,²² is for Christian believers to pursue holiness and holy living. Christian disciples want to meet this imperative. In doing so, Christians seek assurance about their ability to do so and find both encouragement and challenge in the examples of some disciples who have been

¹⁸ Stephen C. Barton. “Dislocating and Relocating Holiness: A New Testament Study” in Stephen C. Barton (ed.), *Holiness: Past & Present*, 193.

¹⁹ Philip Jenson. “Holiness in the Priestly Writings of the Old Testament” in Stephen C. Barton (ed.), *Holiness: Past & Present*, 93.

²⁰ See John Webster. *Holiness*, 105.

²¹ “A central theme of ecclesiology relates to the four “notes” or “marks” of the church- that is to say, the four defining characteristics of the Christian church, as stated in the creeds of Christendom. These creeds affirm belief in “one holy catholic and apostolic church.” The four adjectives included in this phrase – “one,” “holy,” “catholic,” and “apostolic” – have come to be known as the “notes” or “marks” of the church, and have been of importance to ecclesiological discussion since the fourth century.” McGrath, Alister E., *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 417.

²² “Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’” (Leviticus 19.2); “but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.” (1 Peter 1.15); “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness.” (2 Peter 3.11) All references use the New King James Version.

before them. Sometimes, when the subject is advanced, the ideas that come to people's minds are of the seemingly unattainable, such as holiness apparently evident in the lives of some ascetical Christians, who lived in extreme isolation from others, or holiness as apparent in the life of historically outstanding churchmen like John Wesley, who rose daily at four o'clock to be able to pray for hours.²³ Such thoughts about holiness engender ideas of impossibility, inapproachability and separation regarding the subject, and frighten, rather than assure, believers, as modern-day Christian disciples face the specter of personal failure in attaining what they suppose ought to be central to their lives.

Throughout the centuries, discussion among theologians has focused on this theme with significant deliberations about how the theoretical holiness of the church can be reconciled with the apparent sinfulness of Christian believers; these deliberations have often led to theologies of separation. These are clear in the experience of such early groups as the Donatists²⁴ of North Africa and the Anabaptists of Europe and in the more recent experiences of various groups on what is called "the Christian right" in North America. Theologians have wrestled with alternate approaches to the theme of holiness considering that distinctions must be made between the holiness of the church and the sinfulness of its members, or that holiness might be more an eschatological concept to be known when the church is glorified. Saint Augustine, for instance, declared, "Whenever I

²³ Cunningham & Egan wrote of this, in discussing Thomas Merton, a monk and writer who seems to have carried, at least some of the time, such ideas: "What is striking about Merton's reflection is his use of the word 'spirituality.' Merton seems to have understood the word as somehow connected to otherworldliness, asceticism, disconnected from ordinary human tasks like writing. It had a pejorative ring to it." Lawrence S. Cunningham, Lawrence S. and Keith J. Egan. *Christian Spirituality: Themes from the Tradition*, 5.

²⁴ "Perhaps no Father more than St. Augustine dealt with the problem of the place of sinners in a Church one of whose distinguishing marks was holiness. As he dealt with the Donatist heresy, and also with the Pelagian, various facets of his thought emerged. For the Donatists the church was so holy that there was no room in her for sinners. For the Pelagians holiness was largely a matter of human effort and merit; there was no original sin, and consequently no need for redemption." Halton, Thomas. *The Church: Message of the Fathers of the Church*, 153.

have described the church as being without spot or wrinkle, I have not intended to imply that it was like this already, but that it should prepare itself to be like this, at the time when it too will appear in glory.”²⁵ He acknowledges the process that he understood to be involved with the holiness of the saints and that all will not be seen in perfection now; he takes a forward-looking, or an eschatological, perspective to the dialectical reality evident in viewing the current state of saints compared with the ideal to be sought. Aquinas, similarly, sought to reconcile the state of holiness and the apparent lack of it in Christians with an evident rationalization when he stated, “That the church will be...without spot or wrinkle...will only be true in our eternal home, not on the way there. We would deceive ourselves if we were to say that we have no sin, as 1 John 1:8 reminds us.”²⁶

The term “holy” has acquired associations, in the English language, which have encouraged thoughts of separation,²⁷ normally of the heavenly or the spiritual from the earthly or the physical. John Rogerson, summarizing thoughts about holiness offered by the early twentieth-century Lutheran Archbishop of Uppsala, Nathan Soderblom, writes:

holiness begins as the recognition of a mysterious power or entity associated with certain persons, things or events. It is an inchoate reaction to what is unknown, startling or terrifying...the holy becomes surrounded by precautions and interdictions which serve to separate it from the ordinary – to protect the ordinary from its danger.²⁸

²⁵ Alister E. McGrath. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 422.

²⁶ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 422.

²⁷ Rudolf Otto published *Das Heilige (The Idea of the Holy)* in 1917; this volume became a classic on the subject and one that received much attention especially in the earlier twentieth century. Some of the terminology he used, in discussing holiness, indicates some of the separatist terms and ideas that have become prominent in the subject. Such include ‘mysterium’, ‘tremendum’, ‘fascinans’, ‘numinous’, ‘ganz andere’ (wholly other). As a foundational writing for much work on the subject of ‘holiness’, it underscores an approach of inapproachability and separation. See Colin Crowder, “Rudolf Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy Revisited*”, in Stephen C. Barton (ed.), *Holiness: Past & Present*, 22-47. In addition, Old Testament priestly ideas about holiness are understood to carry such definitions of holiness that include the concepts of ‘separation’, ‘power’, and ‘wholly other’. See Philip Jenson, “Holiness in the Priestly Writings of the Old Testament” in Stephen C. Barton (ed.), *Holiness: Past & Present*, 93-121.

²⁸ John Rogerson, “What is Holiness?” in Stephen C. Barton (ed.). *Holiness: Past & Present*, 7.

Earlier, Rogerson had declared that “[h]oliness is a word in the English language whose meaning depends upon the contexts in which it is used and the interests of those who use it.”²⁹ These two references from a single author indicate some of the range of debate and discussion possible surrounding the general theme of holiness.

Holiness, however, is at the heart of Jesus and His mission, as well as the mission of His enduring church. While Jesus ministered on earth, crowds of people were drawn to Him. This was according to God’s design. In Jesus’s transfiguration, God told the disciples that they were to hear Jesus³⁰ and with Jesus’s triumphal entry to Jerusalem, beginning “Holy Week,” clearly people, in large numbers, did respond to Him and sought to hear Him.³¹ Even though they turned from him within a matter of days, throughout His ministry it is clear that many people flocked to Him, drawn by teaching, healings, presence, and his holiness. This was one common reason, for instance, for people’s bringing their children to Him for blessing;³² they expected to receive “special blessing from a great Rabbi.”³³ Jesus’s disciples, following His ascension, understood holiness as one of Jesus’s most important qualities,³⁴ as they spoke of Him as a ‘holy’ servant. In that society, a servant was understood to be one who offered something of benefit to others; the disciples’ message carries the clear implication that Jesus had a holiness that was not only for Him but was to be shared with others. This suggests one reason for people’s responding so readily to Jesus while He was on earth.

²⁹ Rogerson, in Barton, 3.

³⁰ “Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!’” (Luke 9:35 NKJV).

³¹ “...for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.” (Luke 19:48b NKJV).

³² “Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ And He laid His hands on them...” (Matthew 19:13-15a NKJV).

³³ D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer, A.M. Stibbs, D.J. Wiseman. *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, 840.

³⁴ “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together...by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through he name of Your holy Servant Jesus.”” (Acts 4:27, 30 NKJV).

People were challenged, amazed, and thrilled by Jesus's teachings about purity and the holy life as He confronted many who oppressed them and offered them little hope of attaining holiness. In a society where the sick were avoided because of the assumption of sin as the cause for the sickness, Jesus intentionally touched and healed the sick. Where people wanting to participate in the sacred rites of the national church were forbidden from even touching anyone with any form of bodily issue, Jesus embraced being touched by a woman with such a very long-term issue of blood. These heroic stances by Jesus drew crowds of people to Himself.

Moving to the present, two millennia after Jesus's living on the earth, brings us to the reality where people in the western Church world, including Canada, are not flocking to Jesus or the church. Although often fascinated by stories arising about Jesus as the result of new fictional ideas or purportedly fresh historical or archaeological findings, they are not drawn to Him as a great teacher in order to hear His teaching, experience His healings and presence, or encounter His holiness. Logically, some thinkers ask some probing questions about this reality. Why do people not gather around Jesus today as they did when He walked the earth? Why are people not challenged, amazed, and thrilled by Jesus's teachings about purity and the holy life today as when He lived on the earth? Is His example not as clearly presented, in some ways, as when He lived here? In particular, is anything about Jesus's holiness not being presented or demonstrated as it was in Jesus's day; is this failure causing people to not be drawn to listen to Jesus as He is presented through modern Christian believers and the Church? Are ideas of exclusion and inapproachability, often representing the primarily considered concepts of "holiness," the

principal ideas to be known? Where this is the case, is this an impediment to moderns in responding to a call to “holiness?”

Understandably, answers to these questions are not simple and analysis of both the period of time when Jesus was alive on the earth and now must include more components than can be included here; thinking must, for instance, include the reality of God’s choices in drawing people through the Spirit, which was as true then as it is now.

These questions surround the subject of the potential effectiveness of evangelism and require a framework in which they can be answered in such a way that those disciples involved in evangelistic church work can be assured of the value and potential effectiveness and success of their efforts. As stated in the Introduction, Christian disciples who are involved in the evangelical work of the modern Christian Church need confidence in their activities. They need assurance that they correctly understand the framework of their activity and that the activity arising in interactions with others is appropriate. When this assurance is present, they will energetically tackle the work of Jesus’s Church even when apparent success is sparse. They appreciate the need that exists, even though many may not recognize it, but they need assurance for their own lives, as well. They do not believe it logical to assume that God wanted people of first century Palestine to hear Jesus but that He does not want the same to occur in twenty-first century Canada or other areas of the western Church world where churches have declined in obvious influence over the past century.

Cyprian, Bishop of North Africa, writing to his friend Donatus, in approximately 258, the year of his martyrdom, declared:

This seems a cheerful world, Donatus, when I view it from this fair garden, under the shadow of these vines. But if I climbed some great mountain and looked out

over the wide lands, you know very well what I would see--brigands on the high roads, pirates on the seas; in the amphitheaters men murdered to please applauding crowds; under all roofs misery and selfishness. It is really a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. Yet in the midst of it I have found a quiet and holy people. They have discovered a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasures of this sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are the Christians -- and I am one of them.³⁵

Is this any less true today? Is there, today, “a quiet and holy people” in the Christian Churches, and a modern people, that represents Christ and His holiness in a manner that will impact the surrounding society for the Kingdom of God?

In the experience of this baby-boomer believer and pastor, we appear to have come to a critical juncture in the life of the Christian church in Canada and one in which a renewed exploration of the understanding of the Christian church’s “mark” of “holiness” is more than warranted. Is it not probable that ‘holy people’³⁶ have an opportunity to impact the surrounding society beyond what has become typical today?

Before tackling this, it is important to understand the context in which such a discussion occurs; in other words, what is the state of the Christian church in Canada today? What are the believers of Canada like, who must be the primary individuals to understand and practice “holiness” in a way that might be attractive to surrounding populations?

³⁵ Christian Quotes for the Day for September, 2002, [cited April 21, 2007]. Available from World Wide Web: <http://cqod.gospelcom.net/cqod0209.htm>.

³⁶ Edith Wyschogrod spoke of this in her book *Saints and Postmodernism*, indicating that holy people are in a position to serve as important contours to the pursuit of real humanness. See Stephen C. Barton, “Dislocating and Relocating Holiness: A New Testament Study,” in Stephen C. Barton (ed.), *Holiness: Past & Present*, 194.

Environment of the Canadian Christian Church

The sociological state of the Christian church in Canada provides the milieu for consideration of this subject of holiness in the twenty-first century. Part of the environment in which the Canadian church functions has been moulded by ideas surrounding the Canadian church's supposedly imminent demise; the long-predicted death of the Christian church has led sociologists and church leaders, alike, to be involved in the debate and predictions that have flowed from this expectation. Since the "God is dead" movement of the 1960s, Christians have wondered about the future of their beloved church and whether they might be the last generation to believe. The passing of Christendom as a political and social reality has been difficult for western Christians leading to discouragement and ongoing debate about what the future holds for western Christianity. It is not an easy time to be an actively involved Christian in the churches of the geographical 'west' including those of Canada.

Following World War II and the apparent destruction of theories of liberal modernism churches in Canada experienced a period of unprecedented growth throughout most of the 1950s, indicating a "revival of general cultural conservatism and consumerism of which church involvement was a component."³⁷ Spurred by the marriages and fecundity of the post-war population, Canadian churches experienced a dramatic rise in religious interest leading to a rapid rise in numbers and the need for building new church edifices, all-the-while not anticipating declines to come as the realities of the social change brought through immense prosperity and secularism of the 1960s rapidly eroded the practice of faith within the walls of the church in Canada. The

³⁷ Don Posterski & Gary Nelson, *Future Faith Churches: Reconnecting with the Power of the Gospel for the 21st Century*, 42.

up and down of the decades of the 1950s and 1960s are central in the unfolding reality that “[o]ne of Canada’s institutions that has been affected most by the social changes of the post-1950s is religion.”³⁸ The impact of the desire for comfortable living and not suffering deprivation, as had been known in the decade-and-a-half leading to the beginning of the Second World War, led the nation to experiencing “[f]or the first time since the founding of Canada, the church [losing] its moral authority...this change was away from an ethic of obligation to others and toward an obligation to self.”³⁹ By the end of the 1960s, Christendom in Canada was dead. From then, a process in which Christian churches in Canada have been further marginalized and privatized has continued without significant interruption.

Many Christians have not been quick to appreciate this reality and, by-and-large, continued to operate from the Christendom model long after it was past. However, today many are waking to the reality that the world is not a Christian world and are beginning work within this reality, which is new for them.⁴⁰

In retrospect, it must be understood that Canadian churches have struggled for several decades. Realization of the changed social environment has not come easily and adjusting to it in order to remain viable and effective with an ongoing impact into Canadian society has been even more difficult. Many, in seeking ways to better minister to parishioners and society, have defaulted to various models for ‘doing church’ that come from the seemingly highly successful churches of the United States, but with results that, largely due to the different social condition of Canada, have proven to be less than

³⁸ Reginald W. Bibby, *Bibby Report: Social Trends Canadian Style*, 123.

³⁹ Posterski & Nelson, *Future Faith Churches*, 50, 51.

⁴⁰ Donald C. Posterski & Irwin Barker, *Where's a Good Church?* 77.

successful. The fact that people are looking around to try to understand what might be successful indicates at least a measure of insecurity about what is happening currently. In addition, it indicates some lack of assurance that the Christian Church is doing what it ought to be doing.

Following the wars, two-thirds of Canadians attended church on any given Sunday until the 1960s when they faded away from the church, leading to a bottoming out of church attendance at about half of what it was immediately following the war. Church attendance in the United States, however, remained essentially stable from the late 1940s until the end of the millennium. In truth, Canadians' relationship with the church changed while their American relatives' did not. This led to at least two researchers encouraging Canadian churches to look elsewhere than to the United States for answers to the dilemmas facing the Canadian churches:

Canadians often look to America for models of effective ministry because there are so many believers who are also belongers in the United States. We forget the questions may be different. Given the clear differences between the faith experiences of the two countries, it is clear the challenge of encouraging Canadians to integrate Church and faith demands a 'made in Canada' solution. The challenges are here. So are the solutions.⁴¹

It is important not to equate the American church reality with the Canadian reality, or to expect that the American reality will ultimately become the Canadian reality. Canadians and Americans are different people. This is not necessarily one of those areas in which Canadians will follow Americans, but just a decade later.⁴²

⁴¹ Andrew Grenville and Don Posterski. *Like Thy Neighbour?* [Online]. [Accessed March 12, 2007]. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.christianity.ca/news/international/2004/08000.html>.

⁴² See Reginald W. Bibby, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada*, 65, where Pinball Clemons, American-born Christian, motivational speaker and former player and current head coach of the Toronto Argonauts in the Canadian Football League, is quoted as commenting on the fact of the differences between people of the two nations, "Canadians are more noncommittal [and] more all-embracing of cultural differences and beliefs."

Something is afoot, however, in the churches and population of Canada indicating the potential for rebirth, renewal, and renaissance within the Christian church. Sociological research shows that, contrary to the apocryphal news stories and prognoses from those, the nation is not spiritually dead. “Canada became a nation of believers but not belongers”⁴³ as far as churches are concerned, which provides the social and religious environment in which we must operate. Statistics Canada’s census results continue declaring the fact that over 80% of Canadians consider themselves to be Christian believers.

