Being Holy is Being Christlike:
To What Extent is This a Definable and Useful Model in an Australian Context?

David B. McEwan

Introduction
Australia as a Postmodern and a PostChristian Society

There seems to be a general agreement that we are living in a time of transition between two competing worldviews: modernity and postmodernity. The exact nature of each of these worldviews and the extent/permanence of the "paradigm shift" is much debated in current scholarship. It is not intended here to examine postmodernism as a philosophical framework or to enter into the debate as to the extent of its influence in academia. The concern in this paper is to focus on its impact as a cultural phenomenon in the lives of ordinary Australians. In this context, the cultural shift is also aligned with the reality of a post-Christian society. There is no intention to investigate either phenomenon exhaustively but simply to make some general comments in order to provide a setting for a discussion on the challenge of articulating the doctrine of holiness in Australia today.

Some of the key elements in postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon are: a thoroughgoing scepticism about objective truth, a rejection of rationalism, a hermeneutic of suspicion, the proliferation of choices and options in every realm of life as a positive state, a decline of rampant individualism and a resurgence of interest in community.[1] "Truth" is viewed as a construction of the individual mind and thus subjectivism is dominant, with its valuing of eclecticism and utilitarianism. The autono-mous self ("my experience") has now become the determiner of truth and reality; as a result, there cannot be any ultimate concerns, universal ethics or morality. Life is then reduced to caring for our own well-being, with the stress on managing our life and the environment for our benefit and pleasure. The answers to our problems are then found in various forms of therapy.[2] The real difficulty for any society holding such ideas is not so much that *all* truth is relativised, but the intimate juxtaposition of the many truth claims that then makes community identity and cohesion pro-blematic.[3]

Hugh Mackay, one of Australia's foremost social researchers and analysts, has examined the rapid and pervasive nature of social, cultural, technological and economic change in Australian society. In his opinion, "Australia is becoming a truly postmodern society—a place where we are learning to incorporate uncertainty into our view of the world. The absolute is giving way to the relative; objectivity

---

[1]Craig A. Loscalzo, *Apologetic Preaching: Proclaiming Christ to a Postmodern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 13-20.

[2]Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, eds., *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 12-15. See also Loscalzo, 84-5.

[3]Loscalzo, 89-90.

to subjectivity; function to form."[4] Diversity and pluralism are now accepted social and personal realities.[5] For most Australians, choice has become a supreme value, with each person seeking to construct a worldview that coincides with their personal values, beliefs and aspirations. "Postmodernism insists that there is an infinity of alternatives, and encourages us to explore them."[6] There is a high degree of insecurity and uncertainty that accompanies these changes in every area of life—marriage, family, work, religion, leisure, media, and politics. "The present culture shift is a shift towards uncertainty, a shift towards diversity, a shift towards complexity."[7] The danger in our acceptance of this diversity and our embrace of pluralism is the potential loss of a necessary sense of identity: where we have come from, where we are going, having a place to call our own. The gloomiest prospect is to see the future of our society in terms of ever-increasing fragmentation and alienation—that we become simply a collection of "individuals" with the loss of any meaningful sense of community. Those who are more hopeful believe there will be an emerging sense of "reconnection" with the recovery of genuine community.[8]

In the midst of all this change, Mackay sees no signs of a revival of Christian faith and practice. The growing interest in "spirituality" is not reflected in the growth of the Christian church. He comments that Christianity has "never been an integral, intrinsic force in Australian political, cultural or social life in the way it has been for instance, in America or Western Europe."[9] It has always been essentially a private matter and for most Australians a relatively unimportant one. Nevertheless, most Australians are "theists" and value religious belief, no matter how ill-defined it happens to be, and they appreciate religious input in any discussions about vision, purpose and the moral dimension of life.[10]

Current Australian society is characterised by anxiety, stress, insecur-ity and a loss of identity.[11] Gender roles have been redefined, with an accompanying adversarial approach to relationships. This has impacted both marriage and family resulting in an increasing fragmentation of family life. The negative effects of the "personal growth" movement of the 70's and 80's that encouraged egocentricity and an obsession with personal gratification to the exclusion of traditional concepts of social cohesion, resulted in many people searching for a "group" to which they can belong. These decades have seen both rising unemployment and changing patterns of employment, leading many to question the value

---

[4]Hugh Mackay, *Turning Point: Australians Choosing Their Future* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1999), xix-xx.

