

The Doctrine of Holiness as a Holistic Philosophy of Ministry

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Jesus was sharing with His disciples one day and in the midst of their discussion on "The Signs of His Return" He gave them this allegory:

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him saying, 'Lord when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe you? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'"

(Matt. 25:31-40 N.A.S.B.)

Certainly this is one of the most basic of all the principles of the Christian Faith . . . ministering to the total needs of the individual. If there are any who would give heed to such admonition more than others, you would think it would be those who adhere to the principles of the Scriptural Doctrine of Holiness.

In fact, the early leaders of the Holiness movement placed a very high priority on showing concern for the physical as well as the spiritual needs of the people. In his journal, dated May 7, 1741, John Wesley wrote:

"I reminded the United Society, that many of our brethren and sisters had not needful food; many were destitute of convenient clothing; many were out of business, and that without their own fault; and many sick and ready to perish: That I had done what in me lay to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to employ the poor, and to visit the sick but was not, alone, sufficient for these things; and therefore desired all whose hearts were as my heart,

1. To bring what clothes each could spare, to be distributed among those that wanted most.
2. To give weekly a penny, or what they could afford, for the relief of the poor and sick. My design, I told them, is to employ, for the present, all the women who are out of business, and desire, it knitting.

To these we will first give the common price for what work they do; and then add, according as they need.

Twelve persons are appointed to inspect these, and to visit and provide things needful for the sick.

Each of these is to visit all the sick within their district, every other day: And to meet on Tuesday evening, to give an account of what they have done, and consult what can be done farther."

(The works of John Wesley, vol. I, p. 309; Zondervan Publishing House)

Dr. Phineas F. Bresee wrote in the Nazarene Messenger, in 1901, "The evidence of the presence of Jesus in our midst is that we bear the gospel, primarily, to the poor. This must be genuine; it is more than sentiment; it cannot be stimulated nor successfully imitated."

Again it was Dr. Bresee who wrote, "Let the poor be fed and clothed; let us pour out our substances for this purpose; but let us keep heaven open, that they may receive the unspeakable gift of His love, in the transforming power of the Holy Ghost."

(The Quotable Bresee, compiled by Harold Ivan Smith, pp. 167-8; Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City.)

As these writings indicate, the early leaders were men of great concern for the total person. They could not, with clear conscience, simply preach to the people, but were moved with compassion to care for the physical needs as well.

Unfortunately there has crept into the ranks of the Holiness churches (with the lone exception of the Salvation Army) the tendency to equate social concern with liberalism. What a tragic mistake this has been, for to do so is to totally ignore the teachings of our Lord and the admonition of the Holy Scripture. Remember, it was that great evangelist the Apostle Paul who wrote to the church at Galatia,

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

(Gal. 6:7-10, N.A.S.B.)

Strong, unsettling language . . . these words of Paul and the words previously quoted from Jesus, yet these passages are representative of many such admonitions in the Scripture. Certainly, the Word, when properly understood should direct all Christians everywhere to have a genuine burden for the souls of men, but also to feel the compassion of our Lord in reaching out to help the needy and alleviating the pain and suffering wherever it is to be found.

Paul seems to be considering the whole person in his benediction to the first letter to the church at Thessalonica,

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is

He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass."
(I Thess. 5:23-4, N.A.S.B.)

His prayer is that we might be sanctified entirely. That is a familiar term . . . entire sanctification . . . a term that gives the connotation of completeness. But also, he prays, that our spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless . . . spirit, soul, body . . . again that seems to indicate an all inclusiveness. What more is there to be kept blameless? It would seem that Paul is here attempting to give the Holiness position a truly holistic identification, even though he had never been acquainted with the term.

We have attempted to share the scriptural mandate as well as a historical mandate for a holistic mission or ministry for the church. It might be well to point out that the Church Growth Movement has also referred to this phenomenon as a "cultural mandate". That philosophy would contend that in the overall economy of God and in His divine plan for our world the Christian is on the scene to bring peace, hope, and love into this world. We are here as an extension of God's love, and as such we will be concerned for the total needs of mankind. Actually, it is much more than the Christian becoming a part of the circumstance. The cultural mandate would contend that when a part of the human family is suffering, the entire community of human beings suffers.

The cultural mandate would bring the Christian conscience to a new militancy about social concerns, injustices, and unfairness. The concept is that the cultural mandate was born in the heart of God before the foundation of the world and has been passed down to today's Christian for its implementation in an evil world. The sociologist who becomes engrossed in the frustrations of overpopulation with its accompanying problems of poverty and hunger and disease, might be tempted to say there is no hope. That is not one of the options. As Christians we do not throw up our hands in defeat. Even though we cannot solve the problems of the entire world, we can make a difference in the world of our personal influence.

Who should be the recipients of the Christian's concern? Peter Wagner points out that we should think of the needs of others as in concentric rings. First, we are responsible for the welfare of our own family. "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever." (I Tim. 5:8; N.A.S.B.) Secondly, we are to be concerned for our church family, our brothers and sisters in Christ. "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."
(Gal. 6:10; N.A.S.B.)

Our third priority is also referred to in the scripture just given, we are to do good to all men. Dr. Wagner states, "Because it is a third priority it does not mean that this is optional. The poor and hungry and needy and oppressed of the whole world need to be helped by people who live a kingdom lifestyle and who take seriously the cultural mandate." (C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*, pp. 41-2; Harper & Row, Publishers, San Francisco.)

As we consider the holistic philosophy of mission it is well to address the holistic concept of evangelism. There has been some disagreement over the use of the term holistic evangelism within the realm of the church growth people. Most would recognize a difference between the

cultural mandate and the evangelistic mandate and would agree to separate evangelism from service.