Since 1975, Reginald Bibby, a sociologist at the University of Lethbridge, has canvassed Canadians, exploring opinions and issues relevant to faith, church, and Christianity. “Church attendance might be low but Canadians still believe in God...when we ask Canadians if they believe in a God that cares about them personally, about 80 per cent of them say they do.”⁴⁴ This is an important reality, at least anecdotally confirmed by such events as the massive numbers of youth and adults present in Toronto for World Youth Day in 2002, indicating a significant measure of spiritual interest in people of all ages. In addition, in noting the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church following Vatican II and the immense efforts being expended to foster ecumenism in Canada, there is reason to be encouraged about what might yet be for Canada, its churches, and the spiritual health and well-being of the nation as it advances into the future. Based on a comparison between numbers of persons declaring themselves to be Christian and the numbers actually in church for any particular weekend service, yet one more reality about the

⁴³ Grenville and Posterski. *Like Thy Neighbour?* [Online]. [Accessed March 12, 2007].

⁴⁴ Ramon Gonzalez. *Bibby holds hope for Church.* [Online]. [Accessed March 12, 2007]. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.wcr.ab.ca/news/2004/0628/bibby062804.shtml>.

environment for church work in Canada is that “most Canadians fall into the ‘cultural Christian’ category and the relative number of ‘unchurched’ is low.”⁴⁵

Potential

Understanding the state of Canadian believers is an important starting point for developing approaches to doing the work of the Christian church as it goes forward into the twenty-first century, while considering the important subject of “holiness” and how it can become a more relevant and accepted subject and one to which people- Christian and non-Christian- are drawn, as they “hear” Jesus. Bibby declares that “the research through the 1980s was pointing to another important finding: people were not ‘dropping out.’ Some nine in ten were continuing to identify with the predominantly Roman Catholic and Protestant ties of their parents.”⁴⁶ This indicates that such an idea as “holiness” need not be as foreign to a majority of Canadians as might, initially, be assumed.⁴⁷

It is safe to suggest that Christian disciples in Canada can become better able to model Jesus than they have. The Christian life is one of openness to such propositions and opportunities toward growth. Christian disciples can develop lives that more fully demonstrate the holiness to which people of Jesus’s generation were drawn by His life. For this to occur, at the very least, attitudes of many believers toward apparent unbelievers may need to be softened, as sociological findings indicate a different reality

⁴⁵ Donald C. Posterski. & Irwin Barker, *Where's a Good Church?* 15.

⁴⁶ Reginald W. Bibby, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada*, 14.

⁴⁷ Even as “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” declared, Cunningham and Egan affirm the call of all Christians to “holiness.” They write, “The Second Vatican Council insisted that all Christians, not only religious and priests, are called to holiness. The unsupported myth of an exclusively clerical call to holiness had unfortunate consequences. Practices that promoted growth in love and holiness were set aside for religious and clergy...Holiness, as Vatican II has said, is a universal call; the means to holiness are, therefore, needed by all.” Lawrence S. Cunningham and Keith J. Egan, *Christian Spirituality: Themes from the Tradition*, 84, 101.

than some assume. It is common for involved Christians to consider that people who are not involved in churches present a ‘field, already white to harvest,’⁴⁸ as Christ declared. To do so is to misunderstand the state of those people. In a different nation, perhaps, that assumption would be accurate but the Canadian reality is different. “For reasons known only to the gods, Canadians have shown little inclination to abandon the dominant groups- even when those groups have frequently given up on them.”⁴⁹ The opportunity this presents to established churches is immense, but will require creativity in order to capitalize on the potential for ministering more effectively to those within and without the walls of the church and to continue a positive impact on lives connected, even tenuously, with the church, as well as toward all those lives becoming more effective in living “holiness” out into the surrounding society. Bibby sounds another hopeful message:

Simply put, well-established religious groups can be expected to go down only so far before they bottom out. They may be at a low point for a while. But as new people with new ideas take on positions of influence, and as human and financial resources are put in place, these companies can be expected to stir and, to varying degrees, begin to rise again.⁵⁰

Affiliation patterns of Canadians who are uninvolved in churches offers aware and intentional church workers a golden opportunity for ministry if they will avail themselves of this opening. Understanding that people continue to feel affinity with churches of their family’s history can be tremendously encouraging, and must sound a note of serious caution to those who would assume these to be a ready field for proselytizing efforts.

⁴⁸ John 4.35, RSV.

⁴⁹ Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 32.

⁵⁰ Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 71.

Additionally, Canadians are open to becoming more involved in religious groups. In Bibby's 2000 Project Canada survey, one very interesting question asked was, "Would you consider the possibility of being more involved in a religious group if you found it to be worthwhile for yourself or your family?" Nationally, 55% responded positively, including 50% of respondents from Quebec.⁵¹ This idea of 'worthwhile' presents an important key to what the Canadian population seeks; they want relevance and substance, not simply form or tradition. They will affiliate, but with relevance they will do much more than affiliate. "Holiness" understood in all its dimensions will be one contributing factor to encourage people to 'more than affiliate.'

These are powerful facts for the Canadian Christian church to consider; even moreso, these are necessary facts for Canadian Evangelical churches to internalize. If over 50% of those who are not presently actively involved in a church are willing to be more involved if they would find it to be worthwhile, then the onus falls on Christian disciples and the churches to consider what is necessary. Can churches simply continue as they are? Or is different effort necessary? Considering the findings of these studies and research, it is safe to conclude that all the empty pews must be upsetting to the one whose church we discuss and "[i]f God had a reason for bringing Canadian churches into being in the first place, it seems reasonable to assume that some major new developments ...may well reflect the ongoing activity and purposes of God."⁵²

Having this background and understanding the desire of Christian disciples to be actively involved in the work of the church, the question must be asked: "what is a relevant, useable and assurance-generating model for practical holiness ethics for

⁵¹ Reginald W. Bibby, *Restless Churches: How Canada's Churches can Contribute to the Emerging Religious Renaissance*, 68.

⁵² Bibby, *Restless Churches*, 55.

Christian disciples of the twenty-first century?” Although it will be understood that the model for practical holiness will be relevant for all Christians of all traditions, my concern, above all, is with articulating a model for those who are intentionally active in Christian discipleship within the framework of Protestant Evangelical Churches, where believers attempt to intentionally live what they understand to be the biblical imperative of accepting responsibility for sharing with others what they have experienced in relationships with God in order to encourage others toward such a relationship.

Because the theological model for holiness ethics will be a source of encouragement and assurance to those who are active and intentional evangelical Christians, the term “Christian disciples” is used to refer to these active practitioners of the Christian faith. Evangelism involves intentionality necessitating such a distinction, not to exclude other Christians but in order to focus the discussion.

A fuller understanding of the theme of “holiness ethics” and the development of a model for understanding and applying this within the modern environment will have a potentially dramatic impact on the involvement of Christians in the present work of God’s Kingdom. In addition, it is hoped that this understanding will have a significant impact on those who are non-Christians as they witness Christian discipleship in action and that this will encourage them toward their own greater involvement in the Christian church’s mission.

Principally, one side of the theme of holiness has received much focus. Many theologians define it in terms of a separation and that God’s holiness, in particular, is evident in His apparent separateness from his creation including humans. There is another side to holiness, one of which theologians and pastors have approached,

considered, and written and one which is significant for the post-modern baby-boomer dominant Canadian Christian environment. It is this that will be explored in the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Webster, and Emmanuel Levinas. From these thinkers important insights will be collated to form an understandable model for holiness ethics, before returning to consideration of practical implications for Christians and the church of Canada, with sights set on a widening circle of influence toward all Canadian society. More effectively living holiness ethically will have a positive impact on all Canadian life.

Development of holistic approaches to ministry⁵³ are necessary, in order to reach a population concerned with its own well-being as well as that of others around them. Canadian churches, overall, have tended to lean to one side or the other of the two sides of a well-rounded Christian life as Jesus outlined. When Jesus responded to one who wondered what He would consider as the greatest commandment, Jesus declared the need to serve God and to serve neighbour.⁵⁴ He taught the need to care for both spiritual and physical relationships, which some have described as ‘soul care’ and ‘social care.’ “There is a strong biblical support for the claim that the essence of the Christian gospel involves both personal faith and active social concern...both soul care and social care.”⁵⁵

Posterski and Nelson go on to explain:

Since the third decade of the 20th century, Canadian churches and their leaders have leaned toward either soul care or social care. Instead of embracing both sides of the gospel equation, they have given allegiance to one without full regard for

⁵³ “Ministry,” for the purpose of this thesis, is understood as “ethical action for the other who is both near and far neighbor.” Andrew Root, “Practical Theology as Social Ethical Action in Christian Ministry: Implications from Emmanuel Levinas and Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” 53.

⁵⁴ “Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matt.22.37-39.NKJV).

⁵⁵ Don Posterski & Gary Nelson, *Future Faith Churches: Reconnecting with the Power of the Gospel for the 21st Century*, 54.

the other. As we turn the corner and head into the 21st century, Canadian Christians and their leaders have the opportunity to begin again.⁵⁶

The potential benefit to all from a turn toward social ministry is immense. A radical re-examination of the central tenet of the need to be holy presents a vital point of departure for such a beginning. God's call to holiness in the lives of those who follow Him is expressed in both the Old and New Testaments.⁵⁷ Consequently, renewed attention to it can bear positive fruit toward helping more to hear Jesus as He was heard in the days of His ministry on earth. One author expressed this opportunity in this way:

We are bearers of Good News that relates not only to our lives as individuals but also to our lives as communities of believers. In many instances, we can engage non-Christians in a common purpose, demonstrating all along that our actions are based on our hope for new life in Jesus Christ and that we are led by God, through the Holy Spirit, in all that we say and do... The implication is that now is the time for us to undertake Christian mission, ministry and witness- whether organized formally through denominations and agencies or undertaken informally in small groups- in the joy that we can have a positive impact on our culture and that, indeed, many Canadians are expecting us to do so.⁵⁸

The opportunities for extending the work of Jesus into our communities are great, and, perhaps as in some centuries in the past, the church stands in an ideal position to initiate and lead in such again. It would do so more effectively as it uses the model unfolded through important insights from Bonhoeffer, Webster, and Levinas.

There is reason for hope as far as a future for the churches of Canada is concerned. The professed spirituality of a majority of Canadians offers fertile soil for the continuing development of the current Christian church. It must be understood that God,

⁵⁶ Posterski & Nelson, *Future Faith Churches*, 54.

⁵⁷ "For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy..." (Lev.11.44, quoted in 1 Peter 1.16 NKJV).

⁵⁸ Aileen Van Ginkel, *Evangelical Beliefs & Practises: A Summary of the 2003 Ipsos-Reid Survey Results*, [Online]. [cited March 12, 2007]. Available from World Wide Web: www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/pdf/CFT_EvangelicalBeliefs.pdf, Conclusion.

ultimately, is the one to stir and move people. Indeed, Bibby sounds a note of hope as he concludes one book:

The churches are restless. Canadians are restless. It may well be because, ‘in the beginning’ of this new century, the ‘Spirit of God which moved upon the face of the waters’ back then is moving across the country. What remains to be seen is what will be created...this time around.⁵⁹

The supposed impending death of the church has been a fascinating subject for many over the past forty years. However, as was true for Mark Twain is true for the western Christian church, “Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated.” Holiness, more fully understood through the theological model for holiness ethics to be unfolded, can be, and indeed will be, one enlivening force for the Canadian church’s advancing into the twenty-first century.

⁵⁹ Bibby, *Restless Churches*, 248.

Chapter 2

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Secular Holiness and Reality

Holiness Insights Transcend the Decades

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) encountered a world where matters of faith and church conduct were pushed to the edges of society's consideration or were used for personal advantage. Because there is a struggle for the place for faith and the church in every age, including ours, drawing on Bonhoeffer's views brings relevant thoughts to the present and contributes a vital first component to the theological model for holiness ethics. Bonhoeffer provides a view of reality and integration of the interaction between what humans see as the world and the fuller view of reality that God offers. Rather than seeing reality as man-centred, which allows thinking of God as removed and distant, Bonhoeffer demands understanding a reality where what humanity sees and experiences exists in one sphere, that of the greater reality of God.

Bonhoeffer refers to his world as 'the world come of age,' never with any thought of its having become better or having improved over the world before but, rather, considering it like the state of older teenagers who feel they no longer need their parents or their perspective on life anymore.⁶⁰ However, even as parents know that they cannot simply bow out of the lives of their youth at this stage of their lives, Bonhoeffer recognizes that the church and Christians could not bow out of the life of the world,

⁶⁰ "The German phrase that he used describes one who, having arrived at a certain age, is now on his own. He may use his independence for devilish purposes, but he cannot be restricted by returning him to the nursery...Bonhoeffer must not be understood as projecting a utopian view of man or a progressive view of history." Clyde E. Fant, *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching*, 85, 86.

either, but must continue, by using scripture and an understanding of the true reality, to define what was happening and speak and act in response to it.

Consideration of this leads to three dominating thoughts that permeate Bonhoeffer's theological writing and teaching from his earliest pastoral sermons in Barcelona in the late 1920s to some of his final thoughts conveyed in *Letters & Papers from Prison* and *Ethics*, his writings of the mid-1940s. These ideas can be summarized as: being completely in the arms of God, living completely in the world, and abandoning any attempt to make oneself into a saint or anything else in the religious sense. These three ideas encompass a view of reality that enabled him to weather the vagaries of his life and the final complete lack of freedom imposed on him by the German government following the failed attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler in which he was implicated. They enabled him to continue to live and minister according to his call to God's holiness within the Confessing Church while German ministers, en masse, were submitting their pastoral calls to the governmental requirements of the Reich and, in this, giving up the freedom to minister that ought to continue to be incumbent within such a call.

Bonhoeffer was able to observe what was happening around him and he discerned insights about living in the environment of the time that enabled him to do so brilliantly right up to the time of his death. These observations speak to us in our modernity. Bonhoeffer was unwilling to passively adjust to life of the time by giving up his principles for living and ministering choosing, rather, to analyze surrounding life and to arrive at perspectives about God's involvement in it that were both startling and settling. Believing that no aspect of human life operates outside or beyond God's involvement, yet being acutely aware of the secularization of the age interpreted by some as evidencing

lack of God's involvement, he sought to explain what was happening in terms of God's involvement. Rather than judging the worldly or secular, he embraced it as part of God's work and "proclaimed this coming of age in the name of the crucified and risen Christ, and saw it as a necessary part of his Christology."⁶¹ For him, it was Christ, who had been crucified and rose from the dead, who "enabled, judged, and renewed 'true worldliness,' 'genuine this-worldliness,' and 'coming of age.'"⁶² In particular, he was not prepared to demur and simply permit Hitler and his anti-Christian forces to dictate the image of the world. He intentionally sought to explain how the world had come of age for God.

Contrary to many Christian thinkers, he rejected the condemnatory tone of much discussion about secularization and worldliness, choosing, rather, to embrace the reality of the situation in which "God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross."⁶³

Bonhoeffer refused to adopt a defeatist posture, as if God had abandoned humanity. He was able to consider what was really happening in the world, especially immediately preceding and throughout the Second World War. Understanding God's all-encompassing ability led him to perspectives that helped him; he was able to embrace these even during the most difficult of times for himself when he was incarcerated and, eventually, executed. Understanding God's all-encompassing ability has proven helpful for Christians who have followed him and considered the realities of which he spoke and wrote. Writing of his age, he could have been describing the situation of today, a fact that reinforces the relevance of his thought to that of the church of today:

the modern age is characterized by an ever increasing independence of the secular in its relations with the spiritual. So long as Christ and the world are conceived as two opposing and mutually repellent spheres, man will be left in the following

⁶¹ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 867.

⁶² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 867.

⁶³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*, (ed.) Eberhard Bethge, 360.

dilemma: he abandons reality as a whole, and places himself in one or other of the two spheres. He seeks Christ without the world, or he seeks the world without Christ. In either case he is deceiving himself. Or else he tries to stand in both spaces at once and thereby becomes the man of eternal conflict, the kind of man who emerged in the period after the Reformation and who has repeatedly set himself up as representing the only form of Christian existence which is in accord with reality.⁶⁴

This passage gives an extraordinary glimpse into the theological worldview necessary for a holiness ethics today. In any age, separation from reality as God defines it leads to critical conflicts that bear results impacting all society. The positions Bonhoeffer took, when adopted today, will enable Christian disciples to continue living the holy Christian life in a contemporary society that is often indifferent or even antagonistic to the gospel and the differences in style of living that is meant to spring from following it.

Everyday Holiness

Bonhoeffer's understanding of holiness is very important to appreciate, even while seeking to comprehend the context in which he wrote, lived, taught, and applied his understanding. As early as the period of his brief sojourn in Barcelona in 1928-1929, his teaching emphasized the inseparability of Christian ethics from a "radical holiness pervading the whole of life."⁶⁵ This is true simply because God is holy and Christians must live ethically as they live out their converted lives before the face of God and obey His call and will, thus bringing them into the realm of God's holiness. As Christians long to be good, they must understand that this involves a longing for something that is only

⁶⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 194, 195.

