

## Just Holy

by Captain Danielle Strickland

*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Psalm 97:2  
But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! Amos 5:24*

There's been a bold surge in the social justice space in the last decade. New emerging campaigns have been spreading the truth about the desperate need of many global issues that are worthy of paying attention too and lending a helping hand.

Far from a new idea, the global church has a great Christian tradition, a long ancient track record of social reform. Exposing the evils of the slave trade, and helping to end it, campaigning for equality and women's rights, health and welfare reform, the care of prisoners and the reforming of prison systems around the world, education and employment options, the support of unions and workers rights. On and on goes the list of Christians who with a strong understanding of biblical theology embraced lives of social justice. Far from being separate from purity and holiness movements, many of them were fueled by the fire of holiness preachers and revivals. Jim Wallace suggests that those same hungers that fueled the revival fires of past great awakenings are alive and well today, "Two of the great hungers in our world today are the hunger for spirituality and the hunger for social justice. The connection between the two is the one the world is waiting for, especially the new generation. And the first hunger will empower the second."<sup>1</sup>

Alongside our glorious past though, we also have shameful traditions. Exploitation of the poor, shaming the sinner, colonial support, power bases that relied on Christian ethics of submission to government authorities to continue their oppressive regimes, support of slavery and the inequality of women and minorities still happening within the Christian church at large. The strength and weaknesses of our Christian tradition has its place for a discussion around holiness. Proponents of holiness would suggest it's the answer to any problem and supporters of justice would suggest it has come woefully short in changing the world. Is holiness simply the establishing of a 'christian culture' a 'holy club' that not only segregates itself from the world but maintains the exploitation of the poor?

The outcome and history of spiritual awakenings and revivals throughout history paint a different picture. Far from polarized, righteousness and justice are like twins, inseparable and from the same source. Psalm 97 suggests that both (together) are the foundation of God's presence in the world. [Isaiah 9:7](#) speaks prophetically of Jesus, "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with **justice** and **righteousness** from that time on and forever."

[Isaiah 16:5](#) describes Christ's reign, "In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it— one from the house of David— one who in judging seeks **justice** and speeds the cause of **righteousness**."

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<sup>1</sup> (Jim Wallace in Seven Ways To change the World)

In Matthew 12:18 God the Father declares His delight in Jesus and the fulfillment of His purpose on earth, "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim **justice** to the nations."

Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology explains the intimate connection between righteousness and justice by breaking down the root of righteousness in the Bible, "The appropriate background to bear in mind for understanding the teaching of both John the Baptist and Jesus the Christ on righteousness/justice are two of the dominant ideas of the Old Testament. When we translate the Greek words based on the stem *dikai-* into English we make use of two sets of words based on the stems, just and right. So we have **just**, justice, justify and **right**, righteous, righteousness, rightwise (old English)."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus suggests that his coming and the announcement of his kingdom would be like yeast, something that would work its way inside and then force it's way out. This has been demonstrated in personal salvation, holiness and in the consequential social impacts.

John Wesley is the founder of Methodism and the leader of a great awakening. He is the father of holiness and many holiness traditions to this day consider John Wesley the authority on holiness doctrine.

The last letter that John Wesley wrote was to William Wilberforce, a man who had been converted under Wesley's ministry and who was a member of Parliament. The letter concerns his [opposition to slavery](#) and encouragement for Wilberforce to take action for change. (*Parliament finally outlawed England's participation in the slave trade in 1807. The year 2007 marked the 200th anniversary of the abolition of British-US slave trade.*<sup>1</sup>)

Balam, February 24, 1791

Dear Sir:

Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as *Athanasius contra mundum*,<sup>2</sup> I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils.

But if God before you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.

Reading this morning a tract wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by that circumstance that a man who has a black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no redress; it being a "law" in our colonies that the *oath* of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villainy is this?

