

## STUDY PAPER ONE

Holiness Today by the Auxiliary Roman Catholic Bishop of Southwark, Charles Henderson

### Introduction:

My understanding of holiness is centred on God through faith in Jesus Christ. I would find it difficult to conceive holiness unless it is God-centred. No doubt those who have no place for God in their lives will have their own perception of holiness. Godless but good people are more likely to call holiness by a different name, eg goodness, uprightness. This is surely a response to the innate call to love which is found in every heart, unless the circumstances have smothered it. Their thoughts would also arise from sound reasoning which would seek a better way of life, a less stressful way, a contented way. Neither should one exclude the value of character formation which derives from a good home, a good school and the example of good parents and others in the development of a person's values of life. But what might be the breadth and depth of such convictions and their stability, I cannot imagine. The fulfilment of self, self-satisfaction and harmony with others with the resulting peace of life will certainly motivate. One deeply respects the goodness of so many who live their lives without any consciousness of God: though in Christian thought not without divine help which is with every person whether he/she is aware of it or not.

### The Value of Revelation:

My own understanding of holiness comes from the teaching of the Church and the writings of the Fathers which are based on Holy Scripture. Through the Word of God in Holy Scripture, I am fully aware of the dignity of every human person. Each person is in the likeness of God and is called to a life of personal relationship with God, which energises awareness in us of his true purpose – happiness with him for all eternity. “Blessed be God the Father of Jesus Christ who has blessed us with the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ . . . And chose us in Christ to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence . . .” (Ephesians 1: 3, 7, 4). In Christ, God has revealed his great love for each one of us. Through knowing Christ we become very aware of our personal vocation. Through Christ's death and resurrection, we appreciate our value and our enriched status. We are graced or grace-filled by God. We realise more fully that each one of us is destined for eternal perfection in the presence of God. This is a source of great joy in the Lord. Some think of this as Blessedness, a scriptural consideration of which is found in the Beatitudes. (Cf Mt 5: 3 to 12). The Beatitudes are at the heart of the teaching of Jesus, expressing the charitable disposition of a Christian life.

### Christian Holiness:

“We know that by turning everything to their good, God co-operates with all those who love him, with all those that he has called according to his purpose. They are the ones he chose specially long ago and intended to become true images of his Son so that his Son might be the eldest of many brothers. He called those he intended for this: those he called he justified, and with those he justified he shared His glory”. (Rom 8: 28 to 30).

Every Christian is called to this fullness of life in God through Christ. In other words, Christians are called to holiness, to be perfect in the likeness of Christ: “Be perfect as

your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5: 48). Following the example of the life of Jesus, and with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, we can achieve this perfect way of life by always seeking to do the will of the Father as this is perceived by us. We desire it every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”.

We grow in holiness and its awareness. There is a progression of understanding of God’s love and of the presence of the Holy Spirit. There is an intimacy between the soul and God which words are most often inadequate to express. Like the experience of human life the happiness and contentment is beyond words. There is a calm, a peace and joyful contentment of soul.

The Power of Prayer:

Prayer, especially the prayer of listening quietly to God, focussing on his love for us in Christ, which allows the soul to open itself more fully to God. In this way we give to God the opportunity to “speak” with us and to draw us more closely to Him in love.

This personal relationship with God which is best sustained in a Christian community brings many graces and blessings. It opens our minds to the good that is in us and the power of the charity that flows from this holiness. Above all we are “content”, “happy”, “full of joy” and this whatever the circumstance of our life. We learn to seek God above all things and to make each moment of each day and every thought, word and deed, a yearning for that seeking of God, whom we trust to care for us in this life and bless the efforts we make.

Questions:

1. How would you explain the presence of the divine help and love in the life of a person who is unaware of God?
2. Is there a clash between the Scripture description of us and the way the world expects us to live: and need this be so?
3. In what way are we able to turn the whole day into one lived for God?
4. Is it easier to be holy – sustain a life of spiritual discipline – as an individual or in community?