

Notions of Sanctification.

A Survey of Sanctification Theories, With Reference to Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Progressive and Holiness Traditions

By Kristian Tuppen

Contents.

Page.

Introduction. 4.

Points of Agreement. 5.

The Measure of Sanctification Attainable in this Life. 8.

The Case for the Sinless Ideal. 8.

Sinless Perfection. 11.

The Case Against the Sinless Ideal. 13.

Summary of the Measure of Sanctification
Attainable in this Life. 17.

The Means or Mechanism of Sanctification in the Christian Life -
How is the Christian Believer Sanctified? 17.

The Sacerdotal Approach:
Roman Catholicism 19.

Page (Cont.)

Observations Regarding Roman Catholicism. 21.

Eastern Orthodoxy. 27.

Observations Regarding Eastern Orthodoxy. 29.

Progressive Sanctification:

Anglican Evangelicalism. 31.

Observations Regarding Progressive Sanctification. 34.

Sanctification by Crisis.

The Holiness Tradition. 40.

Observations Regarding Sanctification by Crisis. 43.

Evaluation and Conclusions.

49.

Bibliography.

55.



Foreword

The following paper was submitted as part of a Master's degree in Applied Theology. My primary motivation in taking the degree was my interest in the subject of sanctification. It was written in 1998.

While writing it, I was constantly aware that I was writing for an academic, and essentially sceptical audience. The style and the content are consequently constrained by this fact. Had I absolute freedom to write as I chose and express my true-held understandings about the subject, I would write differently. Tom felt that the paper was nonetheless valuable, principally because of its breadth: it includes Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Progressive (Anglican/Episcopalian), Holiness, and Pentecostal conceptions of sanctification, and touches on a few others along the way.

My personal leaning is heavily towards the Holiness conception of sanctification. I believe sanctification to be a very definite experience, frequently as clear, as definite and as memorable as one's first experience of salvation. I am not SO much moved by terminology, but very much by testimony. It matters not a great deal to me if it is called 'the second blessing', 'the clean heart', 'Beulah land', 'Sabbath Rest', 'entire sanctification', or 'inwrought holiness': but it overwhelms my heart to hear a testimony of 'perfect love', the LORD enthroned in the heart, and habitual victory over every inward and outward sin.

Jesus explained that he 'only did the things he saw the Father do'. I believe that this is the standard of ministry to which we are called, and which the Father intends us to realise, in these days.

Kristian Tuppen

Kent, England, 2002

Website Editor's Foreword

Through the mists of time souls have struggled with their various conceptions of holiness, because holiness is a mystery not of this earth. It is instead a mystery of His own nature and character. Brave expeditions to the poles will not uncover this mystery, for it is hid in Him.

It IS Him. Only those who have sold their all and now dwell within Him can plumb these depths.

In each chaotic age souls project onto Him their own desperate pre-conceptions. The actual truth regarding His own Holiness can be none of the enclosed theories. His actual mystery is too glorious for words to convey: only lives consumed in His Holy purposes shew this radiance forth. That is why reading lives of Holiness Saints has such an important role on this website.

Regardless, of the mystery , it helps us mere mortals to describe it, even though it may be "through a glass darkly". I was frankly surprised and gratified to see Kristian's paper competantly describe such a wide variety of positions that have been taken on this most essential of gospel topics. It has helped me to gain more appreciation for the historical sweep of our quest toward the mystery of His own Holiness.

What a voyage of discovery the Lord has taken us on! Read this to gain an idea of where this ship of discovery has taken us so far; so that you may better gird your loins of faith for the soon culmination of our glorious voyage!

Yours in His Service;

Tom Plumb

Alberta, Canada 2002

Notions of Sactification

Introduction.

This study is an examination of Christian doctrines of sanctification. With the necessary restrictions on its length, it has no pretensions of being an exhaustive study of what is a quite vast subject- volumes have been written about the traditional Roman Catholic understanding of sanctification alone. It would be similarly possible to write a small tome on the doctrine of

'sinless perfection', although nobody in recent times appears to have tried.

Sanctification does not command a great deal of interest among modern applied theologians, probably not because it is not important, but because, for one, theology has tended away, in recent times, from personal spirituality toward corporate and social spirituality. The rise of liberation theology is perhaps an example of this change in emphasis. There is also a sense in which sanctification has been extensively considered and these received understandings still appear quite adequate. However, such things ought not entirely preclude the study of sanctification in today's applied theology. Notions of sanctification have been, and will continue to be, an important means of expressing *how* the practical life of the Christian is transformed. While a new *relation* with God is formed at justification, notions of sanctification seek to enunciate how the new *character* which *corresponds* to this new relation is subsequently produced in the Christian. Consequently, notions of sanctification have also been an important means of expressing both the *nature* of holiness – what really is holy character? - and the *measure* of holiness to which the Christian ought to aspire.