⁶⁵ David F. Ford, "Bonhoeffer, Holiness and Ethics," in Stephen C. Barton, (ed.), *Holiness Past and Present*, 365.

real in God.⁶⁶ He was not offering a necessarily easy path for Christian disciples; rather he sought to challenge and to encourage the highest possible responding to the highest possible calling that God can offer. Bonhoeffer expected very much of Christian disciples and it will be with that in mind that the discussion will develop. He declares,

Discipleship means adherence to Christ, and because Christ is the object of this adherence, it must take the form of discipleship...Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.⁶⁷

He argues that whereas ethics normally is concerned with such matters as what ‘should be’ it is fulfilled not in unequivocal answers but in the relation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. This leads to where “the question of good becomes the question of participation in the divine reality which is revealed in Christ. Good is now no longer a valuation of what is...but the real which possesses reality only in God.”⁶⁸ Bonhoeffer did not suppose that our world is something separately constituted and outside the divine and cosmic reality which is in Christ but is an intertwined reality where the physical and the spiritual are together in Christ.⁶⁹ All thinking that rejects this actuality is, in his judgment, only abstraction. In strongly connecting Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, Bonhoeffer reveals that the relation of these two members of the Trinity is the theological key to holiness for the individual Christian. The Christian can fulfill the Levitical injunction to be holy because God is holy, which the New Testament sees as embodied in Jesus Christ. Since he places Jesus Christ, as God, at the centre of everything, holiness is clearly and

⁶⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 186-187.

⁶⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 63-64.

⁶⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 188.

⁶⁹ “Christianity, by contrast, works in a very different way. The unity of human existence is not thought to consist in autonomy; rather, it is found in and through Jesus Christ, who is met not as a metaphysical first principle but as true God and true man, with whom I am in fellowship. In this fellowship, I am ‘set free’ for responsible service.” Jean Bethke Elshain, “Bonhoeffer on Modernity: *Sic et Non*,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 20:3:345-66, 2001.

inextricably linked to the world. The Christian, consequently, can live in the world as God's world, because it is permeated with his presence and affirmation. "There are not two realities, but only one reality, and that is the reality of God, which has become manifest in Christ in the reality of the world."⁷⁰ He felt that the pivotal events surrounding the sacrifice of Jesus Christ indicated three points of God's affirmation of the world.

In Jesus Christ we have faith in the incarnate, crucified and risen God. In the incarnation we learn of the love of God for His creation; in the crucifixion we learn of the judgment of God upon all flesh; and in the resurrection we learn of God's will for a new world. There could be no greater error than to tear these three elements apart; for each of them comprises the whole.⁷¹

Bonhoeffer sees a complete connection between creation and God's purpose for it and those living within it. There is no disconnect between the physical and the spiritual; rather they are clearly seen as part of the whole. Bonhoeffer, resultantly, strikes a death blow to many ideas commonly associated with the subject of holiness where,

It is often seen as rare, as an ideal to be striven for but attained only by a few saints, or by others only ultimately after much purification; and as separated from the sin, ambiguity and impurity of most of life. In other words, it often goes with a sharp separation into two spheres, the holy and the unholy...⁷²

Through his identifying reality as what is real in God and then defining that reality as true only in Jesus, he clearly undermines such thinking in spheres by describing Jesus as the one all-encompassing sphere. He unites all spheres of perception, thought, and reality in the reality of Jesus Christ and the realisation of that reality through the Holy Spirit's activity, as evident from the Genesis account of creation where the Spirit hovered over

⁷⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 195.

⁷¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 130.

⁷² Ford, *Bonhoeffer, Holiness and Ethics*, 368.

the earth to the imparting of that same Spirit to empower the lives of Christian disciples living in the world today.

The role, then, of the Christian and the church is to testify to the world of the truth of reality. For instance, the world is not divided between Christ and the devil; all is the world of Christ and the world is to be called to “its reality in Christ and in this way the false reality will be destroyed which it believes that it possesses in itself as in the devil.”⁷³ Christian life lived in God’s holiness involves participation in Christ’s ongoing encounter with the world. In this involvement, the Christian must permit an ongoing formation to occur, but not one that the person, himself, directs. “On the contrary, formation comes only by being drawn in into the form of Jesus Christ. It comes only as formation in His likeness, as *conformation*, with the unique form of Him who was made man, was crucified, and rose again.”⁷⁴ What occurs involves a transformative conformation of such a fashion that is suited to mediation between all Christian streams with regard to the varying understandings about the nature of holiness. Evangelicals and Catholics Together write of how various streams of Christianity ought to be able to unite under the theme of holiness rather than needing to stand on individually conceived positions; for people who are being formed by Christ, there does not need to be compromise, often perceived as someone winning and someone losing, but an ability “to conceive holiness in response to the urgencies of the present and the future.”⁷⁵ Christian life, which is living holiness, must be understood in terms of participating in the encounter that Christ has with the world on a continuing basis as he continues his work of reconciling all things to himself; this is an encounter that did not end with his ascension

⁷³ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 201.

⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 81-82.

⁷⁵ Ford, *Bonhoeffer, Holiness and Ethics*, 374.

but is one that continues in his second-by-second encounters with the world now as he interacts with the lives of all people through the activity of the indwelling Holy Spirit, for those who have responded to Christ, and the even more mysterious work of the Spirit in the lives of those being brought to Christ, but in whom there is little or no awareness of such occurring.

Religion and Christianity Are Not the Same

Bonhoeffer clearly spoke about the difference between religion and Christianity, seeing this as an important distinction to make in understanding reality and the holy life of the Christian. He understood religion as a purely human pursuit, described as being “that human activity which seeks to reach the beyond, to postulate a divinity, to invoke help and protection, in short: religion as self-justification.”⁷⁶ From this position he was often critical of the churches even while suggesting ways forward for them and those who were of the churches. Understanding this led him to one of his most important insights behind the claim of the single sphere of God’s activity over against the traditional two-sphere interpretation regarding the spiritual and physical matters of the cosmos and human life. He recognized that the church could be extremely guilty if it continued to demonize worldliness rather than helping people to appreciate their true humanity, because humanity and the world are inextricably connected.⁷⁷ In concluding this, he agrees in a sense with such other authors as Feuerbach and Nietzsche when they warned “the church against becoming an apothecary that ministers to heavenly needs and leaves

⁷⁶ Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 872.

⁷⁷ Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 869.

the world to its own devices.”⁷⁸ Humanity likes to glorify itself but this is not helpful to a realistic evaluation of oneself or to finding a way forward in a world that is antagonistic to matters of Christian faith. Bonhoeffer recognized “that the natural, the profane, the rational, and the humane had its place, not against, but with this Christ”⁷⁹ leading him to seek a ‘religionless Christianity’ where Christians might experience pure contact with Christ apart from human effort. He felt that the metaphysics most often connected with matters of the church and religious practice served to seduce “the Christian religion into thinking statically in terms of two spheres, and forces it to give its redemptive nature a one-sided emphasis.”⁸⁰ He expressed this well in his prison letter of 5 May 1944, where he declared, “What is above this world is, in the gospel, intended to exist *for* this world; I mean that, not in the anthropocentric sense of liberal, mystic pietistic, ethical theology, but in the biblical sense of the creation and of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁸¹ He simply did not see any point where the physical ended and the spiritual began, or the metaphysical ended and the natural began. He espoused the reality of a single sphere where God and humanity co-habit. “[F]or Bonhoeffer ‘this-worldliness’ by no means refers to the secularism that is able to do without God, but to a worldly life which in fact exercises true faith in him, and *as a result enables men to become both truly man and Christian.*”⁸² With its tendency to compartmentalization, humanity is drawn toward self-focus and individualization. Bonhoeffer “never lost sight of the social, anti-individualistic direction of faith and the kingdom of righteousness”⁸³

⁷⁸ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 870.

⁷⁹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 870.

⁸⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 873.

⁸¹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 286.

⁸² Clyde E. Fant. *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching*, 80-81.

⁸³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 874.

He was very uncomfortable with the tendency to centre solely on the private human realm with a focus on personal salvation without appropriate consideration for, and focus on, the cost of this approach to the world and the family of God. Clearly, he understood that the Christian disciple was not to separate from the world and forsake the world.⁸⁴

In short, Bonhoeffer took a wholly inclusive approach to life and the world, seeing all as functioning together with God's involvement including even the unpleasantness that life freely offers. In fact, from his youth, he had been concerned by the idea that God was progressively excluded from areas of human endeavour. It appeared to him that as soon as humanity came to significant understanding of mysterious and difficult subjects God was pushed to another fringe, as if God is not involved or needed where humans have come to a humanly-determined level of understanding:

Man has learnt to deal with himself in all questions of importance without recourse to the 'working hypothesis' called 'God.' In questions of science, art, and ethics this has become an understood thing at which one now hardly dares to tilt. But for the last hundred years or so it has also become increasingly true of religious questions; it is becoming evident that everything gets along with 'God'- and, in fact, just as well as before... 'God' is being pushed more and more out of life, losing more and more ground.⁸⁵

He saw God, consequently, as always in retreat, as if there was no place for Him where humanity could control matters through understanding; in short, he saw that, too often, humanity became the centre, rather than God's being the centre. Obviously, this was not

⁸⁴ "There was a great thematic unity to these early sermons in Barcelona. Fourteen of his sermons and three lectures which he delivered in the Christmas holidays have been preserved, and they reveal many of the themes which would later be dominant in his thinking: the insistence upon man's dependence upon God's grace; the reminder that the Christian must not forsake the world ('If you want to find God, be faithful to the world'); the victory of Christ crucified; and already, attention to the word which would later create great controversy and excitement, the word 'religion.'" Clyde E. Fant., *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching*, 10.

⁸⁵ Fant, *Worldly Preaching*, 80.

the way that all churchmen and theologians saw matters, but this insight continued to develop progressively throughout his life. Consequently, with his consistency of thought, he came to the view that the religious act “is always something partial; ‘faith’ is something whole, involving the whole of one’s life. Jesus calls men, not to a new religion, but to life.”⁸⁶ He perceived that churches did not adequately understand this; therefore, they positioned themselves as standing guard over their boundaries through their institutions and the church, and, as a result, were on the defensive rather than taking risks for others. Viewing God as a vending machine, in essence, stands at the centre of human religion, as he expressed in his poem “Christians and Pagans”. In the first verse of this poem, he declared:

Men go to God when they are sore bestead,
Pray to him for succour, for his peace, for bread,
For mercy for them sick, sinning, or dead;
All men do so, Christian and unbelieving.⁸⁷

He observed that the human manifestation of religion depends on the *power* of God, but the Bible directs us to God’s powerlessness. This powerlessness is most clearly evident in the crucifixion where, despite even calls for Christ to save himself, he appeared unable to do so. From this apparent weakness flows the ongoing involvement of God with Christ’s disciples of all ages who must live experiencing the painful realities of their lives, as Christ in crucifixion; deliverance does not necessarily come as humans might expect or dictate. The victory of the resurrection, however, offers another image of the unexpectedness of God’s responses, giving disciples of all ages reasons to anticipate something beyond the pain and suffering.

⁸⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 362.

⁸⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 348.

As this is so, perhaps the Canadian Christian church is at precisely the right place when it is unsure of itself and how well it is doing in the world. Is the church meant to throw itself on Christ, consequently, rather than seeking any form of escaping from real life and a mature responsibility for it? Is it, possibly, at the point where, being at the end of itself, the church must depend entirely on God, in essence fulfilling better what God told Paul on an occasion when he was concerned about his state of weakness?⁸⁸ God is not to be considered as *Deus ex Machina*; God is not simply present to fill the gaps of human need and want for those who are privileged to be in relationship with God. Rather, “[t]he church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others.”⁸⁹ This, then, is the significant activity of holiness lived in the Christian life. Obviously, Bonhoeffer rejected ideas of exclusiveness and separation for those in relationship with God and pushed people of the church back out into the world to, through proper worldliness, impact those of the world.

Single Sphere Thinking

As already noted, but warranting further exposition, a key to Bonhoeffer’s understanding of reality, and his distinct teaching about it, and one that powerfully affects the holy living of the saints, is the fact that we cannot think, talk, and live in terms of two spheres. He saw two-sphere thinking as historically problematic to the Christian church. He saw others dividing life into the spiritual and the physical and strongly rejected such

⁸⁸ “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’” (2 Corinthians 12.7-9a, NKJV).

⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 382-383.

an idea, rather understanding a complete unity of all life coming in Jesus Christ which leads to the alignment of potential life spheres in Christ.

Ethical thinking in terms of spheres, then, is invalidated by faith in the revelation of the ultimate reality in Jesus Christ, and this means that there is no real possibility of being a Christian outside the reality of the world and that there is no real worldly existence outside the reality of Jesus Christ. There is no place to which the Christian can withdraw from the world, whether it be outwardly or in the sphere of the inner life.⁹⁰

He held “that all mistaken thinking in terms of spheres must be excluded, since it is deleterious to the proper understanding of the Church.”⁹¹ All life must be understood as taken up into the body of Christ, which is what the church as the body of Christ is to be through their words and lives to the world. “What is intended here is not separation from the world but the summoning of the world into the fellowship of this body of Christ, to which in truth it already belongs.”⁹² He understood the discipline of worshipping in terms of participating in the suffering of God on this earth, believing that “Christ takes everyone who really encounters him by the shoulder, turning them around to face their fellow human beings and the world.”⁹³ Christ calls his people to be united with the world and to minister or serve within the context of the world as it is, recognizing that:

whoever sets eyes on the body of Jesus Christ in faith can never again speak of the world as though it were lost, as though it were separated from Christ...Everything would be ruined if one were to try to reserve Christ for the Church and to allow the world only some kind of law, even if it were a Christian law. Christ died for the world, and it is only in the midst of the world that Christ is Christ.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 198.

⁹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 200.

⁹² Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 203.

⁹³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 883.

⁹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 203.

His biographer summarizes his thoughts in stating that “Christ, the center of this arcane discipline, continually sends out the ‘initiated’ to participate in the life of the world by promising to encounter and question them there. They stand shoulder to shoulder with those in their sphere of work and ‘exist for others.’”⁹⁵ In his original thesis, *Sanctorum Communio*, he spoke of this encounter with neighbours in a radical way, as he discussed the degree to which encountering someone else ought to impact the Christian:

Love for our neighbor is our will to embrace God’s will for the other person; God’s will for the other person is defined for us in the unrestricted command to surrender our self-centered will to our neighbor, which neither means to love the other instead of God, nor to love God in the other, but to put the other in our own place and to love the neighbor instead of ourselves.⁹⁶

For the discussion of ‘holiness,’ this is a critical insight. The Christian is to seek union with the world rather than separation from the world; this is a revolutionary idea for some. For the realm of holiness to encompass the whole of human life, rather than an isolated enclave or pursuit in an ideal environment, however one might conceive that idealism, challenges Christians to be intentionally involved with a world that is often derided and shunned by these same Christians. It challenges Christians to take a markedly different position than is often sought. It challenges Christians to grab life and to allow the muddying and bloodying of themselves through dealings with all that is not, yet, of the Christian persuasion, as Jesus permitted himself to be. This requires all Christian disciples to live “a single-minded devotion to Christ.”⁹⁷ All religious pursuit is to be shunned as the Christian responds to life as it is brought to him through his interaction with the world. This appreciation of the integrated unity of all reality in Jesus Christ

⁹⁵ Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 884.

⁹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 171.

⁹⁷ Clyde E. Fant. *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching*, 15.

provides the vital first component of the theological model for holiness ethics; Christian disciples must function within reality, correctly understood. Bonhoeffer unveils how to correctly understand reality.

Interestingly, Bonhoeffer makes very clear distinctions between religious language and genuine Christian preaching. Preaching, of which he was an ardent proponent, is not limited to the formal message delivered during a church service, but encompasses what is evident from the life of each Christian, in the ‘beautiful feet’ sense expressed in Isaiah⁹⁸ or the St. Francis of Assisi sense where he is reputed to have told people to “preach the gospel. And if necessary, use words.” Ideally, the world won’t be able “to separate the preached word from the life of the preacher, because this very life speaks more loudly than any words.”⁹⁹ If the preacher responds to the world as it is, there will be no planned message to give that would be appropriate in any and all circumstances; rather, there will be a special message relevant to each presenting life or situation. Bethge summarizes this thought while discussing the need for message and messenger to be completely aligned, as he says:

[t]hat is why the congregation must beware of preaching that can be imagined as taking place anywhere, under any circumstances, by anyone to anyone and at any time. As nonreligious interpretation, proclamation is far more than an objective process of translation.¹⁰⁰

Individual and appropriate responses and intentional actions springing from the needs of the moment will be seen, thus reflecting the activity of Christ.

⁹⁸ “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Isaiah 52.7, NKJV).

⁹⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 885.

¹⁰⁰ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 885.

How might this process be evident and how might one find oneself living fully, as Christ, within the single sphere of God's activity? While considering the problems of Bonhoefferian ethics, one might consider such an occurrence as expressed by the question: "What should I do when someone living on the street asks me for money?" (This question has some congruence with one asked to Christ where one queried him about who might be considered a neighbour).¹⁰¹ A packaged answer, appropriate to all such situations, would be nice, simplistic, and not of Christ; there is not a once-for-all-times completely appropriate answer to be given. Bonhoeffer recognized that each situation called for a fresh response- a unique reply.¹⁰² The simplicity that leads to thoughtless and simplistic answers finds no place in his understanding. Similarly, it can find none in that of the person who allows Christ to point him toward the world where he interacts with awareness and intention.