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<sup>2</sup><http://biblestudy.crosswalk.com/mybst/default.aspx?type=library&contentid=87937&category=REF>

That he who has guided you from youth up may continue to strengthen you in this and all things, is the prayer of, dear sir,

*Your affectionate servant,*

*John Wesley*<sup>3</sup>

### **The Best Tradition**

In the best traditions of holiness revivals and movements, 'holiness of heart' means a changed *inward* reality resulting in changed *outward* behaviour. The implication is that the world will be changed as a direct result of our experience of holiness. The process of holiness working its way from inside-out turns greed to generosity, selfishness to community and conceit to charity and then as a direct result, turns society upside down. "There have been other periods in history when faith tangibly changed things. Often called 'Great Awakenings', they are times when the 'revival' of faith alters societies. In fact, the historians say that spiritual activity isn't called revival until it changes something, not just in people's inner lives but in society."<sup>4</sup>

Even the earliest church holiness teacher, the Apostle Paul understood that effective church planting and kingdom building meant caring for the poor (Gal. 2:10), abolishing poverty (re-distribution) and celebrating equality (Philemon, Galatians, Ephesians). All of this contributes to a rich history of social justice within the Christian witness over the centuries.

### **QUESTIONS:**

Is social justice an outworking or an evidence of holiness?

Is personal holiness a barrier to engagement with the world?

Is social justice holiness expressed in the word?

A famous Jazz singer says that justice is love in public... so if holiness is perfect love than isn't it evidenced by justice?

### **Why Are We Divided?**

Why then is the church, indeed even The Salvation Army divided about holiness? On one hand there are those who suggest that holiness must be personal, individual – that it is, above all other things, a blessing of the heart that leads to purity within. It is an experience of divine cleansing and freedom from sin. Others suggest, almost on the contrary that holiness is only made complete within the fight for social justice. Reforming society is about holiness expressed through solidarity with the poor, outspoken prophetic, anti-religious behaviour that hopes to ignite and offend in anticipation of God's kingdom come. These campaigners use John the Baptist and

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3 1. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life, p. 56. •2. "Athanasius arrayed against the world."

The graphic of John Wesley writing his letter to William Wilberforce was scanned from A. B. Hyde, The Story of Methodism Throughout the World (Springfield, MA: Willey & Co., 1889), p. 237. and is in the public domain.

Source: <http://new.gbmg-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/wilberforce/>

4 (pg. 1 Seven Ways To change The World by Jim Wallace)

Jesus as examples of non-conformists (even to religious standards) to say that personal-based holiness movements are pharisaical. And they may be right.

Critics of personal holiness without social impact are quick to point out the preachers and advocates of personal holiness movements who live in expensive homes and run state of the art programs but neglect the poor.

Holiness movements in the Western world during the last half of the century have largely catered to a prosperity theme and a theology that like the Pharisees in Jesus' day equate personal moral behaviour with acceptance and prosperity by God. Not only that, but they've also compiled a list of moral sins that are damnable and exclusionary – homosexuality and abortion are at the top of the list while systemic systems of injustice like apartheid, inequality and extreme poverty go unaddressed.

Those outside of the prosperity bubble of God's favour have been accused of not living up to a moral code of holiness. Holiness, as one advocate puts it – is the solution to every problem. But is it? Is holiness the solution to a child born to parents so poor that they cannot sustain themselves with enough nutrition to make it through their early years? Is holiness the solution to the farmer who is exploited on a regular basis, kept from providing a decent wage for his children to go to school? Is holiness the solution for women trapped in illegal brothels, drugged and exploited, and sexually abused?

Social justice advocates say these are not holiness issues – they are justice issues. Those women don't need more personal piety – that child doesn't need to pray more often or with more faith – that worker doesn't need anymore hymns singing him into submission – they need rights, advocacy, reform, rescue and avenues of fighting a systemic evil and bringing God's justice to bear.

On the other hand, those holiness representatives are quick to point out the shortcomings of social reform without inward change. Not only of the reform campaign ideals, but of the reformers themselves. How can love be championed by a man who commits adultery they say about Martin Luther King Jr.? How can God's kingdom be advancing through Bono's proclamation of the gospel to the poor when he uses swear words on T.V.? Billions of dollars and a generation of people committed to helping the world's poor dismissed by the external impurity of language and moral purity codes broken.