So sanctification doctrines enable us to enunciate, first, the means by which the practical Christian life is transformed; secondly, the nature of holiness; and, thirdly, the measure of holiness possible in the present life. This study is primarily occupied with two of these themes, the first and the third.

Points of Agreement.

Most notions of sanctification are, at some point, by some party, disputed, but we may, at the outset, lay some foundations which are generally accepted.

The first is a **definition** of sanctification. Most theologians like to distinguish two meanings of the word 'sanctify' or 'sanctification' as employed in the Bible. The first, it is said, means 'to set apart to the service of God'. Where 'sanctify' is used in the Old Testament it is generally noted that it is with this meaning in mind. Hence, we see that the Temple, the vessels in the Temple, the Levitical priesthood and the nation of Israel itself were 'sanctified', they were 'set apart to the service of God'. Alternatively, 'to sanctify' can be interpreted more literally, in which

case it means 'to make holy'.¹ This is the predominant use of the term in the New Testament. It refers to the inner transformation of a person (or people), the ' . . . actual realisation of holy character'. It has an ethical and a moral aspect to it, and consequently it is not possible to sanctify (in this sense) an inanimate object, or an animal. The use of 'sanctify' in this sense is evident in the later prophets of the Old Testament, but it tends to be more dominant in the New where, ' . . . not holy offerings by a holy priesthood in a holy temple, but a holy character is [now] required'.²

Most theologians of whichever Christian traditions are perfectly happy with these definitions and this distinction. It may not be agreed in every single instance whether sanctification is referring to 'setting apart' or whether it means 'making inwardly holy' (there is some dispute, for example, about its use in 1 Cor. 6: 11) but they are agreed that these are accurate, basic definitions. And it is broadly accepted that 'setting apart' is the predominant sense in the Old Testament and 'making inwardly holy' the predominant in the New.

A second area of general agreement regarding sanctification is that it is of great importance to the Christian. The Christian is called to be holy. It is not an optional extra. The measure of holiness to be obtained, and even the precise nature and the marks of holiness are not so indisputable, but all are agreed that the Christian ought to be holy. The scriptures are replete with pertinent quotations: the supreme standard and pattern of holiness is Jesus Christ (Mark 1: 24; Acts 3: 14); God intends that His people conform to the image of His Son (Romans 8: 29); the will of God for the believer is his sanctification (1 Thess. 5: 23 – 24); the Scriptures command us 'Be ye holy, as I am holy'(1 Peter 1: 16) and assure us that ' . . . without holiness none shall see the LORD'(Heb. 12: 14). Jesus spoke of a righteousness beyond that of the Pharisee which should characterise the disciple (Matt. 5: 20), and Paul frequently referred to the lofty standards which ought to prevail in the Christian community (2 Cor. 3: 3; Gal. 5: 16; Eph. 4: 22 -24). Without multiplying quotations these suffice to suggest [the necessity of holiness for the Christian](#) which is agreed in all doctrines of sanctification.

Thirdly (and here we have to be slightly cautious) Christian sanctification doctrines generally contend that only Christians can be sanctified. In theological terms, [sanctification \(in the](#)

¹ From the Latin *sanctus* holy; *facere* to make.

² E. Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression*, Philadelphia, Judson Press, 1917, p. 417

sense of being made inwardly holy) cannot occur without justification. It is generally explained in such terms as these:

God alone is holy. Holiness is a participation in the holiness of God. None outside God are holy. Man is a sinner, a rebel against God who has lost the right to appear before Him. There is no possibility of him sharing in God's holiness unless His condemnation of him as a sinner is annulled, unless God gives him back the right to appear before Him. This He has done through Christ. He, the Lamb of God who sits at the right hand of the Father, is the sinner's righteousness; that is to say that He grants to the sinner the right to appear before God, the right to pray to God, the right to hope that God will grant his prayers, the right to live in the service of God. This righteousness before God, solely the result of his justification by faith in Christ, enables the sinner to receive holiness from God, to participate in His holiness. Therefore, righteousness must precede holiness.³ Or, to put it differently, the sinner must have access to that spiritual realm where holiness dwells in order to experience its reality. Until he surrenders his self-righteousness and accepts Christ alone as his surety before God he shall remain outside the realm of sanctification.