Much of the richness of Bonhoeffer's understanding and discussion about single-sphere thinking is evident in what can be perceived to be his most mature theology as found in four of his later letters written from Tegel prison, and composed over a brief twenty-one day period of time, immediately prior to the failed attempt on the life of the Fuehrer. Here we can find his theological ideas most clearly written and considered. He was in a difficult time of his life, having few remaining illusions about the potential

¹⁰¹ Luke 10.29.

¹⁰² "With his discussion of truth telling, of conscience, of the importance of staying in touch with the real and the actual, the claims of neighbor love, Bonhoeffer reminds us that Christianity is not primarily a moralistic system. Those who moralize Christianity treat God as a metaphysical first principle of some sort, rather than recognizing the living Trinitarian God who is a true agent in history. If we locate God safely outside the cosmos, all that is left is our action; then we decide that our action requires rules, and we make of Christianity a rule-governed moral system. However, this kills the living Christ and freezes the 'moral memory' so that it- and we- can no longer respond large-heartedly to the neighbor before us. A certain fetishization of truth telling is part and parcel of moralizing Christianity, and Bonhoeffer considered Kant to be the predominant figure who had led things badly astray." Jean Bethke Elshain. "Bonhoeffer on Modernity: *Sic et Non*," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 29.03, 2001, 360.

outcome of his life and understanding that he might not regain freedom as he had known it; this awareness led to a focusing of spiritual and intellectual activity on concepts that he considered to be most important.

These letters, along with many others, caused a stir in the theological community when they became public for the first time in 1951 and 1952 and some reacted with a certain animosity. Even Karl Barth, a friend and compatriot of Bonhoeffer,

warned against this later Bonhoeffer. Replying to P.W. Herrenbruck's question about what he thought of Bonhoeffer's ideas altogether and, in particular, of the attacks on him, Barth said that the lonely prisoner might possibly have 'peeped around some corner' and seen something that was true, but that it was too 'enigmatic' and that it was better to stick to the early Bonhoeffer.¹⁰³

However, in reading Bonhoeffer's works, beginning with *Sanctorum Communio* and continuing through to the final compilation of his ideas in *Letters & Papers from Prison*, it is necessary to admit the consistency of thought that many early critics of *Letters & Papers from Prison* failed to recognize; there is systematic development and maturing of thought and expression, as one would expect with the maturing of a theologian.

His letters to Eberhard Bethge written on 27 June 1944, 30 June 1944, 8 July 1944 and then, just days later on 18 July 1944 form a succinct and accurate summation of the most significant of his theological ideas that have already been discussed, but add a further richness and patina to them. These letters offer a step-by-step explanation of the process of Bonhoeffer's ongoing thinking toward his conclusion of the single sphere of God's involvement and, consequently, the single sphere of Christian disciples' involvement in the world. To be in reality, disciples have to respond to the world as the one they seek to emulate.

¹⁰³ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 889.

In the first of these, he explained that “the faith of the Old Testament isn’t a religion of redemption.”¹⁰⁴ He saw the stories focusing on deliverances of Israel from Egypt and Babylon as historical and normally believed to have been written simply to enable living well during ongoing physical life. Conversely, he recognized that other extant myths about redemption, or deliverance, were concerned with overcoming the barrier of death. “Israel is delivered out of Egypt so that it may live before God as God’s people on earth.”¹⁰⁵ He saw most such stories as trying, in some way, to find an eternity after death, where all the horror of the past is but a shadow compared with the present in eternity. Similarly, the Christian hope of resurrection, where it is commonly proclaimed as redemption toward eternal life, involves both a mistake and danger. He wrote, “Redemption now means redemption from cares, distress, fears, and longings, from sin and death, in a better world beyond the grave.”¹⁰⁶ Then he raises the question about whether this is really the essential nature of what Christ and Paul proclaimed in the gospels and epistles. Again, he counters any two-sphere thinking as he sees that man is to be sent back to the world:

The difference between the Christian hope of resurrection and the mythological hope is that the former sends a man back to his life on earth in a wholly new way which is even more sharply defined than it is in the Old Testament. The Christian, unlike the devotees of the redemption myths, has no last line of escape available from earthly tasks and difficulties into the eternal, but, like Christ himself (“My God, why hast thou forsaken me?”), he must drink the earthly cup to the dregs, and only in his doing so is the crucified and risen Lord with him, and he crucified and risen with Christ. This world must not be prematurely written off; in this the Old and New Testaments are at one. Redemption myths arise from human boundary-experiences, but Christ takes hold of a man at the centre of his life.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 336.

¹⁰⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 336.

¹⁰⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 336.

¹⁰⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 336-337.

Bonhoeffer actively directs Christians back to the arms of God in the world and to living well in this world, rather than permitting them any opportunity for an escapist mentality which would keep them from interaction with the world; Christians are to be intentionally involved in the world, reflecting the true servant mentality of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁸

Even today, such a reflection demands a powerful corrective of much of commonly accepted Christian thought about life in the world and the life of holiness. In this, Bonhoeffer underscores the basic belief that he did not see two distinctly separate spheres for activity- the physical and the spiritual. Rather, he perceived that there is but one, in which God is actively involved with the world that he cared enough for that he did not abandon it to its devices but came to it as it was,¹⁰⁹ choosing to suffer the result of being pushed out of it rather than to not be involved. God did not demand that the world be cleaned up, purified, sanctified, or white-washed before he would be involved with it. Rather, he entered it as it was and expects the same of those who follow him today.

In the second of these late letters, he explains how God has been increasingly pushed out of the world, and has permitted this to happen. He discusses how theology has attempted to accommodate itself to man's pushing God out of the world, "restricting God to the so-called ultimate questions as a *deus ex machina*; that means that he becomes the answer to life's problems, and the solution to its needs and conflicts."¹¹⁰ However, this approach has led to a serious problem for the theologian when someone doesn't seem to

¹⁰⁸ "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Phil.2.5-8, NKJV).

¹⁰⁹ "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3.16-17, NKJV).

¹¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 341.

have any problems to which God is needed as ‘the answer’. If this person cannot be shown his perceived need,

if he cannot be brought to see and admit that his happiness is really an evil, his health sickness, and his vigour despair, the theologian is at his wits’ end. It’s a case of having to do either with a hardened sinner of a particularly ugly type, or with a man of ‘bourgeois complacency’, and the one is as far from salvation as the other.¹¹¹

The theologian has painted himself into the proverbial corner. He points out how Jesus did not force people to admit being sinners before he would interact with them; he was not limited by a perspective where one had to admit to sin before God could work with him. Jesus exemplified caring for all of man as he was at the point of encounter and claimed “for himself and the Kingdom of God the whole of human life in all its manifestations.”¹¹² Bonhoeffer effectively directs those Christians who will listen and hear back to the world without judgment and criticism, but toward intentionally involved interaction.

In his next letter, written on 8 July 1944, he underscored how

the Bible does not recognize our distinction between the outward and the inward. Why should it? It is always concerned with *anthropos teleios*, the *whole* man...The ‘heart’ in the biblical sense is not the inner life, but the whole man in relation to God. But as a man lives just as much from ‘outwards’ to ‘inwards’ as from ‘inwards’ to ‘outwards’, the view that his essential nature can be understood only from his intimate spiritual background is wholly erroneous.¹¹³

In other words, one must recognize man as the whole person that he is and one must resist formulating artificial divisions between one sphere and another- there are not two spheres, only one whole. This led to the conclusion of the need to be involved with humanity as he is. “[W]e shouldn’t run man down in his worldliness, but confront him

¹¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 341.

¹¹² Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 342.

¹¹³ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 346.

with God at his strongest point, that we should give up all clerical tricks, and not regard psychotherapy and existentialist philosophy as God's pioneers."¹¹⁴ Accept man as man is and have the confidence, from God at work in Christians, to be able to be involved in a significant manner with him wherever that might be.

In the 18 July 1944 letter, Bonhoeffer discussed God's willingness to be intimately involved with the world. He had sent a copy of his poem *Christians and Pagans* and commented on the second stanza¹¹⁵ which speaks of an essential difference between Christians and pagans whereby Christians stand by God when God is grieving; pagan ideas of religion do not include the possibility for the gods to grieve or to want support from those who worship them. Jesus, as God incarnate, in Gethsemane, asked his disciples to watch with him while he prayed. The religious man doesn't expect God to need or want anything from him but only for God to provide for him. However, "[m]an is summoned to share in God's suffering at the hands of a godless world."¹¹⁶ The consequence of this is profound and brings humanity to the point of genuine interaction with the world. "He must really live in the godless world, without attempting to gloss over or explain its ungodliness in some religious way. He must live a 'secular' life, and thereby share in God's suffering."¹¹⁷ So the Christian is called not to live in some one particularly religious manner, or to make something of himself, as the result of a particular idea of how he ought to be, but to simply be the person that Christ creates in each of us. "It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the

¹¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 346.

¹¹⁵ "Men go to God when he is sore bestead,
Find him poor and scorned, without shelter or bread,
Whelmed under weight of the wicked, the weak, the dead;
Christians stand by God in his hour of grieving."

¹¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 361.

¹¹⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 361.

sufferings of God in the secular life.”¹¹⁸ He reminds us that Christ’s involvement in the world took many forms including his table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners like Zacchaeus, his acceptance of children in receiving and blessing them, and his obvious acceptance of women evident through the several recorded discussions and interactions with them. Many came to him and admired him without any confession of sin or recognition of an apparent need; these included such a diverse and eclectic number as the shepherds and the magi, the rich young man, and the centurion of Capernaum. The element common to all who were involved with Jesus during his ministry years was their sharing in the suffering of Christ and this suffering, or simple involvement, was enough. There was no need for a particular religious act or method. Religious acts encompass only parts of people’s lives whereas faith involves the whole person, as each of these individuals was wholly involved with Jesus. “Jesus calls men, not to a new religion, but to life.”¹¹⁹ Christ calls us to be wholly involved in the world and to live life as holy, as he did. He does not call us to live a formulaic life centred in particular patterns of religious behaviour.

Bonhoeffer’s letter of 21 July 1944, written one day after the failed attempt on Hitler’s life, in which Bonhoeffer bore part of the responsibility and because of which he was executed, warrants particular attention and leads to a summary of Bonhoeffer’s conception of holiness as it springs from what has already been considered. He writes of understanding more

the profound this-worldliness (of Christianity), characterized by discipline and the constant knowledge of death and resurrection...

¹¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 361.

¹¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 362.

I remember a conversation that I had in America thirteen years ago with a young French pastor. We were asking ourselves quite simply what we wanted to do with our lives. He said he would like to become a saint (and I think it's quite likely that he did become one). At the time I was very impressed, but I disagreed with him, and said, in effect, that I should like to learn to have faith. For a long time I didn't realize the depth of the contrast. I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it...

I discovered later, and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world- watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is *metanoia*; and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian (cf.Jer45!). How can success make us arrogant, or failure lead us astray, when we share in God's sufferings through a life of this kind?¹²⁰

In one brief letter, he tied together the main threads of his complete philosophy, including the need for the Christian to be actively involved as worldly in the world, not shunning his responsibilities toward others, while not seeking any measure of self-aggrandizement.

Implications

Christian disciples must not fail to grasp that while Bonhoeffer writes about the interaction of God, through Christ and the Holy Spirit in the one integrated sphere of His activity, this explicitly includes His activity within the life of the Christian who is interacting in and with the world. As the Christian must not dismiss the world and discount the world because of the involvement of God there, he must, as well, not diminish himself. If God is involved with the world, He must be involved with the Christian who is involved with the world. If there is not a division between spiritual and

¹²⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 369-370.

secular for the world, then there is not for the Christian, either. This is a significant observation and insight toward a fuller understanding of how holiness practically manifests itself ethically into the world in such a manner that individuals want to incorporate it into their lives, being drawn toward it, in Christ, as they were in the first century, while Christ walked the dusty roadways of Palestine.

Attempting to live life in conformity to Christ as He is understood to be involved in the world offers life richness that could not have been conceived before the moment of belief in Christ when one receives salvation; this moment is called conversion. Prior to this, it was impossible to imagine a life on a foundation other than oneself. Now, the Christian is able to go forward with confidence completely in the arms of God, living completely in the “real” world without pretensions or illusions about his own holiness or the need to ‘make something of himself.’ The Christian disciple is able to become a bearer of the holiness of the one sphere; that holiness begins and ends with God and moves toward the needy of the world. (How this occurs will unfold in the following chapter, through considering writing of John Webster.) As one does this, the disciple becomes involved in holiness at its liveliest as Christ continues to interact with the world creatively, unpredictably, and with rightness in all relationships with people and history. Consequently, for the individual dynamically involved in this ongoing process, conforming to the one who created and continues to create¹²¹ he becomes one who, as well, shapes “new life, new lives, new communities, a new world, with all the amazing freshness and uncategorisable beauty of holiness.”¹²²

¹²¹ “All things were created through Him and for Him...and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.” (Colossians 1.16b, 20).

¹²² Ford, *Bonhoeffer, Holiness and Ethics*, 379.

Chapter 3

John Webster: Practical Holiness

Holistic Holiness

John Webster's work presents holiness as very practical and unavoidable for the Christian disciple, as it is fully identified with the nature of the triune God as it flows from God to the believer and outwardly from there. Despite his assertion that his volume, *Holiness*, "is not primarily concerned with matters of ascetical or pastoral theology"¹²³ its scope, detail, and logic make it very practical and pastorally valuable. Essential to his discussion is a declaration in the middle chapter of this little volume: "The holiness of the saints is not a mere turning inwards; if it were, then it would all too quickly become mere sectarian hostility towards a profane world."¹²⁴ Here he affirms an approach to the subject that stands apart from all who consider that holiness requires separation and inaccessibility between the one who is holy and the one who is not. In this, he offers the second essential element of a theological model of holiness ethics- a way for the Christian disciple to view himself as a holiness-carrier within the single integrated sphere of reality.

Using a careful and methodological manner, Webster moves from the outward to the inward- from the grander to the more humanly immediate- from the more theoretical to the more practical. Through this movement he leads readers to conclusions about the applicability of the often ignored theological idea of holiness and leads readers toward further investigation and exploration of this vital topic.

¹²³ John Webster, *Holiness*, 2.

¹²⁴ Webster, *Holiness*, 74.

He builds the discussion of holiness, which he calls “a worked example of this understanding of the task of Christian theology in its ecclesial setting,”¹²⁵ using limitations that he understands are placed on the discussion within the realm of sound theology. Theology is “not free thought or speech...but holy speech”¹²⁶ and it is bounded by the gospel, which brings it under “the tutelage and authority of the church”¹²⁷ which is under the authority of that same gospel. He is not interested in broad discussion or philosophizing about potential comparisons but is interested in discussion that is completely rooted in the scriptural gospel and “the presence of the holy God.”¹²⁸

Fundamental to this theological discussion of holiness and its applicability in life is the Trinity and how God, in Trinity, relates with humanity as His creation. “[T]he triune God is the Holy One in our midst; his holiness is a mode of relation to the creatures whom he sanctifies and calls to holiness.”¹²⁹ Webster elucidates the central thought that holiness is not a mere idea rooted in the separateness of God, nor is it concerned with a route or path for humans to take in order to enjoy their sanctification. His concern is with the active path taken by the Trinity who interacted by choice, in freedom, and in active election to reconcile and perfect creation. God interacts expressing his desire for humanity’s obedience and the further expansion of lives being lived with the reality of holiness. He moved into a world in desperate need of holiness and its impact. Consequently, Godly holiness is not an abstract idea separate from God’s acts; neither is it a method or sphere for human sanctity that is separated from election, salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit. It is very practical, as it is rooted in these godly movements.

¹²⁵ Webster, *Holiness*, 4.

¹²⁶ Webster, *Holiness*, 2

¹²⁷ Webster, *Holiness*, 3

¹²⁸ Webster, *Holiness*, 5

¹²⁹ Webster, *Holiness*, 5.

In full alignment with Bonhoeffer's single-sphere thinking, Webster expounds a holistic approach to the subject of holiness, and one which offers more practical appeal to humanity, as opposed to the separated and seemingly less attainable holiness of common two-sphere theological thought.

Holiness cannot, consequently, be separated from interdependent living where God intends holiness to be manifested. From the beginning, God has evidenced His choice to use His human creatures as the vehicles for manifesting much of Himself.¹³⁰ They become carriers of His holiness as they enjoy a dependent relationship with Him. 'Him,' however, must always be understood within the Trinitarian formulation, which mandates relationship and from which God reaches into the world in Son and Spirit to sanctify; humans enjoy holiness only in dependence on the Spirit of the Son who makes holy. Human creatures must live in relationship with God; this demands a "way of thinking of God's relation to and action upon creatures, one which refuses both their radical separation and their confusion."¹³¹ The key word, consequently, is 'relationship.' This relationship is seen in all spheres of humanity's endeavours.