[5]Ibid., x-xviii.

[6]Ibid., xx.

[7]Ibid., xxiv.

[8]Ibid., xxvii-xxxv.

[9]Ibid., 219-20.

[10]Ibid., 221-26.

[11]Hugh Mackay, *Reinventing Australia: The Mind and Mood of Australia in the 90s* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1993), 7.

of work. Spectacular corporate collapses in recent years, with all the associated personal and social disruption, have exacerbated the problem. The increased use of information technology has been confused with genuine communication, and there is an increasing depersonalisation in all social structures as we interact more with such things as voice-mail and e-mail. Due to a rapid redistribution of wealth, with the gap between the rich and the poor increasing, the long-held dream of an egalitarian society is under threat. The all-pervasive impact of multiculturalism, with its resulting angst over cultural identity, has led to a valuing of diversity over unity. Many Australians are increasingly sceptical and cynical over the whole political process; politics is now almost synonymous with economics, with a corresponding retreat from a concern for human values and social justice.[12] The declining emphasis on personal relationships and increased social fragmentation destroys our sense of social cohesion and puts even more pressure on our ability to hold and pass on shared ethics, ideals, values and virtues. Mackay believes that there is an increasing desire to re-establish meaningful personal relationships and a sense of community in Australian society.

Christlikeness: A Personal, Individual, Private Experience?

For John Wesley, holiness could be summed up as "Christlikeness," and this has continued to be one of the standard ways of describing the holy life. The unstated assumption in much of Western Christianity during the last two hundred years is that this is a universal, timeless model easily comprehended by people in every age and culture. We forget that we read the biblical descriptions of the life of Jesus through our cultural lens and, generally, Western nations (and Australia more than most) are characterised by a rugged individualism. Modern individualism reinforces narcissism, self-indulgence, instant gratification, self-promotion and greed. In an earlier age, emotions were held in check by values such as commitment, duty, reason, and honour. In today's society, feelings and emotions are very important, with individualistic self-fulfilment through self-expression as the goal of personal life; self-discipline and self-control are now largely seen as forms of repression. Relationships are a means to self-fulfilment, and to be discarded if our emotional needs are not met.

Australian Nazarenes are not exempt from these cultural realities, and many view God as one who exists to meet our needs as we define them. In line with our convictions, our understanding of entire sanctification and holy living is expressed in terms of "Christlikeness." From our reading of the Bible, we see Christ as an "individual" who possessed "holy" qualities that are essentially personal, private, interior and spiritual. Experientially, the Spirit then "bears witness" to the presence of such qualities in the individual, enabling them to testify to the experience of entire sanctification, understood as the personal possession of these holy qualities. Holiness is purely a private, personal, inward experience. Needless to say, such a "reading" of Scripture and the accompanying conclusions regarding the nature of holy living only exacerbates the problems already present in Australian society. It leaves the church with no effective witness that would address the inner turmoil that many are currently facing, with their longing for meaningful relationships. A church that is simply a gathering of "holy individuals" cannot be effective in mission to a society desperate for genuine community.

Furthermore, the Christlike life is often described in terms of certain observable behaviours (for example, abstaining from drinking alcohol as a beverage) to which moral values have been attached. The moral/ethical quality that is most valued in a Christian's life is obedience to the commands of God.

---

[12]Ibid., 22-23, 270-72.

Given our focus on individualism, our personal keeping of the rules can easily become more important than nurturing relationships and may even replace them. Holy living is then a solitary existence centred upon an inward experience of God's grace that is nurtured by private and personal devotional exercises. Holiness can then become a very unattractive (and self-righteous) legalism, which is hardly a positive base for building community. The result has often been that individuals have been careful about keeping the rules governing outward behaviour while showing no real concern for relationship breakdown in the church—since that is not "my problem" and it does not affect "me." In all of this there is a tendency to forget that we have a great capacity for self-deception, let alone confusing our own feelings for the "witness of the Spirit." If Christlikeness is to be judged purely from "my personal subjective perception," then "I" may well be badly in error.