Harsh assessments of one another and 'camps' of holiness that celebrate specific facets of holiness but may miss the bigger picture are not helpful to our mission of winning the world. Holiness, much like Salvation is much bigger than we can perhaps ever know, but if the foundation of God's throne is righteousness and justice like the Bible suggests then perhaps we ought to discover the way to make ready for Christ's sovereign presence in the world. Perhaps righteousness and justice are not sequential or competing ideas but expressions of the same love. I remember someone once suggesting that righteousness is the first commandment and justice is the second. The two hinges of God's presence in the world. Perhaps the argument is mute if we understand more completely what holiness means.

Dr. Purkiser from The Wesley Center for Applied Theology explores the issue of holiness and social impact: "What we need to recover is the insight that "personal

gospel” and “social gospel” are both perversions of the New Testament. There is only one Gospel. To split it is to destroy it. We cannot choose between doctrine and ethics, between creed and life, between inner experience and outer conduct, between individual salvation and social action. Both are in the New Testament and are not divided. What God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”<sup>5</sup>

E. Stanley Jones said it well: The clash between the individual gospel and the social gospel leaves me cold. An individual gospel without a social gospel is a soul without a body, and a social gospel without an individual gospel is a body without a soul. One is a ghost and the other a corpse. Put the two together, and you have a living person. I want and need one gospel — a gospel that lays its hand on the individual and says, ‘Repent, be converted,’ that lays its hand on the corporate will and says, ‘Repent, be converted’—one gospel, two applications.<sup>6</sup>

Tom Sine in *The New Conspirators* describes a generation of believers who are starting to grasp the essence of holiness as the embrace of both righteousness and justice. He speaks passionately about world poverty, “The only way poverty will become history is for those of us whom God has entrusted with God’s generous resources to critically evaluate our own lives and priorities. It is estimated that today over 200 million Christians live in dire poverty. Isn’t there something terribly wrong, in the international body of Christ, when some of us live palatially and other Christians can’t keep their kids fed? Isn’t it past time to recognize that we live in an interconnected global village in which there is no longer such a thing as a ‘private’ lifestyle choice?”<sup>7</sup>

The Manual of the Church of the Nazarene states; “We understand Christian holiness to be inseparable from ministry to the poor in that it drives the Christian beyond his or her own individual perfection and toward the creation of a more just and equitable society and world. Holiness, far from distancing believers from the desperate economic needs of people in our world, motivates us to place our means in the service of alleviating such need and to adjust our wants in accordance with the needs of others.”<sup>8</sup>

Holiness cannot be about my own personal relationship with God. To make it that small of an experience is to miss the meaning of shalom and the fullness of the ‘blessing’. Both its message and its power is rooted in how we live in holiness and how we live out our holiness in the here and now. Holiness as John Wesley has suggested, is social. It is about an internal revolution that reflects a counter cultural message lived not just in theory, but in the hearts of people. This in turn overthrows ‘superpowers’ with the power of the gospel. It is John Wesley’s heart ‘strangely warmed’, it is Oscar Romero, shot while administering the sacrament to the poor, it is

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([http://74.125.155.132/search?q=cache:g9yUljz6rW8J:wesley.nnu.edu/holiness\\_tradition/purkiser/purkiser\\_ch5.htm+hypocrisy+in+the+holiness+movement&cd=7&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=safari](http://74.125.155.132/search?q=cache:g9yUljz6rW8J:wesley.nnu.edu/holiness_tradition/purkiser/purkiser_ch5.htm+hypocrisy+in+the+holiness+movement&cd=7&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=safari))

6 [A Song of Ascents: A Spiritual Autobiography (Nash-ville: Abingdon Press, 1968), p. 151.]

7 Tom Sine, pg. 210 *The New Conspirators*.

8 Manual of the Church of the Nazarene 2001 – 2005 Paragraph 904.5 -

<http://66.102.1.104/scholar?q=cache:xAXm8Hx8B34J:scholar.google.com/+holiness+and+poverty&hl=en>

William marching on white horses straight to parliament and Catherine preaching up a storm to crowds from the rich side of town; it is Wilberforce, sleeping in a coffin the same size as slave ship hold to identify with the poor and working at great expense for his entire life for the abolition of the slave trade; it is Finney's evangelical campaigns marked by his parallel fight for women's equality and civil rights in America, it is Martin Luther King Jr. declaring a prophetic picture of how things can be when love comes to town.

Holiness is the manifestation of righteousness and justice from the inside-out. So, let's be Just Holy.