The Holiness of Theology

Relationship is at the heart of the holiness of theology. Theology requires that people think correctly about the true God. It is important to not simply create an unholy god of one's own wishful thinking and creative imagination, as is often noted as

¹³⁰ Interestingly, expressing a similar idea, Stephen Barton writes, "...the New Testament witnesses to a profound sense that the holiness of God revealed through the Spirit in the life, death and resurrection of the Son of God makes possible, both in principle and in representative practice, the *unity of humankind*." See Stephen C. Barton, "Dislocating and Relocating Holiness: A New Testament Study," in Stephen C. Barton, (ed.), *Holiness: Past & Present*, 208.

¹³¹ Webster, *Holiness*, 6.

occurring in the record of the biblical Old Testament. Theology is bounded by the authoritative biblical record and the reality of all activities, including that of reason, being in need of God's salvific activity and processes.¹³² Through scripture and other revelatory activities of the Trinity, God has revealed Himself; however, this revelation does not involve the communication of hidden truths but self-presentation.¹³³ This self-presentation has the result of 'saving fellowship'¹³⁴ where human opposition to God is overcome and replaced with "knowledge, love and fear of God"¹³⁵ rather than being simply a self-display. Through this revelation, fellowship is established in which humanity and Trinity inter-communicate and enjoy fellowship. Reason, as all other activities of the human sphere, is an activity of the human realm that needs to be fully submitted to God's guidance; sound reason cannot operate independently from God and antagonistically toward God.

God's revealed presence is forwarded through the scriptures which provide the boundaries and standards for theological investigation. Within this revelation can be understood the concept of 'holy'; it is not a phenomenology to be developed but a relationship to be understood and experienced, which becomes apparent through exegetical study of the works of God. "Those works determine the content of holiness; the holiness of God and of those realities which God sanctifies is not simply 'the sacred'; it is, rather, inseparably bound to the enacted identity of this God."¹³⁶ The idea of a firm connection between God and his revelation is advanced, rather than simply a philosophical or intellectually self-determined concept of holiness. It is possible,

¹³² Webster, *Holiness*, 10.

¹³³ Webster, *Holiness*, 13.

¹³⁴ Webster, *Holiness*, 13.

¹³⁵ Webster, *Holiness*, 13.

¹³⁶ Webster, *Holiness*, 19.

consequently, to begin to envision the thought of ‘attractive holiness’ through this exposition. Holiness is not a psychological or religious quality determined by reason; rather, “[r]eason is holy because God acts upon reason, arresting its plunge into error and freeing it from its bondage to our corrupt wills and our hostility to God.”¹³⁷ God’s holiness is fellowship-creating holiness “which assembles and upholds a human community, set apart as the communion of saints to be the human answer to God’s holy love.”¹³⁸

The Holiness of God

The holiness of God springs from the relationality of God, who reveals himself as Trinity. This is the way God is and this way of being shapes and determines all of our thinking about God’s nature including his holiness. “In short, God is holy as Father, Son and Spirit.”¹³⁹ Holiness is not a concept in abstraction but is a predicate of the personal being and relation of God as triune; it is how God is. It is possible to attempt to define God in terms of many different adjectives. However, each possible adjective or descriptor that can be used of God fully describes Him, His activity and His being. ‘Holy’ is one such descriptive word that fully describes all that surrounds the subject, God. God is completely holy. The greatest example of holy is God and all that God does is holy and springs from this quality.¹⁴⁰ Holiness is intimately connected with God’s being. God is what God does so his holiness is defined and understood out of his works; holiness is a

¹³⁷ Webster, *Holiness*, 25.

¹³⁸ Webster, *Holiness*, 25.

¹³⁹ Webster, *Holiness*, 36.

¹⁴⁰ Webster, *Holiness*, 39.

mode of God's activity and identifies the manner of his relation to humanity and is, therefore, a relationship rather than an abstract quality.

Amazingly, this holiness is not evident, as many suppose, with God placing himself into a position of abstract otherness from humanity but is most clearly known through his turning toward the profane of the world and his creatures. This is an incredible reality of God's action, and insight about that activity opens the door to the expression of holiness in manners that can be attractive to those surrounding Christian disciples. Turning toward the world, rather than away from it, carries a meaningful message of God's concern to the world. Fortunately, God the Trinity has not subordinated his relation to humanity to His majesty which would leave Him completely beyond and forever hidden. God's majesty and relation are inextricably linked and humans participate in the singular movement of God's distance and approach which are "one movement in God's being and act."¹⁴¹ This presents the interesting reality that the commonly supposed distinctions between the absolute or metaphysical and the relative or personal attributes of God have only limited applicability and are helpful only marginally or descriptively. God is much nearer than often assumed. Holiness, then, characterizes all God's ways; God cannot be anything but holy. Webster concludes that, "...If the holiness of God is not perceived and understood, then the entire work and conduct of God are not grasped."¹⁴²

It is vital, therefore, that holiness not simply be made into a subject for discussion that is separated from relationship; this would leave God as indefinite, a blank, or a void which might be described using one's own notions. Holiness indicates the way that the

¹⁴¹ Webster, *Holiness*, 42

¹⁴² Webster, *Holiness*, 43

particular God of scripture and history has turned toward humanity in mercy and with grace. It is not a descriptor for God's otherness and transcendence which would place God apart from the human race. God is holy "precisely as the one who in majesty and freedom and sovereign power bends down to us in mercy."¹⁴³ This overwhelming idea juxtaposes two seemingly opposite actions, which are united in God as Trinity; God's transcendence and condescension find an intimate link in God's holiness as he comes to his people, purifies them, and makes them into his own possession. God's positive and negative holiness (terms for His transcendence and condescension, respectively) work to bring all to His holiness. God's negative holiness is that activity through which God works to destroy what is in opposition to Him and bring that into relationship with Himself. He works with humanity despite its efforts to destroy itself as it was created to be through attempting to live outside of relationship with God. God is dedicated to bringing all to Himself. Contrary to many dualistic philosophies, the holy does interact with the unholy in order to bring all to holiness. The unholy cannot permanently overcome the holy. God does touch the physical; in fact, He becomes intimately involved with it as He works to end the enmity with Him that originates in the deception and delusion of the human realm.

The Holiness of the Church

For holiness to be practical it must be about more than God and must flow to a discussion of God's creatures and, principally, humanity and the holiness of the saints as representatives of God. For humans, holiness becomes practical when it intersects human life and flows from the heavenly to the earthly. Indeed, "[l]ike its unity, its catholicity,

¹⁴³ Webster, *Holiness*, 45

and its apostolicity, the Church's holiness is that which it is by virtue of its sheer contingency upon the mercy of God.”¹⁴⁴ Never does holiness carry any thought of self-generation; it is always a contingent quality existent because of a human response to the divine call. The church is grounded in no human possibility because, apart from God, human history is simply populated by a “bleak, estranged and ruined company called ‘no people’.”¹⁴⁵ The church demonstrates the daily miracle of God’s involvement with people in that there is the ‘people of God’ which does not simply collapse back into the alienation, hatred, sin and disconnectedness of general human society. Without the holiness of God there can be no holiness of people; all talk of the holiness of the church is rooted in talk of the holiness of God, and the church is because God is. Interestingly, this necessitates the reality of what Webster refers to as “a holy passivity” on the part of the church where the church yields its will and being to God.

It is essential, therefore, to recognize that no one can evaluate holiness, whether personal or corporate, apart from clearly appreciating the origin of that holiness in God’s holiness. “Only God is properly holy; only God may elect the Church; only an elect Church is sanctified. The Church’s holiness is thus grounded in the election of God the Father.”¹⁴⁶ This holiness is established in the work of reconciliation performed by Christ and is perfected by the Holy Spirit; consequently, it is an ‘alien sanctity,’¹⁴⁷ or holiness, and not a natural condition of the saints.¹⁴⁸ Necessarily, confession of the holy God

¹⁴⁴ Webster, *Holiness*, 57.

¹⁴⁵ Webster, *Holiness*, 58

¹⁴⁶ Webster, *Holiness*, 60

¹⁴⁷ Webster, *Holiness*, 62

¹⁴⁸ See, also, Moltmann, who writes of this concept. “If the church acquires its existence through the activity of Christ, then her characteristics, too, are characteristics of Christ’s activity first of all...The holiness of the church is not initially the holiness of her members or her cultic assemblies; it is the holiness of the Christ who acts on sinners...the holiness of the church lies in his sanctifying activity. The result of

becomes the fundamental act of the church and its saints. Through this confessional acknowledgement it declares the position and dignity of the One from whom its holiness derives and assents to God's reality and its existence because of God's mercy. At its heart, the church's holiness is a confession which does not rise from within itself but from God's manifestation of himself.

What, then, does the holiness of the church look like? Necessarily, care must be taken to not root any appearance of holiness in activity of the church or the saints of the church; holiness cannot be a matter of what visible people do because holiness is not something that is possessed, quantifiable, or just present in some social manner. The church's holiness is not something it can stir or realize itself but it involves constantly acknowledging what the triune God has done. The works of the church do not complete, continue or in any way extend or embody God's work which is perfect, and which, alone, is properly holy. But as the people of the church hear God, with the hearing being an unfinished and constantly new work, response occurs and confession is constantly offered. In his Easter sermon of 1531, Luther declared, "There is no greater sinner than the Christian Church."¹⁴⁹ He understood that the church would reflect an understanding of a simple awareness of itself in comparison with God that is to never diminish on the part of the saints of God. Holiness is visible as the church witnesses to the world. This witness is of great importance as the outgrowth of holiness lived solely in one sphere, as encouraged by Bonhoeffer, and is the means by which Christian disciples properly carry what begins in heaven in a very practical way to the waiting and needy surrounding society. Since the origin of the church's holiness is entirely outside itself it would be

his justifying activity is 'the communion of saints'." Jurgen Moltmann. *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 338.

¹⁴⁹ Webster, *Holiness*, 73, quoting from M. Luther, *Werke. Weimar Ausgabe* 31/I, 276.7f.

unconscionable for the church to simply turn inward. The holiness of the saints “is not a mere turning inwards”¹⁵⁰ for that would be the antithesis of God’s call to his people. Indeed, the apostle Peter wrote, “You are...a holy nation...that you may declare” (1 Pet.2.9). Holiness is not something to be grasped and held onto very tightly but is something to be used and declared to others so that they can enjoy it, also. Without question, the church is to be evidently abstaining from some behaviours and pursuits of the surrounding world but that is not to be the primary focus of its holiness. Separation is not the goal of being holy; in practicing separation Christians have often mistaken how holiness is to be evident. This mistake has been a factor in driving people away from ‘hearing Jesus.’ Where holiness has been presented as unapproachable and remote, many people have turned from it and sought other less valuable pursuits and have continued in their state of ‘no people’; however, God intended that the end of holiness would be ““that you may declare”: holiness is to be maintained ‘among the Gentiles’ not simply to prevent the pollution of the Church, but with the end that ‘they may see your good works and glorify God’ (1 Pet.2.12; cf. Mt.5.16; Phil.2.15).”¹⁵¹ Holiness is to be visible in such a way that people can see good works that are transparent, without hidden motives and which declare the wonderful deeds of the holy God. Others will be drawn to these.

The church, then, will be involved in energetic effort for God to be known, evident, and understood in the surrounding society. The desire is for God to be evident, not for the church or its saints to be the focus. It is vital to not move the focus to the wrong place, like the church or the saint, which is often done, and too easily accomplished, but which encourages people to look to something on earth rather than to

¹⁵⁰ Webster, *Holiness*, 74

¹⁵¹ Webster, *Holiness*, 75.

God who stands behind what is easily seen. Undoubtedly, in times of apparently declining interest in the matters and interests of the church, it is easy for people of the church to want to turn that around and have people drawn to the church and its programs. Christ, in establishing the church, guaranteed its continuance but he declared that people were to be drawn to him. He affirmed this clearly in John 12.32 where he said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” If the ‘people of God’ keep the focus on God, rather than themselves as the ‘people of God,’ keeping the focus on the holiness of God as transmitted through God’s people rather than on God’s holy people, there will never come a diminishment of the hallowing of God and His name. In fact, rather than passively sitting and expecting God to act, the church will “declare, and within their limits take on responsibility, that in the matter about which they pray to God something will be done correspondingly by them.”¹⁵² Some of this will include hearing the gospel, testimony, sanctification of reason, and praise, “the great act of rebellion against sin, the great repudiation of our wicked refusal to acknowledge God to be the Lord.”¹⁵³

The church is holy, therefore, inasmuch it continuously magnifies God, keeping the triune God as the centre and focus of all and ensuring that people and the activity of people never becomes the focal point.

The Holiness of the Christian

Intimately tied to the holiness of the church is that of the individuals who are part of the church, the ones called Christians, saints, and disciples. When considering the

¹⁵² Webster, *Holiness*, 76. Here Webster quotes Barth, *The Christian Life*, 169.

¹⁵³ Webster, *Holiness*, 76.

holiness of the individual Christian, it is important to remember that God's holiness is relational and has to do with the way He relates to His creatures, of which humans are primary. For the Christian, holiness is derived, which leads to the reality that the orientation of one's life must be external and toward God as the source and the object of resulting praise. Consequently, when speaking of the holiness of the saints, it is vital to do so in such a manner that the person does not become the centre around which all language of the holy Church and the holy God revolve. To do that abuses the concept of holiness and collapses the transcendent work of God's election into the very tiny world of the individual saint. "Good dogmatic order will help promote good pastoral order, and so inhibit that inflammation of self-concern which can so afflict the life of piety and frustrate growth in holiness."¹⁵⁴

Whatever can be said about the holiness of the church can be said about the holiness of the individual within the church. He, as the church, is renewed, through God's intervention, for the active life of holy fellowship with God, and this fellowship is grounded and rooted in the "sanctifying work of the Holy Trinity."¹⁵⁵ This fellowship, and resulting activity, does not originate in any human decision; focus must not shift from God's agency to our own. In God's election to holiness, the Christian has been "extracted from the sphere of human autonomy"¹⁵⁶ to a way of life that does not have segregation as its purpose or function but has being in a certain way as its objective. God's election of grace is not to a state, but the consecration of the individual is for active

¹⁵⁴ Webster, *Holiness*, 78.

¹⁵⁵ Webster, *Holiness*, 79.

¹⁵⁶ Webster, *Holiness*, 80.

service of God; Jonathan Edwards stated that God “elects them that they may live holy.”¹⁵⁷

The Christian’s position, therefore, is rooted in the triune working of Father, Son, and Spirit where the agent of our holiness is not the Christian but God. Understanding the Christian’s position in this way prevents any thought of turning the Christian’s sanctified state into some form of self-improvement and prevents isolating the work of Christ to the single phase of His saving work, but includes the whole panorama of His work from eternity to eternity.

Christian holiness in Christ and the Spirit involves an alien sanctity because it originates outside the human person and can in no way signal any measure of self-sufficiency but rather a “perpetual and inherent lack of self-sufficiency.”¹⁵⁸ The Christian has been separated from his self-caused self-destruction and has been given an entirely new person that is entirely enclosed in Christ which carries the imperative of yielding to the work of God outwardly toward the encompassing of all creation.

Calvin spoke of the active life of holiness as characterized by mortification and vivification at every moment. Rather than being separate activities, these are the same continuous two-part reality and are to be characteristic of all patterns of the life of holiness. In Book III of the Institutes, Calvin declared:

Now the great thing is this: we are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory...

If we, then, are not our own but the Lord’s, it is clear what error we must flee, and whither we must direct all the acts of our life. We are not our own: let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own: let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the

¹⁵⁷ Webster, *Holiness*, 80.

¹⁵⁸ Webster, *Holiness*, 83.

flesh. We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.

Conversely, we are God's: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal. Oh, how much has that man profited who, having been taught that he is not his own, has taken away dominion and rule from his own reason that he may yield it to God! For, as consulting our self-interest is the pestilence that most effectively leads to our destruction, so the sole haven of salvation is to be wise in nothing and to will nothing through ourselves but to follow the leading of the Lord along.¹⁵⁹

We must, therefore, understand that God's consecration is purposive; our condition is one that denies our desire to be God to ourselves, because we have been created and recreated by the one true God. It is from this holy condition that the movement of holy living arises. The process of mortification and vivification are at the centre of life lived in holy fellowship with God and, therefore, are core activities of life lived as it was created to be. It is in this ongoing process that humans know true freedom, obedience and love. This is how the Christian is liberated from constant self-concern to a relationship of love toward his neighbour which is where human fellowship flourishes. "Holiness' and 'freedom' are correlative terms: my sanctification is my emancipation."¹⁶⁰ What becomes possible for the Christian is living in a state where reversal of the normal human state has occurred and he lives in the truth. Through repentance and reconciliation the Christian is so bound to God's grace and call that he is liberated from all other bonds and set free to live in the truth where bondage to Christ frees one to live as he was created to live. In fact, one becomes fully human, living in the reality of the truth of what one is supposed to be as a creature of grace. Here, one can live the truly holy life, responding to others around and

¹⁵⁹ Webster, *Holiness*, 89, 90. From J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.i.1, ET John T. McNeill (ed.) and F.L. Battles (trans.), Library of Christian Classics XX, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960, p.690.