It is this over-emphasis on the individual in Australian society and its implications for Christian living that uncovers a fatal flaw in our current conception of holiness as Christlikeness. The problem is not Christlikeness *per se*, but our cultural reading of Scripture and the resulting theological reflection that focuses on the person of Jesus Christ as an isolated, autonomous individual. The challenge in articulating a doctrine of holiness for Australia today lies in moving beyond such a limited conception by embracing an earlier understanding that holiness is essentially a relational reality. Here we confront a major problem in that large sections of Australian society—including the church—have no real idea of what a healthy, functioning community looks like. We do have a strong heritage in the Wesleyan-Holiness movement from which we can draw, as well as the traditions of the Christian church as a whole. While we do not have complete access to the interior life of Christ, we do have access to his message, his actions and his relationships. From these we can attempt to construct a model that is not simply based on subjective experience. The life of Jesus Christ demonstrates what it means to live in relationship with God and with other people, and that this relationship with other persons was an essential condition of the relationship with God.

It is vital that we recognise the importance of the fact that the church as a community has a long tradition in which it has kept alive a powerful "memory" that allows it to continue to confess the origins and nature of the self, the world and the community as creations of God. It has also kept alive a powerful vision through its confession of hope in God and the future he has planned and purposed for the self, the world and the community. This means that the church does not need to succumb to the despair and defeat of the surrounding society; it can proclaim a present filled with potential and genuine hope because we are not in ultimate control—God is.[13] Our society is, of course, highly skeptical about this confession and would debunk the church's confidence and, it must be admitted, it often has had good cause to do so. This is where the role of personal and community witness to the person of Jesus Christ, the gospel and its transforming potential is so important.[14] Since a postmodern society rejects out of hand the premise of any argument based on rationalism, doctrinal formulations on their own are not of much use. It is as we have genuine Christian community, with its shared experiences and relationships, that pagan Australians will be compelled to consider the claims of holy living.

---

[13]Walter Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 29-48.

[14]Loscalzo, 69-75.

Christlikeness: A Relationship-based Holiness

Stanley Grenz reminds us that

> The Enlightenment brought in its wake an individualist impulse that elevates the human person as the logical *prius* of all forms of social life, and views the contract between individuals as the basis of all social interaction. Individualism promotes such values as personal freedom, self-improvement, privacy, achievement, independence, detachment, and self-interest. It sees society, in turn, as the product of autonomous selves who enter into voluntary relationship with each other.
>
> Voluntarist contractualism finds its ecclesiological counterpart in the view of the church as a voluntary association of individual believers. Rather than constituting its members, the church is constituted by believers, who are deemed to be in a sense complete "spiritual selves" prior to, and apart from, membership in the church.[15]

In recent years this viewpoint has been increasingly questioned and there has been a call for the re-establishing of a relational understanding, while maintaining the valid and helpful insights of individualism. At the heart of this theological enterprise is a fresh examination of what it means for human beings to have been created in the "image of God."[16] The God who has revealed himself to us and whom we worship is a Triune God, and thus "the divine image is not primarily individual, but is shared or relational."[17] In many recent Trinitarian studies, the concept of *perichoresis* has re-emerged; the concept, as understood by Colin Gunton, signifies that

> the persons [of the Godhead] do not simply enter into relations with one another, but are constituted by one another in the relations. Father, Son and Spirit are eternally what they are by virtue of what they are from and to one another. Being and relation can be distinguished in thought, but in no way separated ontologically; they are part of the one ontological dynamic.[18]

God reveals himself to us as a "being-in-communion," and to be created in this "image" means that humans must also be participants in some form of communion, not only with God but also with each other. Gunton has pointed out that the image therefore closely binds us with other human beings as well as with God. The Genesis account would seem to clearly indicate that we are a social kind; "the

---

[15]Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 314.

[16]From a Wesleyan perspective, see for example Samuel M. Powell and Michael E. Lodahl, eds., *Embodied Holiness: Toward a Corporate Theology of Spiritual Growth* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999); Michael E. Lodahl, "*Una Natura Divina, Tres Nescio Quid*: What Sorts of *Personae* are Divine *Personae*?", *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36:1 (Spring 2001): 218-30. Also see n.49, p. 241 in Dean G. Blevins, "The Trinity and the Means of Grace: A Sacramental Inter-relationship," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36:1 (Spring 2001): 231-55.

[17]Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 213.