Within the Church of the Nazarene there has always been a high priority on evangelism. Dr. P.F. Bresee's statement has often been quoted in many circles, "We are debtors to give the Gospel to every creature in the same measure that we have received it." This statement clearly states our position on evangelism, both at home and around the world.

However, it would seem incongruous to place evangelism completely apart from service. To bring a lost soul to Christ is not to leave him in a vacuum, but requires counseling, nurturing, encouraging, helping, loving that person. To bring an alcoholic to the Lord is only the beginning, but requires a holistic awareness of his need. Holistic evangelism would be to consider the total needs of the person as we seek to lead him to the Lord.

It is heartening to observe the growing interest on the part of many laymen and laywomen within the church and their desire to be involved in the ministry of helping where they can. The "Men in Mission" program of the church has personally involved hundreds of laypersons in the building of churches, parsonages, and other buildings around the world.

The General Church Disaster and Relief Fund has found a response in the hearts of many of our people. The giving to this fund has indicated that our people really do have a special sense of compassion for those who are disadvantaged.

Although we do find these interests to be encouraging, again we must observe that these programs are only the beginning. There is a danger in tokenism, in just doing enough good works to pacify our collective conscience. That in no way represents a holistic approach to ministry or mission. If we as a Holiness church are to become all that God wants us to be, we will need to see some dramatic changes take place in our level of commitment to the needs of our world.

However, it is important to recognize that at this point in the history of the Holiness Movement it would be extremely difficult to bring the churches into a total commitment to holistic ministry. While pastoring I found a great need to serve one hot meal each day to the many senior citizens who made up a large part of the population of our neighborhood. We developed a significant program to meet this need involving the city, a nearby hospital, a local service club, as well as the church. It represented a total community effort, meeting a genuine need of the people, with the church at the center. When the proposal was presented to the church board it was soundly rejected. The congregation simply was not ready to open their doors to the people of the neighborhood, nor were they willing to join hands with others in such a venture.

In another pastorate we found a need to assist young unwed mothers who were being rejected by their homes as well as by their friends. We developed a support system to care for these young mothers in a large house in the community. The support system was totally outside the church, with representatives from the various agencies within that city. That home for unwed mothers, which we chose to call "Gateway House" has served hundreds of young mothers through these years assisting them to move from despair to hope, from dependency

on society to productive members of society. It was my opinion that such a home would not be supported by the church, but that it would be supported by the community. Gateway House continues to serve the needs for which it was founded even to this day.

These examples merely indicate the difficulty of transforming the thinking of many Christian people who have been misguided into the opinion that social action is anathema within the conservative or Holiness churches. The conviction that the mission of the church is to preach the gospel and not to reform society continues as the basic tenant of most Holiness people.

Billy Graham, one of the greatest evangelists of modern times, has stated, "Jesus has taught that we are to take regeneration in one hand and a cup of cold water in the other. Christians, above all others, should be concerned with social problems and social injustices." (Billy Graham, *Peace With God* quoted by Peter Wagner in *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*, p. 14) Most Holiness people would agree with Dr. Graham's statement, as long as we don't become too serious about the "cup of cold water".

One pastor, with whom I am intimately acquainted identified totally with the cultural mandate. Shortly after being called to serve as pastor of a church he began a revolutionary ministry of serving the needs of the poor in that community. He developed a significant program of providing food for the hungry, self-help type jobs for the unemployed, and finally shelter in the church fellowship hall, for the homeless. Conflicts began to develop over this ministry, for most of the congregation perceived this as the pastor's ministry of the church. The result was a rejection of that pastor because he was too far ahead of the congregation not the needs of the outsiders".

Does this mean that the Holiness church is to give up on the possibilities of a holistic ministry? Quite to the contrary, this is part of our mission . . . it was partially for this reason that we were brought into existence in our beginnings. If a pastor leads his people into a ministry to meet the temporal needs of others will that congregation fall off in attendance and in membership? Dr. Peter Wagner answers this question with the words:

"The studies I have cited show fairly conclusively that a strong emphasis on the cultural mandate is not in itself a significant cause of membership decline. Churches can be very active socially and still enjoy vigorous membership growth if they do not give the cultural mandate a higher priority than the evangelistic mandate. However, if Biblical priorities are reversed, not only will membership suffer, but so will social ministry. There is a spiritual magnetic force in the evangelistic mandate." (Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*, p. 123.)

These words are encouraging to us as we consider the role of the church in today's world. Possibly even more encouraging are the words from a recent Gallup Poll in which the question was asked, "Do you, yourself, happen to be involved in any charity or social service activities, such as helping the poor, the sick or the elderly?" According to the poll evangelicals indicated 42% were involved in some such ministry, whereas only 26% of the nonevangelicals indicated such involvement. (*Emerging Trends*, Princeton Religious Research Center, 1, no. 1, January 1979, pp. 1-2).

Surely there is much reason to be hopeful for the future. In fact, there seems to be a genuine revival of concern for the victims of poverty, of war, of crime, of sin among us today. This generation has developed a climate for such concern like has not been apparent since the turn of the century. In fact, it may be possible that the Holiness Church is about to grip the Cultural Mandate with one hand and the Evangelistic Mandate with the other and march through our world in a bold new way to bring about reform and renewal at the same time. Is that too much to hope for? Not at all, for anything less than that would be to fail in our Scriptural, and our Historic, and our Cultural, and our Evangelistic Mandate. Such a mandate has been given us by our Lord. We will recall that the members of the cross on which Jesus died were twofold: the vertical member pointed upward as if His arms would encompass the entire world. May we as His emissaries go out into our world with outstretched arms to embrace all those we meet . . . in Jesus name. That My Friends is **The Holiness Mandate.**