¹⁶⁰ Webster, *Holiness*, 92.

becoming a fully active channel of God's love and grace toward others. Holiness, drawn from God, flows outwardly in relationships with other human creatures. In words surprisingly similar to those of Bonhoeffer in *Sanctorum Communio*,¹⁶¹ Webster declares:

Love involves my acknowledgment that I am obliged by my neighbour as a reality given to me by God, a reality which I would often like to evade but which encounters me with a transcendent imperative force...my neighbour is given to me, forming part of my destiny in the company of the saints. My neighbour is a summons to fellowship...Without a sense that fellowship is (God-)given, my neighbour would not present a sufficiently strong claim to disturb me out of complacency and indifference into active, initiative-taking regard.¹⁶²

Apart from this neighbour's call to fellowship, there is only self-will which keeps one trapped in a very self-concerned existence. However, God has given the neighbour as a divine call to fellowship as a condition "and not merely one possibility for my ironic self to entertain."¹⁶³ The self, apart from this call to fellowship, will remain in the relational paucity of sin; however, God's call to relationships that are sanctified by Christ and the Spirit is a call to the holiness within which all are created to live. Webster summarizes this reality in declaring:

And so: as Father, God is the one who wills and purposes from all eternity the separation of humankind as a holy people, destined for fellowship with himself. As Son, God is the one who achieves this separation of humankind by rescuing humanity from its pollution and bondage to unholiness. As Spirit, God is the one who completes or perfects that separation by sanctifying humankind and drawing it into righteous fellowship with the holy God. May it be so with us.¹⁶⁴

Obviously, the opportunities this reality affords are lofty yet practical and fully spring from the connection between heaven and earth.

¹⁶¹ "Love for our neighbor is our will to embrace God's will for the other person; God's will for the other person is defined for us in the unrestricted command to surrender our self-centered will to our neighbor, which neither means to love the other instead of God, nor to love God in the other, but to put the other in our own place and to love the neighbor instead of ourselves." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 171.

¹⁶² Webster, *Holiness*, 97.

¹⁶³ Webster, *Holiness*, 97.

¹⁶⁴ Webster, *Holiness*, 98.

Carrying Holiness toward Others

Holiness, therefore, is relational to its core as the relational Trinity has initiated fellowship with his creatures who become the elected, redeemed and consummated holy people living a constant ‘alien’ holiness which is gift, not possession or achievement. The challenge arises where this holiness interacts with society. This is where the Evangelical Canadian Christian church encounters the resistance as well as the wondering about how to demonstrate this God-commanded virtue in such a manner that people are absolutely and irrevocably drawn to Christ and to hearing Christ as did those around Him when He walked the dusty roadways of ancient Palestine. Christians are capable of understanding that holiness is a primary ingredient within human flourishing and humanity; in need of conversion which Christians have experienced, non-Christians cannot immediately appreciate its importance. However, humanity will respond to Christian people who demonstrate this life-focusing election to relationships of caring for people they encounter during their normal living of life. As Christian persons simply live out the office of God’s call to “be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy,” living in a life of responsiveness to the demands made by surrounding human persons, holiness will be seen and experienced and a drawing to it will occur, even though the Christian may have no sense of what is actually occurring.

Webster has defined the role of the Christian believer in the single-sphered world elucidated by Bonhoeffer. Relationally carrying holiness toward those for whom it is not a value puts the obedient Christian and God’s working with others on course toward the time when holiness will be a value for all those for whom it does not have present value.

Chapter 4

Emmanuel Levinas: Holiness in Relationality

Truth and Holiness

“[T]o be human is to live and act in conformity to the given truth (nature) of what I am- a creature of grace, a reconciled sinner...caught up in the ways and works of God.”¹⁶⁵ Emmanuel Levinas explains how this “conformity to the given truth...of what I am,” spoken of by John Webster, works practically and points toward relationality as the value of central importance in living as originally designed. Levinas’s insights guide modern Christian disciples in understanding how to carry holiness toward those for whom it is not a value. Levinas, through an exceptional approach to apprehending “truth,” shows the disciple how to be all he is to be and how to be fully involved in the works of God. This relationality is rooted in the ‘truth’ of what I am and how I am to be.

Christian disciples, who understand the reality of God’s working in one sphere, as taught by Bonhoeffer, and that each disciple both carries and encounters God’s holiness through normal living, as taught by Webster, still face one unanswered question. The answer to these questions brings confidence that is needed to progress in personal involvement in God’s work. The disciple wants assurance about being in the right place at the right time with the right person and doing the right activity. Levinas offers an answer and provides the third pillar of the theological model of holiness ethics. He does this through his understanding of truth found in a special kind of relationality.

Truth is more than just an interesting topic for discussion; it has been a constant quest of humanity. Where Webster concludes his book speaking of the need to respond to

¹⁶⁵ Webster, *Holiness*. 94.

the neighbour as part of elected relationships given by God, Emmanuel Levinas sees even more. In the neighbour he sees the invitation to responsive action as the one he calls ‘the Other’ beckons. The concept of ‘truth’ serves as both a common and connecting idea between these two authors, tying together two very different philosophical processes for reaching an understanding of the importance of ‘the neighbour’ of Webster and ‘the other’ of Levinas. Levinas purports that the human person encounters the Divine through the neighbour as ‘other’ and receives a command for action toward the neighbour.

The third component of the theological model for holiness ethics is inherent in Levinas’s understanding of the meeting of the ‘other’ in human life. Through responding to the ‘other,’ Christian disciples can be assured that they are involved where, when, how, and with whom they ought to be involved. They can be confident that they are doing God’s work as they ought to be doing it.

Plato, Western Philosophers, and Truth

Searching for truth dominates modern concerns in all fields of endeavour whether it involves discussing the need to understand how to cure a particularly virulent strain of a disease like cancer, addressing a projected natural catastrophe or seeking to understand the veracity of election claims made by political figures. The question of “what is truth?” has haunted humanity for millennia. Pontius Pilate asked Jesus this question as thousands, before and since, asked this question. In one of his final messages to his disciples, Jesus declared that He was the truth.¹⁶⁶ What does that mean to the model for holiness ethics? Can further thoughts or conclusions be drawn that might lead to insight

¹⁶⁶ “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” (John 14.6, NKJV).

about that enigmatic declaration? How do conclusions springing from these questions impact our understanding of holiness at work in the lives of Christian disciples?

Truth has been the focus of philosophical debate over the centuries with many thinkers centering on the subject as key in determining what is and is not truth.

Understanding conclusions reached will enable both clearer understanding of Levinas's radically different conclusions about "truth" and how these conclusions offer an appropriate route for Christian disciples to understand "holiness."

In its entry on "truth," the *Catholic Encyclopedia* indicates that most definitions of truth focus on the subject and what the subject is able to perceive. Truth is understood as a correspondence between ideas as they exist in human minds and as they function in various acts of cognition and the idea that the understood reality expresses and embodies. Correspondence between "knower and known, therefore, turns out...to be of the very essence of the truth relation...[T]o be able to define truth, we must first possess it and know that we possess it."¹⁶⁷ This is the essence of the scholastic school's understanding of truth, but other schools of thought, such as the Hegelian school, advance the centrality of the subject to understanding truth as well. "Truth, in fact, is but reality *qua* thought. It is an intelligent act in which the universe is thought as a whole of infinite parts or differences, all organically inter-related and somehow brought to unity."¹⁶⁸ The pragmatic school declares, "All human activity is purposive and its purpose is the control of human experience with a view to its improvement, both in the individual and in the race. Truth is but a means to this end."¹⁶⁹ Central to these understandings is the idea of truth as somehow known, understood, acquired, and even possessed by the subject, who

¹⁶⁷ *Truth*, New Advent, <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm>> (accessed 12 October 2005).

¹⁶⁸ *Truth*, New Advent.

¹⁶⁹ *Truth*, New Advent.

is central to the acquisition of truth. The subject seeks control of the information that is apprehended and considered to be truth. This approach has the potential to dramatically and negatively impact interpersonal relationships between Christian disciples and others, as well as all other human relationships.

Emmanuel Levinas sees matters very differently. He views western philosophy's understanding of truth as having a strong element of violence attached to it.¹⁷⁰ In fact, he seeks to correct errors in Western philosophy,¹⁷¹ which derives from Platonic Greek forms of thought and has been carried through to modern thought. Bernard Lonergan affirms this and hints at how national background may offer a source of difference in outlook about truth between Levinas and his Jewish roots, and the Greek origins of western philosophical thought.¹⁷² Levinas criticizes Heidegger, a significant contemporary philosopher, who expounds a view of truth which built from Platonic thought and which is rooted in the subject; Heidegger saw that Plato's positions and difficulties in explaining or understanding truth sprang from knowing nothing of this modern notion of the subject and subjectivity...Ancient philosophy never pondered the temporal way that minds related to that which was external to mind. All the conceptual difficulties that Plato encountered in the *Theaetetus* in explaining the possibility of human error originate from his inability

¹⁷⁰ Steven Connor. 1997 *The War in Truth* [online], University of Sunderland, 1993 [cited May 5, 2007]. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/skc/>.

¹⁷¹ "Levinas's philosophy seeks to correct that which he believes is the error of Western philosophy, most dramatically encompassed in the thought of his former philosophical mentor, Martin Heidegger. This error is the tendency for the knower to think it is possible to thematized the other in such a way as to make him or her totalized in his or her being. Hence, I am able from the position of my 'I' to conceptualize, in totality, what it means for the other to be the other. I think I can grasp him or her fully, for I and the other share in the existential state of our being (which for Heidegger is *angst*). This totalization can lead only to violence, according to Levinas, never moving the I to the other in an openness that would allow for ethical action for the other." Andrew Root, "Practical Theology as Social Ethical Action in Christian Ministry: Implications from Emmanuel Levinas and Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *International Journal of Practical Theology*, Vol. 10, Issue 1, 2006, 54.

¹⁷² "...Indeed, later notions of truth had not yet been developed. The Hebrew thought of truth in terms of fidelity, and when he spoke of doing the truth he meant doing what was right. For the Greek truth was alethia, what was not unnoticed, what was unconcealed, what was conspicuous. For a long time and for many the Homeric tales were conspicuous indeed." Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 306.

to form a notion of the subject and subjectivity. For him, an error free understanding would rise above the defective temporal understanding.¹⁷³

It is this reality of violence in a subject-centred understanding of truth which Levinas perceives as he develops his understanding of “truth.” He explains:

The truth correlative to being- in which the subject, a pure welcome reserved for the nudity of disclosed being, effaces itself *before* that which manifests itself, and in which effort, inventiveness, and genius are all just the means, ways and detours by which being is dis-discovered, by which its phases come together and its structures are secured-remains, within the thought that issued from Greece, the foundation of every notion of truth.¹⁷⁴

Levinas sees a stream of thinking emanating from Platonic thought and flowing through modern western philosophical thought.¹⁷⁵ He perceives that the subject is central to the western tradition¹⁷⁶ and that consciousness and “thematizing contemplation”¹⁷⁷ are essential; this includes the idea of hostility that is necessary as the subject attempts to understand and grasp that of which he becomes aware. Violence is part of seeking truth in the western tradition of philosophy, rooted in Greece. “Representation governs the notion of truth, and thereby every meaning is governed by ontology.”¹⁷⁸

Gianni Vattimo summarizes that a subject cannot become authentic by leaving the reality of the world, but “entry into the sphere of authentic existence [...] can only occur (if it actually can) through the modification of this world, through the transformation of one epoch of Being into another.”¹⁷⁹ Levinas observes that subject-centred philosophy about “truth” leads to many difficulties of explanation including Descartes’ use of

¹⁷³ Emmanuel Levinas, “Martin Heidegger and Ontology,” 11-32.

¹⁷⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, (ed.) Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, 99.

¹⁷⁵ Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 99.

¹⁷⁶ Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 100.

¹⁷⁷ Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 101.

¹⁷⁸ Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 99.

¹⁷⁹ Gianni Vattimo, “From “The Decline of the Subject and the Problem of Testimony””, in Medina and Wood, (eds.), *Truth: Engagements across Philosophical Traditions*, 181.

solipsism, which places the subject as the key element in the knowing, and Heidegger's developing the idea of *Dasein* which put the subject at the centre, again.

"The philosophical activity of the west has been dominated throughout its history by the primacy of being, of ontology, as the 'first philosophy' and thus as the basis for all subsequent forms of philosophizing."¹⁸⁰ In the quest for truth, individuals, as subjects, attempt to acquire truth through interactions with other individuals and with the surrounding world. They exert a certain force on the surrounding world in order to bring truth into themselves, exerting violence on it in the process.

Levinas, Truth and Holiness

Levinas rejects this common western approach to truth and unfolds an understanding that places ethics prior to philosophy, enabling a different relationship between people and opening the way to the third element of the model for holiness ethics. Holiness is connected with truth through a different relationship than in ontologically centered philosophy. The difference lies in understanding truth as disclosure or truth as testimony, between philosophy influenced by the Greek tradition or taking the idea of ethics as "first philosophy" seriously. Medina and Wood summarize the difference in positions:

The Greek tradition concerns itself with metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology, and it takes for granted the substitutability of subject-positions. With the opening of ethics, as Levinas presents it, we have instead a fundamental asymmetry, in which I am responsible for the other but he or she is not responsible for me.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Marie L. Baird, "Revisioning Christian Theology in Light of Emmanuel Levinas's Ethics of Responsibility," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Summer/Fall, Vol.36, Issue 3/4, (1999): 343.

¹⁸¹ Medina and Wood, *Truth: Engagement Across Philosophical Traditions*, 231.

The western tradition connects truth to being and disclosure, while Levinas connects truth to the capacity and obligation to respond to the testimony of others. Each approach leads to significant differences in the potential relationships between holiness-carrying Christian disciples and the ‘others’ they encounter. The first encourages relationships of totalizing, control and power, while Levinas’s approach offers a responsive relationship.

Testimony is central to Levinas’s understanding of truth. Vatimo writes that any appeal to the idea of testimony would be anachronistic as recently as the early 1970s, at which time “the ‘death of the subject’ was in full swing, and the whole question of testimony seemed *passé*. But since then... the climate has changed.”¹⁸² Indeed, a number of forces were at work which combined to provide the kind of environment in which many, including Levinas, were prepared to look differently at the subject of testimony. These included the growth of

technology and commodification, social and industrial development. These have brought with them immense gains, but for many people this has been at the price of a sense of loss, that our contact with the ‘real’ is being prepackaged, mediated, commodified, subjected to rules, concepts, and algorithms.¹⁸³

A second trend that contributed to looking differently at testimony involved the reports of survivors of the Holocaust and other regimes of terror, whose testimony was recognized as carrying truth but in a different format than propositional truth. This change in atmosphere bore fruit in what can be termed a ‘better philosophy’ in Levinas. For Levinas, “the other person’s testimony is the primary ethical moment, and it is only through this that I have access to the other in any real sense.”¹⁸⁴ This testimony is not something connected to a subjective experience so that ontological terminology might

¹⁸² Medina and Wood, *Truth*, 229.

¹⁸³ Medina and Wood, *Truth*, 233.

¹⁸⁴ Medina and Wood, *Truth*, 230.

continue as if something had just been revealed to a subject. “This testimony belongs to the very glory of the Infinite.”¹⁸⁵ “The face of the other for Levinas is metaphysical. It is beyond comprehension, beyond totalization.”¹⁸⁶ This contrasts sharply with the normally held view which significantly discounts testimony, as Levinas explains:

Testimony- the confession of some knowledge or of an experience by a subject- can be conceived only in relation to the disclosed being which remains the norm; it brings about only indirect truths about being, or about the relations man has with being. These truths are evidently inferior, secondhand, and uncontrollable, distorted by the very fact of their transmission... The critique of testimony...is necessary to draw out the truth.¹⁸⁷

The ‘other,’ from whom testimony emanates, stands opposite someone and offers truth from the realm beyond:

When I see the face of the other, however, I cannot turn away from the other, for the infinite has appeared. To deny it would be to deny its possibility, making totality operative and transcendence impossible. If only totality is a possibility for humanity, ethics is impossible, for the other is only an item in my existence and cannot place a demand upon me, cannot call me into responsibility...In order to see her truly, to peer deep into the unique beauty of her face, I must enter this moment open, prepared for ambiguity, prepared to discover anew reality and truth, and to experience as never before, again, the transcendent.¹⁸⁸

Levinas affirms that the glory of the Infinite, in the testifying of truth, does not come to simply affect a subject as a representation, but “[i]t commands me from my own mouth.”¹⁸⁹ Here is how the holiness-carrying Christian disciple, living in the single sphere of God’s activity, can have confidence about personal activities. The disciple can understand the opportunities presented as coming from God. Levinas explains:

¹⁸⁵ Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 103.