[18]Colin E. Gunton, *The One, The Three and The Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity. The Bampton Lectures 1992* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 214. See also Roderick T. Leupp, *Knowing the Name of God: A Trinitarian Tapestry of Grace, Faith and Community* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 159-62.

merely *individual* state. . . is a denial of human fullness."[19] Gunton applies the concept of *perichoresis* to humanity as well as to the Trinity. It is not merely that we "enter" into a relationship with others, but rather "persons mutually constitute each other, make each other what they are."[20] Individuals are still unique persons, but their uniqueness is by virtue of their relationship to others.[21] A relationship necessarily involves the presence of another who has a distinctive identity, which in turn requires a distinctive character and history.[22] This keeps both the importance of the individual and the community, so that you cannot have one without the other, nor can you set one over against the other.[23] Nevertheless, the Church as God's community of the redeemed should have priority over our more natural individualistic concerns, for we need to remember that individual experience occurs within the community and its mutual relationships.[24]

The biblical revelation of God consistently shows us a God whose essential nature is holy love.[25] From this we can deduce that the key marks of the personal are then love and freedom; a "free relation-in-otherness."[26] The essence of freedom is found in the balance between self-realisation and service to others; the balance of self-love and self-gift.[27] God's own character can only be mirrored by humans who love after the manner of the perfect love lying at the heart of the triune God. Only

---

[19]Gunton, *The One*, 216. He also underscores that it is a myth that we can fulfil ourselves as individuals, see 226. See also Brian E. Beck, "Connexion and Koinonia: Wesley's Legacy and the Ecumenical Ideal," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy Maddox (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 129-41; Leupp, *Knowing the Name,* 92-96.

[20]Gunton, *The One*, 169.

[21]Ibid., 172-73.

[22]Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 1992), 9-11; see also Leupp, *Knowing the Name*, 97-98.

[23]See J. Stephen Rhodes, "The Church as the Community of Open Friendship," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 55:1 (Spring 2000): 41-49.

[24]Michael E. Lodahl, *The Story of God: Wesleyan Theology and Biblical Narrative* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994), 68-69, 166-67.

[25]See the arguments advanced by H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), 183-207.

[26]Gunton, *The One*, 227. Dunning has convincingly argued that being created in God's image means that the human being was originally endowed with freedom for God, for the other and freedom from the Earth and self-domination; see *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 277-83. See also Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000), 16-33; Charles Sherlock, *God on the Inside: Trinitarian Spirituality* (Canberra: Acorn Press, 1991), 204-205; Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 155ff.

[27]Leupp, *Knowing the Name,* 92-96.

as we live in fellowship can we show forth what God is like. And as we reflect God's character—love—we also live in accordance with our own true nature and find our true identity.[28] We are human only as we draw life from the Trinity, for Jesus Christ is the truly representative human—not Adam.[29] It is Christ who reveals to us who we are and what it means to be human; holiness is then both Christocentric and Trinitarian.[30] Love is not a possession apart from God, but is intrinsically relational. It is by grace that we are invited and enabled to participate in the ongoing personal relationships of the triune God, thus opening up our lives to the transformative power of God's love that impacts every area of personal and community life. Henry Knight cautions us against reading John Wesley's order of salvation in an individualistic manner, abstracting it from the liturgical, communal and devotional contexts of the community; Wesley emphasised the place of relationship with both God and neighbour.[31] In the Preface to the *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, published by Wesley in 1739, we have the following statement:

> "Holy solitaries" is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. "Faith working by love" is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. "This commandment have we from Christ, that he who loves God, love his brother also"; and that we manifest our love "by doing good unto all men; especially to them that are of the household of faith." And in truth, whosoever loveth his brethren, not in word only, but as Christ loved him, cannot but be "zealous of good works." He feels in his soul a burning, restless desire of spending and being spent for them. "My Father," will he say, "worketh hitherto, and I work." And at all possible opportunities he is, like his Master, "going about doing good."[32]

The context was his opposition to the notion that one can be a "solitary Christian," but the point he made applies equally to the strong individualism of much current Australian Christianity. In his sermon, "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. Discourse the Fourth" he strongly refuted the notion that holiness is purely an "inward experience," nor can it be realised in solitude: "When I say this is essentially a social religion, I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but that it cannot subsist at all without society, without living and conversing with other men."[33] He agreed up to a point

---

[28]Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 213.

[29]Leupp, *Knowing the Name*, 97-98.

[30]Tom A. Noble, "The Cappadocians, Augustine and Trinitarian Holiness," Public lecture, Nazarene Theological College, Brisbane, Qld., August 2000. Author's printed notes.

[31]Knight, *The Presence of God*, 2.

[32]John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley,* 3rd ed. 14 vols., edited by Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprint ed., Kansas City, MO.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979). Preface to the *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 14: 232.