¹⁸⁶ Root, “Practical Theology as Social Ethical Action in Christian Ministry,” 55.

¹⁸⁷ Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 100.

¹⁸⁸ Root, “Practical Theology as Social Ethical Action in Christian Ministry,” 56.

¹⁸⁹ Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 104.

[t]ruth presupposes a being autonomous in separation; the quest for a truth is precisely a relation that does not rest on the privation of need. To seek and to obtain truth is to be in a relation not because one is defined by something other than oneself, but because in a certain sense one lacks nothing.¹⁹⁰

Truth, consequently, arises in relationships with ‘others.’ It does not occur because of a sense of want or need, but in a relationship of acceptance and openness. “Truth arises where a being separated from the other is not engulfed in him, but speaks to him.”¹⁹¹ Contrarily, relationships of totality seek integration of the ‘other’ into the ‘same’ of the subject; Levinas maintains the separation between the ‘other’ and the same, referring to this as infinity. Truth lies outside ‘the I,’ in separation. “Without separation there would not have been truth; there would have been only being. Truth...does not undo ‘distance,’ does not result in the union of the knower and the known, does not issue in totality.”¹⁹² This relationship offers something to the subject that he cannot have on his own; it opens him to something beyond him. In fact, Levinas declares that this opens him to the Infinite. This demands humility and the willingness to respond and even to be uncomfortable when presented with the unexpected:

The impossibility of total reflection must not be posited negatively- as the finitude of a knowing subject who, being mortal and already engaged in the world, does not reach truth- but rather as the surplus of the social relation, where the subjectivity remains... The social relation itself is not just another relation, one among so many others that can be produced in being, but is its ultimate event. The very utterance by which I state it and whose claim to truth postulating a total reflection, refutes the unsurpassable character of the face to face relation, nonetheless confirms it by the very fact of stating this truth- of telling it to the Other.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, 61.

¹⁹¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*. 62.

¹⁹² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*. 60.

¹⁹³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 221.

Truth is outside the subject and cannot exist in a tyrannical relationship but exists in openness to summoning from many sources, including the non-human. “Truth can be only if a subjectivity is called upon to tell it, in the sense that the Psalmist exclaims: ‘The dust will give thanks to you, will tell your truth.’”¹⁹⁴

Levinas understands that a radical ethical responsibility for the beckoning ‘other’ is necessitated; the resulting relationship is asymmetrical with “the I” having to be willing to deny the self, suffer for the other, and offer “the very bread from my mouth to the other.”¹⁹⁵

For Levinas, truth has something farther beyond it. Truth presupposes justice, which is a theme drawn from some of the most fundamental biblical texts and exhortations.¹⁹⁶ “The face of the other is the discrete but imperative word that affects me and appeals to me neither to use force nor to misuse, violate, totalize, hate or destroy the other.”¹⁹⁷ Justice, from which truth ultimately emanates, involves what “Levinas sometimes renders using the Biblical imagery of Stranger”¹⁹⁸ leading to transcendent meaning for those open to it. He sees this as an overlooked matter in western philosophy, where:

[d]eprived of any fixed point, the modern world feels frustrated. It invoked reason in order to have justice, and the latter surely needs a stable base, an interiority, or a person, on which to rest. A person is indispensable to justice prior to being indispensable to himself. Eternity is necessary to a person, and even in our own day, it has been sought by the most lucid thinkers.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 245.

¹⁹⁵ Root, 56-57.

¹⁹⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 99.

¹⁹⁷ Roger Burggraeve, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace, and Human Rights*, 18.

¹⁹⁸ George Draznenovich, “Towards a Levinasian Understanding of Christian Ethics: Emmanuel Levinas and the Phenomenology of the Other,” *Cross Currents*, Volume 54, Issue 4, Winter (2004-2005): 37.

¹⁹⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, “Difficult Freedom” in Sean Hand, (ed.). *The Levinas Reader*, 256.

What Levinas does it to elevate “the *truth* of justice over epistemological and ontological truth.”²⁰⁰ Truth arises through inexhaustible openness between individuals where one party accepts his position as a debtor with immense responsibility toward the other.²⁰¹

Holiness within Relationships

How does Levinas’s ethics as “first philosophy” apply to the practicality of holy Christian living in the twenty-first century? His central thought of the summons or call of the ‘other,’ from whom truth emanates, echoes the message of concern for others found in the Torah, Writings and the Prophets of the biblical Old Testament. From Genesis to Malachi, early believers found injunctions to care for the others who crossed the path of their lives; these included individuals from the fringes of society including widows, orphans, and strangers. One example is found in a comment about the ethical requirements offered in Micah 6:8:

Social and moral standards were laid down for the individual to practice in his relations with his companions in the faith...*Justice* is the key word so often used by the prophets to sum up this social obligation. It covers and transcends a host of negative precepts, such as prohibition of oppression, perjury, and bribery. It calls for a sense of responsibility toward weaker members of society lest they go to the wall. It insists on the rights of others; it demands an instinct for *social* preservation.²⁰²

Levinas echoes this:

²⁰⁰ Purcell, “For the Sake of Truth...The Demand of Discontinuity in Foucault, Blanchot and Levinas,” 255.

²⁰¹ “Truth is the gathering of being in the exposure of things to each other, always an inexhaustible exposure and debt beyond any given touch, any given limits. I understand the face to face of which Levinas speaks as the relation to the other, the saying of the good, as touch, touching the other in its skin, reaching toward its depths, a touch beyond the revelation of any touch, a touch beyond the limits known as exposure. Plenishment is the impossible union of general and restricted economy, impossible because that union knows no measure. Plenishment is where immeasure touches measure. This limitless touch is the exposure known as truth, gathering and interruption.” Stephen D. Ross, *The Gift of Truth: Gathering the Good*, 202.

²⁰² Leslie L. Allen, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 373.

Man is called before a form of judgement and justice which recognizes this responsibility, while the rigours of the Law are softened without being suspended by a sense of mercy. Man can do what he must do; he can master the hostile forces of history by helping to bring about a messianic reign, a reign of justice foretold by the prophets.²⁰³

Further, he declares that one most closely follows God by drawing near to those individuals near him and showing concern for the most needy; he sees this as an unfolding, on earth, of “the spirit’s adventure.”²⁰⁴ In no way is one diminished through the ethical response of holiness toward others with its demand of radical responsibility. Levinas often quoted Alyosha Karamazov in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* who more than adequately explains his understanding of the imperative of response to the others of one’s life. He said that we are all responsible for everyone else- but I am more responsible than all the others. It is through this radical responsibility that one discovers one’s true humanity as one is shaken away from self-centredness.²⁰⁵

These ideas permeate Jesus’s experience and teaching. Prior to his night of agony Jesus tells his disciples that he was the truth (John 14:6). It is not unreasonable to conclude that Jesus summons to Himself and that in response to Him, Christian disciples experience truth and the out-flowing holiness of God. With justice behind truth, as Levinas declares, when in relationships with others, who summon, this involves Christian disciples with the person of Jesus whose concern for justice is unequivocal. He declares that the greatest commandments concern relationships with God and neighbours (Matthew 22:37-39). In one of his teaching highlights, “The Parable of the Good Samaritan,” where he answered someone’s query seeking identification of his neighbour, Jesus concludes with the shocking revelation that even the despised Samaritan is a

²⁰³ Levinas, “Difficult Freedom” in *The Levinas Reader*, 252.

²⁰⁴ Levinas, “Difficult Freedom”, 253.

²⁰⁵ Root, 57.

neighbour (Luke 10). In this vein, Levinas writes, “[t]he Infinite ordains the ‘neighbor’ for me without exposing itself to me.”²⁰⁶ Through justice, or responding to the ones summoning a subject, the subject- an I- enters relationships where truth abounds.

God initially ‘comes to the idea’ or ‘falls into meaning’ in the ethical relation where I am exposed to the infinite claims made on me by the other. The trace of God is put into me as I say ‘Here I am’ in response to the command constituted by the transcendence and destitution of the other, before being for myself.²⁰⁷

Response “is thus rooted in the incarnated passivity and susceptibility of the subject in the face-to-face relation that itself bears the trace of God.”²⁰⁸

Truth rooted in justice is a common theme found in both biblical testaments. This connection offers a way forward in holiness living, where Christian disciples look toward the surrounding others with whom relationships, however brief or extended, are entered. Truth flows from the Infinite, through these others, thus enriching lives responding to the summoning. Purcell writes that

truth will always be primarily an attitude, a search and a struggle, rather than something possessed and woven together into a finished theme... Truth is made possible by the relation with the Other our master, and justice consists in recognizing that he is our master. ‘The Other is the very locus of metaphysical truth, and is indispensable for my relation with God.’²⁰⁹

In the ‘other,’ Christian disciples encounter the supreme ‘Other’ who gives truth through those. “Our desire for meaning, the ‘land foreign to every nature, which has not been our fatherland’ is met by the Other whose trace is found in response to the diverse beings we encounter.”²¹⁰ Into those relationships with the ‘other,’ the holiness of God is both carried

²⁰⁶ Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 106.

²⁰⁷ Baird, “Revisioning Christian Theology in Light of Emmanuel Levinas’s Ethics of Responsibility,” 347

²⁰⁸ Baird, “Revisioning Christian Theology in Light of Emmanuel Levinas’s Ethics of Responsibility,” 349.

²⁰⁹ Purcell, “For the Sake of Truth,” 250.

²¹⁰ Drazenovich, “Toward a Levinasian Understanding,” 43.

and experienced by the Christian disciple. In responding to the ‘other,’ the Infinite will reach with truth, as others are received with respect for them and in humility before them. “A Levinasian understanding of Christian ethics, being open to the face of the other who solicits us in the face-to-face encounter is a methodological process, a psychosocial disposition, and finally a theological direction.”²¹¹ The Christian disciple will know he is where he is supposed to be when he encounters the ‘other’ and takes an open and receptive position with the ‘other.’ When the ‘other’ approaches, the Christian disciple, understanding God’s fully integrated working in a single sphere and that he is a carrier of God’s holiness, as well as being one who encounters God’s holiness in the ‘other,’ must remain free to give himself to the ‘other’ and to experience the potential encounter with the Infinite that each occasion offers. “Levinas pleads for us to look for the transcendent amongst us, within the inter-personal, for only here will ethics be possible.”²¹² Levinas’s insights call Christian disciples to openly receive the presenting other so they can respond ethically. Potential conflicts of ethical responsibility will arise; suggestions for resolving these ethically will be offered in the next chapter.

Emmanuel Levinas exposes truth as rooted in relationships with those who summon us, and through whom the truth of the Infinite can pass to us. He declares the connection between justice, understood biblically as involving concern for the ‘other’ in need, and the response to others, which is the hallmark of Christ’s direction.²¹³ This ethic

²¹¹ Drazenovich, “Toward a Levinasian Understanding,” 41.

²¹² Root, 61.

²¹³ Peter Vogt in his thesis *Church as Community of Love: A Historical and Theological Inquiry*, submitted at Boston University (2001), explains how Dietrich Bonhoeffer elaborated ideas which I see as complementing Levinas on this matter. On pages 227 & 228 he writes, with quotes from Bonhoeffer’s *Sanctorum Communio*, “Christian love ‘is based on obedience to the word of Christ who, in meeting our claims, demands that we should give up all our claims whatsoever on God or on our neighbor.’...God’s will for the neighbor is, of course, that he or she should be loved...In the encounter with the ‘Thou’ of the neighbor, the ‘I’ experiences God’s claim on his or her will. And yet, as Bonhoeffer writes, ‘I do not love

connects what is often seen as disconnected between the two biblical testaments, and opens another way of accurately understanding Jesus as ‘the truth.’ In all relationships with the summoning ‘other,’ Christian disciples can meet Jesus, the Truth. Response in justice brings greater respect to the one summoning and greater unity to the surrounding world. Holiness is both offered and encountered; no encounter is separate from God and His holiness. Levinas unfolds an approach to holiness ethics that is consonant with biblical teaching; as a philosopher, he arrives at a Christian understanding of responsibility and the potential impact of responding responsibly to other through a sequence of philosophical steps that might draw some more than by biblical teaching. “Glory is the response to the summons without any possible evasion, a surprise to the respondent himself, but by which, driven out, he develops sincerity or Saying.”²¹⁴ In response, understanding that the Infinite is beyond the encountered ‘other,’ the Christian disciple will have confidence that he is precisely where he ought to be as he lives a life of intentional following of Jesus.

God in the ‘neighbor’, but I love the concrete You; I love the You by placing myself, my entire will, in the service of the You.’...In other words, the point of neighborly love is not the fulfillment of God’s will, but the complete and self-less orientation toward the neighbor. Only when the other does not serve as an instrument for fulfilling God’s will, but is ‘infinitely important’ in his or her own right, will God’s will indeed be fulfilled.”

²¹⁴ Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*. 103.

Chapter Five

“Hearing” Jesus: Foundations of Holiness Ethics

Three Authors and a Model of Holiness

Ideas of three outstanding thinkers, whose writings touch significantly on the subject of living and advancing holiness ethics, lead to conclusions that enable understanding the living of holiness practically and attractively before those surveying the modern Christian Church. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Webster, and Emmanuel Levinas contribute insights that intersect and build on one another to form a model that is encouraging, yet challenging for those seeking to be active Christian disciples. This model is helpful in discussing practical holiness ethics within the context of the Canadian Evangelical Church and this model can be generalized to all church communities, understanding that “an ethic is devised to speak to multiple contexts; its power derives from its redundancy; and it may therefore be fruitfully interpreted from the vantage point of various contexts.”²¹⁵

Bonhoeffer writes of the nature of God whose holiness Christian disciples seek to inculcate and expedite into the surrounding world. He highlights God’s humility and willingness to so fully reach to the world that in order to gain the world He allows Himself to be pushed out of the world. God is not separate from His creation despite all the ugliness that has been brought into it since Eden. Rather, through coming in Jesus to renew the opportunity for relationships with His human creatures, He practically demonstrated His holiness ethics. Jesus’ example of involvement with the world offers insights into expected Christian behaviour toward the world. Bonhoeffer offers the first

²¹⁵ Kenneth Earl Morris, *Bonhoeffer’s Ethic of Discipleship: A Study in Social Psychology, Political Thought, and Religion*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986, 19.

key concept for the model for holiness ethics through explaining the reality of the single sphere of God's activity. This is an important insight for modern Christians who can be pulled, often through the Christian churches themselves, to separate themselves from those around them who are considered to be 'less clean or pure.' Bonhoeffer directs us away from two-sphere thinking and points us to recognize that all that is physical and non-physical together forms the single and unified sphere of God's activity. This understanding evokes changes in thought, speech, and activity that will be discussed shortly.

John Webster underscores God's all-encompassing holiness and offers insights about the nature of Christians and their task while living in God's single sphere. In the one sphere the defined boundaries between holy and unholy that many consider existent simply do not exist. In the single sphere, wherever God is present there is holiness. This leads to understanding who Christian disciples are as bearers of God's holiness. As God is holy and the church is holy, so are individual Christians holy as they have responded to God's activity in them. Christians will reject classifications of holiness or thought and discussion about levels of holiness; they will consider the holiness of the single sphere where God is operating as He works with His children.²¹⁶ It is imperative for Christians to reject the separation discussion about holiness that has been common throughout the centuries and which has risen to greater prominence in some periods of time, and to reject all ideas where one raises oneself above others in perceived holiness. Wherever God is, holiness is active, and no human is in a position to assert that it is not in this location or

²¹⁶ "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of the cross." Colossians 1.19, 20. It is apparent that all has been reconciled through Christ even though much does not live, yet, as reflecting this state of reconciliation. Christian disciples have to live understanding something of this overarching work in which God continues His intentional involvement.

that activity. Making such negative declarations involves limiting God; it is to, using a Levinasian term, “totalize” God according to the ideas of one’s own mind. Even in the darkest regions of the world, which exist at any moment, no one can affirm that God and His holiness are not involved bringing light into the horror that might be most easily identifiable.²¹⁷ God’s all-encompassing holiness has important implications for Christians.

Levinas enables the discussion to advance one further level. Bonhoeffer discusses the nature of the God of the single sphere and Webster discusses the nature of the Christians living in that single sphere; Levinas unfolds how the Christian is able to carry God’s holiness into the single sphere. It is important to understand that God is fully involved and Christians are part of that involvement as bearers of God’s holiness. However, left at that point, several compelling questions remain for the Christian, including: “How do I act and reach out to others as a channel and representative of God’s holiness?” “Where do I look to know what ought to be done in reaching out as a channel and representative of God’s holiness?” “To whom am I to reach out as a channel and representative of God’s holiness?” “When do I reach out as a channel and representative of God’s holiness?” The answers lie in intentional sensitivity to others; this is where the model for holiness ethics leads. Christian disciples receive their understanding of what they need to do through responding to others, as Levinas elaborates. Consequently, holiness practically operates where God-sensitive individuals are intentionally responding

²¹⁷ The Psalmist cried: “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And your right hand shall hold me. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall fall on me,’ Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.” Psalm 139.7-12, NKJV.

to others and this is often most true when the situation is most uncomfortable or surprising to the one being beckoned by “the other.” Teachers of leadership in church circles have often noted that service is rarely convenient; this is certainly true when one is open to responding to others. Holiness practically operates where individuals are intentionally responding to others and not doing this in a pre-defined religious way, with religious language, or with any expectation of a particular religious outcome. This, no doubt, creates a potential area for some cognitive-dissonance for Christians. In an age that is very “outcome sensitive,” to give up expectations of particular expected results simply to respond when and as called and to give up control of the presenting situation is a challenging pastoral perspective.

Three authors from widely divergent theological traditions, periods, and genres of thought contribute to this model that is practical for Christians who wonder how to live according to God’s invitation for us to be holy just like He is already holy. Each author contributes toward the model that is helpful and positive, and that offers unlimited possibilities for expanding the reach of the holiness of God’s Kingdom.

Christian ministry involves ethical actions for the other who is both near and far.²¹⁸ Theology became practical when God sent the fully human and fully divine Jesus to earth. Jesus asserted the reality of His fully representing the Father and that whoever sees Him has seen the Father, in this giving God a human face. With His ascension and imparting His Spirit to the Church, Christians were pushed into the world to minister as Christ’s continuing work. They are to represent Christ to others. It is impossible for the Christian to participate in Christ without participating in the life of the human others around him. Consequently, Christians are called to understand the demand of the ‘other’

²¹⁸ Root, 53.

as the demand of Christ and must willingly offer themselves to the ‘other’ without reservation. Jesus gave all for humanity and radically calls Christians to do no less. In this responsiveness, theology and holiness ethics become fully real and practical in the encounter with the ‘other,’ as explained through the theological model for holiness ethics and the opportunity for Christians and others to “hear Jesus” is multiplied.

The Opportunities

What are the implications of this model? What actions does the model for holiness ethics necessitate? What might be already happening, but which can become more widely practiced?

Of first importance is for Christian disciples to challenge their thinking regarding single-sphere thinking. It is vital to reject all thinking of two, or more, spheres that are not necessarily interconnected or inter-related, which thinking corrupts understanding of the way God functions. Additionally, compartmentalization of life will be challenged as Christians consciously “re-label” the world so that they see all as part of God’s single-sphere world. Scripturally, this single sphere thinking is evident in the reality of Christ’s work of reconciling all things to God through His sacrifice.²¹⁹ This reality demands rethinking conclusions about God as having a “hand’s off” policy with the world, as scripture declares God’s love for the world as it is, without exception or exemption from the all-inclusive term “world.” Consequently, Christian disciples will look at the surrounding world through renewed eyes, with willingness to be changed because of this reality. Such perception will lead to changes in terminology as well as in awareness. It

²¹⁹ “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.” (Colossians 1.19,20, NKJV).

will lead to dropping the separation, isolation and exclusivism mentality that both feeds, and is fed by, judgmentalism in which individuals affirm or condemn one another based on personal subjective standards. Perceptions of “holiness” that have, historically, caused individuals and churches to separate themselves from the world, dark as it sometimes is, will be rejected in favour of understanding that God is at work somewhere in the midst of that darkness; it may be impossible to discern where and how but that inability cannot justify concluding that God is absent.

Triumphalistic verbiage pertaining to superiority because of holiness will be rejected. Any measure of “us” versus “them” must be discarded in favour of appreciating the reality of humanity’s journeying together in the single sphere of God’s activity. Without question Christians are in a position of intentional, chosen, and knowledgeable relationship with God; this is, unquestionably, special. However, this knowledge precludes separation and visions of superiority; rather, it demands identification with the world, responsibility toward the world and humility in action toward the world, modeling all after the example of God the Father,²²⁰ God the Son,²²¹ and God the Holy Spirit.²²² God’s love for the world is clear in His choosing to move toward the world, rather than away from it. Christian actions are to align with His; although in intensity and magnitude they cannot match God’s, Christian disciples are to ensure that they do in intention and direction. This requires much of Christians who might prefer the apparent comfort of

²²⁰ “For God so loved the world that *He gave* His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3.16, NKJV, emphasis mine.)

²²¹ “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2.5-8, NKJV).

²²² “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.” (John 16.13, 14, NKJV)

isolation, often for perceived theologically defensible reasons; however, such separation does not draw people toward the example of God's holiness today and toward "hearing Jesus." It is critical that Christians follow God's model of movement toward the world so they do not repel others who might, otherwise, be drawn to the hearing of Jesus. Such are implications of Bonhoeffer's insights about the single-sphere of God's activity.

As seekers of holiness, Christians are often insecure about their position before God and as bearers of the image of Christ. It is not uncommon for Christians to speak with uncertainty about such topics as their conversion, spiritual giftedness, abilities within the church, and their general usefulness to God. Additionally, simply knowing that, as Christians, they do carry God's holiness where they go might be a subject offering similar uncertainty as Christians question how well they might do this. One source for this insecurity lies in pervasive ideas regarding holiness, especially those about the marked separation between God and humanity, including Christian disciples. Without question God is different being of a different "substance" and inhabiting a different realm than Christians do. However, He is the one who initiated the reconciling movement toward humanity, effectively embracing humanity through the Trinitarian activity underscored throughout Webster's *Holiness*. Consequently, Christians, who understand God's working within a single-sphere of activity and their being bearers of God's holiness, will accept this reality and allow this actuality to become part of their personal framework for living. Christians must accept that they are holy bearers and channels of God's holiness and that they not only encounter God's holiness when they move out into the world where God is at work, but that, toward the world, these same disciples carry God's holiness into the world where He is already at work. This leads to holiness joining

holiness in a mysterious and wonderful manner. In some situations these disciples may be the only obvious Christian example of holiness that someone might encounter. The greatest obstacle to accepting and understanding this two-sided reality of the presence of the holiness of God lies within the innermost being of many Christians. Without question, Christian disciples will be deeply aware of their personal inadequacies, struggles, and weaknesses and can interpret this as a lack of God's holiness in them; such is not a valid conclusion. Christians need to address this disparity and confront thought patterns not rooted firmly in the reality of God's all-encompassing involvement with His holiness. Christians can advance with confidence and renew this correct understanding of reality where it may have withered. Remembering that God was willing to be pushed out of the world through the cross and that it is in weakness that God is often most clearly seen, Christians need to refuse permitting themselves to be turned from reality by their own weakness. It may be that in that weakness and because of that weakness, yet through taking the action toward the world that they comprehend ought to be taken, others will "hear Jesus."²²³ Christians may, in short, not be the best judges of what can be most effective, especially when it comes to matters of their personal spiritual strength and weakness.

The example of Christ is one of accepting a servant's role toward the world that He had created and then entered through the miracle, yet weakness, of incarnation. This shows Christians how to approach the world. It is necessary to not approach the events of

²²³ St. Paul faced such a dilemma, where he felt that God's work was hindered because of an unidentified affliction that he suffered for a time. However, God told him that his perspective on strength and weakness was insufficient. "And let I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Corinthians 12.7-9, NKJV).

one's daily life with pre-determinations about what will be or must be the outcome. What is required, as Bonhoeffer, Webster, and Levinas together affirm, is what can be called "active passiveness." Christian disciples are to be intentionally willing to accept surprise encounters of life and to respond to the others who encounter them, calling to them and showing them where to be. They are to actively pursue such a "passive" approach to life, being willing to be led and to encounter the Infinite in this way. Sometimes, as the result of this, life will become uncomfortable because all the pride of human life will be forced to capitulate.

There will be times when, as an "actively passive" person, Christian disciples will have to talk themselves through situations to respond as they ought. At least occasionally, all Christian disciples have an 'other' confront them on matters that challenge even long-held ideas or beliefs. When confronted with errors of their thoughts, beliefs, or practices, for instance, it becomes easy to resist the other even though that other might be challenging the Christian toward better understanding. This better understanding might have the effect of enabling better evidencing of the Infinite toward the other. Pride encourages remaining as one already is. Pride would rather that one fought to bring the demands of the 'other' to fit what one already understands or believes, continuing the totalizing that is a natural response of human life. Being actively-passive will force the Christian disciple to, at least, be open to altering positions as the result of yielding to Jesus' servant-hood model of living. This is one example of a difficulty to be faced in applying the theological model for holiness ethics, but is a difficulty worth confronting.

Another situation demands attention and requires Christian church action in a particular direction. Christians are to understand that:

[w]henever I meet my neighbor in his distinction, affirming and respecting the boundary that separates the other from me and affirming his own enjoying self, I meet Christ. When I refuse to totalize the other but stand vulnerable in the wonder of the other's infinity, I meet Christ.²²⁴

However, what does the Christian do when confronted by two 'others' presenting simultaneous and conflicting ethical opportunities? For instance, what if one is confronted by a drug-addicted relative needing a place to stay after eviction from an apartment? The Christian disciple must not turn from this need of an-other, even though it might be inconvenient and even potentially dangerous. However, if the Christian has his own child to care for, who needs a safe and tranquil environment in which to live, what is the Christian disciple to do? How does one fulfill conflicting responsibilities within the model for holiness ethics? How can the Christian be a bearer and channel for God's holiness to both encountered others? The answer lies within the extension of what Webster returns to time-and-again- the relationship of Trinitarian community. The extension of this community, from heaven to the earth, is the Christian Church community. Where the Christian disciple is surrounded by a viable and healthy community, meeting conflicting ethical needs can occur very readily. The Christian disciple will be able to find a place for the needy relative in the home of someone of the community, freeing the Christian to care directly for the needs of the child at home. The community will be able to share in the ethical responsibility, doing Christian ministry together, and meeting the initially apparently conflicting ethical opportunities in a manner that extends God's holiness to others.²²⁵

²²⁴ Root, 69.

²²⁵ See Root, 74.

The implications of the model formed through the fusion of insights offered by these three authors are wide-reaching, and the examples of applications offered only begin to outline potential and practical applications of the theological model for holiness ethics. However, it is appropriate to understand that many may be, already, closer to implementing this model than they might imagine.

This study began through examining the current state of the Canadian Church, understanding that, despite uncertainty about where and how to be within the general framework of doing the work of the church, there is reason for optimism because of professed faith allegiances of the majority. However, it may be necessary to rekindle personal and congregational assurance about the quest to live holy lives now. Christians need to constantly reaffirm their understanding of the presence of God in their personal and church lives and that where God is there is, already, holiness. Holiness is not separate; neither is it the special domain of the very few while the many are left grasping for it. God, in His generosity, offers it to those He puts within His spiritual family. Christians who seek to live their lives in active and intentional discipleship can appreciate that they are not as removed from being holy, as beckoned by the ancient biblical call, as they might believe to be true.

Many Canadian churches are already deliberately attempting to care for the social and spiritual needs of themselves and others. In particular, many individual churches put significant focus on the very real physical needs of others and attempt to practically respond to the others who are beckoning. Sadly, this land of plenty is not a land of plenty for all but multiple opportunities for ethical living of holiness are provided because of this disparity. This focus on what is referred to as the “social gospel” puts Christians in

the correct realm for activity encouraged in the theological model for holiness ethics. Christians can understand that they are to live, drawn to situations that might be uniquely for them, and in which they will be manifesting God's holiness. Others may not recognize what they see as "God's holiness," immediately, or ever, but their correctly parsing Christian action is neither the issue nor a requirement for holiness to have been present in ethical actions. Recognition is not the goal. Rather, to be faithful and to allow God to work with individuals according to His design and plan is the goal.

Evidently, many are already fulfilling the demands of this model that combines the single-sphere thinking of Bonhoeffer, the reality of God's omnipresent holiness of Webster, and the willingness to respond relationally to the calling of the other of Levinas, through which one encounters not only human need and desire but the call of the Infinite. A Christian understanding of right action is one that entails refining long term commitments. If Christian disciples are not presently quick to respond to the call of the other, they can adjust in this matter and can prod themselves to intentionally and more quickly respond, accepting the personal discomfort and even the risk that might be involved. They can determine to be "actively passive" in order to encounter life's others as they are brought to them. This does not preclude intentional action and initiation in the attempt to do the modern work of the Kingdom. It simply points to the way forward in many of the situations faced in life.

Beyond the responsibility of the individual Christian disciple, the role of the pastoral leader as a facilitator of the theological model for holiness ethics must be considered. This congregational leader is intimately involved in the process of the unleashing of confidence from the church in its interactions with society in the matter of

God's holiness. Pastoral leaders are inextricably involved in the process of the formation of the Christian community with common understanding and common meaning of the issues of holiness ethics, as Lonergan explains.²²⁶ Historically, the pastoral leaders as preachers, pastors, or elders, have a significant impact and influence, through communication, in shaping the perspectives of the church that they serve; they need to be concerned with properly using the power of the pastoral office in order to build the Christian society that will, then, build general society.²²⁷ Those with teaching responsibility in the church can lead in internalizing the concepts of this theological model and strenuously fulfill their responsibility in encouraging the confidence of the church according to the scriptural instruction of equipping offered by St. Paul.²²⁸ Those in the churches respond to the teaching and example of their leaders. Where pastoral leaders declare the reality of the world in which the Christians they serve are living, including the integration of the heavenly and the earthly within a single sphere, rather than advancing language of two spheres, people will consider, will internalize the concept and will begin to act from this reality of the world. Where pastoral leaders declare the reality of the treasure carried in the lives of each Christian, to whom they speak, as

²²⁶ "A fourth function of meaning is communicative. What one man means is communicated to another intersubjectively, artistically, symbolically, linguistically, incarnately. So individual meaning becomes common meaning... A community is not just a number of men within a geographical frontier. It is an achievement of common meaning, and there are kinds and degrees of achievement." Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971, 78, 79.

²²⁷ "The Christian message is to be communicated to all nations. Such communication presupposes that preachers and teachers enlarge their horizons to include an accurate and intimate understanding of the culture and the language of the people they address. They must grasp the virtual resources of that culture and that language, and they must use those virtual resources creatively so that the Christian message becomes, not disruptive of the culture, not an alien patch superimposed upon it, but a line of development within the culture... The church is an out-going process. It exists not just for itself but for mankind... Alienation and ideology are destructive of community; community is the proper basis of society; hence to seek the elimination of alienation and ideology is to promote the good of society." Lonergan, 362, 363, 365.

²²⁸ "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4.11,12 NKJV).

individual and communal carriers of God's holiness into the world, people will consider, will internalize the concept, and will begin to act from this reality of the selves. Where pastoral leaders declare the reality of the calling of the 'other' so that the Christians in their congregations can understand where God is calling them into service, people will consider, will internalize the concept, and will begin to respond to this understanding of those other people who cross the paths of their lives. From such teaching, Christian believers, with renewed confidence, will advance within reality as God's people. They will advance toward involvement with and service toward people that God will use to speak to God's people. Christians will, with renewed confidence, carry God's holiness and will encounter God's holiness within the entire sphere of God's activity. They will be sensitive to what they carry as well as to what is offered to them through their interactions with others. In such a two-way relationship, Christians will confidently function in the world. They may not understand what is happening initially but they will be able to freely offer and the impact of God's holiness will increase.

Finally, the impact of the model on evangelical churches can be considered. When the theological model for holiness ethics is accepted and internalized by denominations and churches within evangelical Christianity it will lead to openness toward all other religious bodies that will be encountered as the beckoning 'other.'²²⁹ Rather than permitting isolation and judgmentalism toward them, evangelical churches will encounter other Christian and non-Christian bodies with openness and willingness to understand what might be offered as a result of the encounter of the 'other' that is existent in them.

²²⁹ Alan J. Torrance, in the 'Foreword' to Michael Jinkins's book, has expressed this idea particularly well: "when our underlying theology is true to God's inclusive embrace of humanity in Christ, our whole understanding of ourselves and, indeed, the other- not least the 'radical other,' the enemy- is transformed." Michael Jinkins, *Invitation to Theology*, Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2001, 12.

Openness to God's potential messages from the interactions will be practiced and enrichment of the bodies will occur as holiness is both offered and received through the relationships that occur. This might seem a frightening possibility to some. However, accepting and practicing this model will advance holiness understood as an opportunity for unity rather than division as advanced by "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," providing many opportunities to advance a "culture of life."²³⁰

Bonhoeffer, Webster, and Levinas affirm the transcendent as experienced through giving oneself totally to the encountered other. Through this, the human and divine are fused so that to deal with one is to deal with the other, as well.

The Christian evangelical aim is for people to 'hear Jesus.' Since He is present today through the people of His Church, it is imperative that they carry the best of Him, while responding to the world around as He did. He lived as holy while looking for where He was to be involved and serve in the world, and always responded to the beckoning 'others,' which led to significant opportunities for serving, teaching and healing. Through following this pattern of the Master, explained in the theological model for holiness ethics, His followers today will enter this same work and will know similar results as they move toward the 'other' who calls, serving and suffering, extending and experiencing the reach of God's holiness.

²³⁰ *The Call to Holiness*, 26.

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