[33]John Wesley, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley,* 35 volumes projected, editor in Chief, Frank Baker (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984ff). Volumes 7, 11, 25, and 26 originally appeared as the *Oxford Edition of The Works of John Wesley*, edited by Frank Baker and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-83), Vol. 1: *Sermons I*, ed. Albert C. Outler (1984),

with those who claimed that Christianity is purely inward, a matter of the heart, a union of the soul with God, a "pure and holy heart." He said this was the "root" of our relationship with Christ, but if truly present, it must also put forth "branches" (outward evidence), and they are of the same nature as the root. Wesley agreed that outward evidence without the inner heart change is nothing, but it was not a case of either/or but both/and; the commands of the Lord cannot be carried out except in society.[34] Biblical passages like Lev 19 and Matt 5-7 (especially 5:43-48) underscore both the essential relational character of Christianity and the centrality of holy love.

Donald Alexander has recently addressed the recurrent problem of interpreting holiness in terms of the inner dimension of human experience. He is in substantial agreement with the authors cited earlier on the importance of understanding humans to be "persons-in-communion," both with God and with neighbour.[35] He has raised an additional problem to be considered before we can move on to the role of community in shaping holy living: is there an additional condition beyond the "fact" of the Creator-creature relationship in order for humans to be holy? Conservative evangelicals have often read Genesis to imply that human holiness is also grounded in personal obedience to God's command, given first in Gen. 2:16-17. Alexander calls this a "Moral-Obedient View" of holiness and his extended analysis of it leads him to reject it as the most helpful model for the present day. He believes that what he terms the "Functional View" has greater potential to address the concerns raised today.[36] Here the relationship with God is grounded in the act of creation itself and not in any subsequent demand. Humans are created "good" and endowed with the capacity of personal being ("in God"s image") so that they "function" (think and act) in a manner harmonious with their nature as created by God and thereby reflecting the character of God in whose image they are created. This removes the heart of the ongoing relationship from a "moral/obedient" understanding to one of "faith/trust." The command not to eat of the fruit created the basis for trust and provided an opportunity for humanity to continue to live in that trust. Obedience was then the means by which the faith/trust relationship with God now found concrete expression—it flowed from the prior relationship established by grace but did not create it. Since humanity chose not to trust, the concrete act of disobedience followed and allowed the entrance of sin and an experiential knowledge of good and evil. The "image of God" is not then some quality or characteristic that we possess by analogy with God, but our capacity to encounter and respond to others in a personal way that is not merely instinctive or habitual. To respond as we were created to respond is then to display the character of God. The "image" is then found in the relationship and can only be realised in fellowship; that is why the Ten Commandments and Jesus' summary of the Law (to love God and neighbour) are relational

---

533-34.

[34]Wesley, *Sermons I*, 534-42. See also "The Repentance of Believers," 335-53, especially n. 65, p. 343; *Sermons III*, "On Visiting the Sick," 384-97.

[35]Donald L. Alexander, *The Pursuit of Godliness: Sanctification in Christological Perspective* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1999), 15-17.

[36]Alexander, *Pursuit*, 35-40. For Wesleyans, Alexander's analysis has the added benefit of offering us an alternative understanding that would free us from remaining locked in a fruitless debate with the Reformed theologians over exclusively legal categories for sin and salvation.

in form.[37] To be created is to have a direction, a dynamic, which derives from the createdness of all things by the triune God. That dynamic can be subverted, reversed, even, so that that which is directed to its own particular perfectedness instead participates in dissolution and death.[38] To break the relationship with God does not result in a loss of "being"; rather humans get involved in patterns of relationship which make for a loss of ontic integrity, a loss of centredness.[39] Salvation (including entire sanctification) is then aligned with becoming truly human, living in the framework of human relationships, ordered and expressed in the purpose of God's new community—the church.

Christlikeness: A Community-shaped Holiness

Stanley Grenz reminds us that personal identity is socially produced and so the church community plays a crucial role in the process of Christian character formation. The church is called to be a proclaiming (apostolic), reconciling (catholic), sanctifying (holy) and unifying (one) community centred in Christ, who alone bears the full *imago dei*.[40] To be a Christian is to be a member of a "Christ-focused community" and the encounter with Christ is "an identity-producing event," both individually and corporately.

> The church gains its true identity through participation in the fountainhead of community, namely, the life of the triune God . . . the communal fellowship Christians share is nothing less than a shared participation—a participation together—in the perichoretic community of trinitarian persons.[41]

Because of the experiential dimension, we must take seriously the specific historical-cultural context of the local community that the Spirit addresses and seeks to transform.[42] The ministry of the Spirit that enables our relationships with God and neighbour also "maintains and even strengthens particularity"; not seeking homogenisation but a "relation which does not subvert but establishes the other in its true reality."[43] In support of this, Michael Lodahl has argued that if the *personae* in the Trinity are not exactly alike ontologically, then human *personae* living by faith in the Triune God may grow in God's image to live more richly and ecstatically with(in) our differences—thus loosening up our obsession with conformity in the name of (tri)unity.[44] For example, the church community

---

[37]Ibid., 41-47.

[38]Gunton, *The One*, 230.

[39]Ibid., 230.

[40]Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 323.

[41]Ibid., 323.

[42]See for example, Stanley J. Grenz, "Culture and Spirit: The Role of Cultural Context in Theological Reflection," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 55:2 (Fall 2000): 37-51.

[43]Gunton, *The One*, 182.

[44]Lodahl, "*Una Natura Divina, Tres Nescio Quid,*" 218-30.

identified in 1 Cor 12 clearly demonstrates richness and variety, not homogeneity. "God the Spirit is the source of autonomy, not homogeneity, because by his action human beings are constituted in their uniqueness and particular networks of relationality."[45]

At this point it is helpful to be reminded of an earlier quotation from Grenz where he noted that "individualism" viewed society as "the product of autonomous selves who enter into voluntary relationship with each other." Carried over into the Christian community, this results in the church being seen as a "voluntary association of individual believers" and "[r]ather than constituting its members, the church is constituted by believers, who are deemed to be in a sense complete "spiritual selves" prior to, and apart from, membership in the church.[46] This has clear implications for the whole process of spiritual transformation when coupled with the common understanding that "Christlikeness" is a private, inward spiritual experience. The church then easily becomes a closed community turned in on itself (holiness seen almost exclusively as *separation from* the world); "fellowship" then becomes the enjoyment of a group of like-minded people who may unintentionally exclude others who are different. Such an understanding finds it difficult to respect and embrace differences that may bring tensions to the "fellowship," forgetting that a healthy community is not marked by the absence of conflict but how it handles conflict.[47]

The human community becomes concrete in the church, the medium and realisation of communion with God and then with others. The Church of Jesus Christ is then a fellowship of communities that individually and corporately form his Body.[48] The postmodern condition undercuts any notion of a "universal reality called community" by which to judge every other community—all must flow from a conversation between particular communities.[49] It is the "commonality" of our experience that is the identifying feature of participation in a specific church community, for a different experience would mark us as a member of another community.[50] The Wesleyan-Holiness community is shaped by its theological reflection and praxis guided by Scripture, reason, tradition and experience (both personal and corporate). This will have both a local and specific element as well as a common pattern or style that identifies us all as Nazarene churches.

To take this seriously implies that we can no longer promote a holiness ("Christlikeness") that is primarily understood as a private, inward experience. In the past much of our ministry has been directed towards "individuals," and this focus was exacerbated by the accompanying Protestant emphasis on the importance of personal access to God through private study of the Bible and prayer. Christian experience was removed from a community setting (liturgy, shared confession and living witnesses) to a privatised, interiorised, isolated personal experience. One of the gains of postmodernism is a new openness to the place of the community and the vital importance of interpersonal

---

[45]Gunton, *The One*, 182-84.

[46]Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 314.

[47]Rhodes, "The Church as Community," 44-47.

[48]Gunton, *The One*, 216-18.

[49]Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, 323.

[50]Ibid., 202. See also Gunton, *The One*, 171.

relationships. Our pulpit ministry has often been more in the mode of an academic discourse, with the language geared for a people who were familiar with the biblical story and theological language. The goal was often to impart universal truths and principles and the assumption was that the correct "information" would result in the desired transformation. The focus of the sermon was the individual who needed to make a (rational) decision about their faith commitment. Walter Brueggemann argues that people today do not change primarily as a result of new "information" but as a result of encountering a new way of life that they are able to experience for themselves, in the process unlearning and disengaging from a model that is no longer credible or adequate.[51] The role of the "community" in modeling holiness and not simply "speaking" about it cannot be emphasised too much. A community ethos is based on the identity of the people of God—because of *who* we are, this is *how* we live. It is the *whole* life of the Christian community that is critical to effective communication of the doctrine of holiness in the current Australian setting; it requires both the life and the "speech" to be congruent before persuasive witness is possible.

      If, as we have argued, Christlikeness is to be understood as a relational reality and not merely an individual one, then the church must have in place means that the Spirit can use to form and shape the community as well as the individual. This leads to a consideration of Wesley's emphasis on the importance of the "means of grace." A full study of the "means" and how they can function to shape holy lives is beyond the scope of this present paper. We can say that they form an interrelated context within which the Christian life is lived and through which relationships with God and neighbour are enabled and developed. In Henry Knight's comprehensive examination of the "means" and their importance for forming and shaping holy lives, we find the following classification and examples:

- **General Means of Grace**: universal obedience, keeping all the commandments, watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily, exercise of the presence of God
- **Instituted (Particular) Means of Grace** (appointed by God, universal in history and culture): prayer in all its forms and setting, searching the Scriptures in all its forms and settings, Eucharist, Fasting or abstinence, Christian conference
- **Prudential Means of Grace** (vary from age to age, culture to culture, person to person, adapted to time and circumstance): particular rules or acts of holy living, class and band meetings, prayer meetings, covenant services, watch night services, love feasts, visiting the sick, doing good, doing no harm, reading edifying literature.[52]

The list encompasses a wide range of activities that are to be pursued and must be pursued in both a personal and a community setting. The development of the Methodist societies, classes and bands as patterns of fellowship and discipleship were related to their historical and cultural contexts, but something like them is always necessary to nourish the individual Christian life through deepening relationships, fellowship, and mutual accountability.[53] The tendency was present even in his day for many to reduce holy living to an inward experience supported exclusively by acts of personal piety.

---

[51]Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation,* 24-25.

[52]Knight, *Presence of God*, 5.

[53]Knight, *Presence of God*, 95ff. See also Brian E. Beck, "Connexion and Koinonia: Wesley's Legacy and the Ecumenical Ideal," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy Maddox (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 129-41.

Wesley wanted to prohibit pious activities from becoming a means of avoiding love when they should be the means through which God enables and evokes love. Wesley believed that love for God and neighbour are not in competition, and he was insistent that the "neighbour" must not be limited to fellow Christians but encompass the whole of society. By its very nature, love actively transforms all relationships and so you cannot have "inward love" without a corresponding change in relationship with both God and neighbour.[54] Love for God and others is a core affection or temper that governs the Christian life. As such, it is both a capacity (enabled to love) and a disposition (inclined to love others). It is by personal interaction with God and neighbour as a result of utilising all the means of grace, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, that both the capacity and the disposition are enabled to increase.[55] This enables the Spirit to form, shape and maintain our relationships with God and neighbour (and our "self") in a way that is truly "Christlike." That is why Wesley was so insistent that holiness ("Christlikeness") is either a social reality or it is non-existent.[56]

Conclusion

A functional model of Christlikeness, with its key emphasis on relationships, returns us to the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity in Christian theological reflection. Genuine relationship is understood through reflecting on the way that the persons of the Trinity relate to each other and to the whole of Creation. Jesus Christ is the concrete demonstration of how this works out in a specific human life in a specific culture and time. We are then invited to be "in Christ" as a new creation and thus able to participate in the life and relationships of the Triune God. We, in turn, model this graciously restored "functionality" in our culture and time through our participation in the life of the church and ministry to the world. Holiness is then relationship-based and community-shaped; it is a holistic experience that takes seriously our time and culture-specific reality. The qualities of a holy life are then evaluated by the judgement of the Spirit-led community, whether this is at local church, district, region or the general church level. This maintains the role of the physical community as a place of wisdom and discernment as we work towards a consensus on the "marks" of holiness. This would also restore the central Wesleyan value of "conference" as an essential means to help us live authentically holy lives.

---

[54]Knight, *Presence of God*, 4.

[55]For some of the implications of this see Randy L. Maddox, "Reconnecting the Means to the End: A Wesleyan Prescription for the Holiness Movement," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33:2 (Fall, 1998): 29-66.

[56]See Knight, *Presence of God*, 18-21. Remember that for Wesley, "law" is not legalism, but the law written on the heart; to have the love of God and neighbour as a governing affection—see *Presence of God*, 60.