Thus, sanctification is a participation in God's holiness. This is impossible until the sinner is declared by God to be acceptable to Him. This can only be so when he accepts Christ as his righteousness. If this is so then sanctification is excluded to believers of other religions and nonbelievers.

There are objectors to this position. Jurgen Moltmann believes that sanctification today means 'rediscovering the sanctity of life and the divine mystery of creation.' It is 'the defence of life and creation from manipulation, secularisation and violence'. He says, 'If whatever God has made and loves is holy, then life is holy in itself, and to live with love and joy means sanctifying it.'⁴ M. Furlong is of the same opinion, asserting that since God made the world and is in the world, the world is holy. And, Man, too, is holy, because he is in the world and, further, because he was also made in the image of God. He may be separated from his *ideal* fellowship with God but that does not necessarily exclude him entirely from the divine nature.⁵

³This is a very close paraphrasing of R. Prenter's excellent explanation of this aspect of sanctification found in his article The Reformed Tradition of Holiness, in M. Chavchavadze, *Man's Concern with Holiness*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1970. pp. 124 - 127.

⁴ J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, London, 1992, p. 172 -173, 176.

⁵ M. Furlong, in the extended preface to Chavchavadze, *op. cit.*

In fairness to both of them, neither are particularly concerned with how the practical life of the Christian is transformed; their concern is more with how we may regain the notion that life in its broadest sense is sanctified, 'set apart to God'. Even so, both of their understandings seem to indicate that they rather favour the notion that all men are naturally sons of God, which, conservative theologians would point out, severely minimises the cardinal Christian doctrine of the new birth.⁶ Of any arguments in favour of pre-justification sanctification, John MacQuarrie's are the most attractive. MacQuarrie suggests that a measure of sanctification is occurring outside the justified state when, for example, people are being convicted of their need for forgiveness or are recognising that their lives appear to lack any purpose.⁷

However, the above three aspects of sanctification are points of general agreement among sanctification doctrines: sanctification is either 'setting apart' or it is 'making inwardly holy'; its necessity in the Christian life is clearly spoken of in Scripture; and it is only truly spoken of regarding one in the justified state. There is, finally, one other notion of sanctification upon which theologians are agreed, and that pertains to the [nature](#) of holiness.

A degree of caution is required here. All that we may truly say is that most (*probably* all) theologians agree that when we speak of holiness of the inward kind a notion of sin is present. That is to say that one could not define holiness without carrying an implication of sin or sinlessness. So, for example, if someone claimed to be becoming more holy, implied in that statement is that he is not as sinful as he used to be. More holy equals less sin; less holy equals more sin. Since most are basically agreed that sin may be defined as contravention of the known will of God and that the will of God is expressed in the Law (*nomos*), Antinomianism is firmly rejected. Holiness *does* involve obedience to the law of God. But it was commented that we needed to be cautious here, and the reason for that is this. Christian traditions define holiness variably. A traditional Roman Catholic's notion of holiness would include the regular performance of 'good works' and the frequent partaking of the sacraments. On the other hand a disciple of the Holiness tradition believes that sinlessness and the spontaneous and genuine exhibition of the fruits of the Spirit are the manifestation of a true holiness. So the former might accuse the latter of unholiness for his neglect of the sacraments while the latter might accuse the former of having a cold, Law-bound heart and a miserable face. The only

⁶ For example, E. Y. Mullins, who has examined the notion of the natural sonship of all men and remarks that it is does not have a strong case from Scripture. *Op. cit.*, pp 401 - 409.

⁷ J. MacQuarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, London, SCM Press, 1966, pp. 300 - 302.

thing they might agree on is that neither of them should be sinning.

This brings us conveniently to the more arguable aspects of sanctification doctrines, and probably one of the two most contentious of all – the *measure* of sanctification possible in this present life.

The Measure of Sanctification Attainable in this Life.

Immediately we can make a simple division. There are those in the Christian Church who believe that it is possible to be 'entirely' sanctified (whatever that might mean, and we shall explore that later) in this present life and there are those who do not. Those who do not believe in entire sanctification overwhelmingly outnumber those who do.

Our mark in this matter must be Scripture. That the Christian is called to be holy is not disputed, neither is the notion that Jesus Christ is the supreme standard and pattern of holiness (Mark 1: 24; Acts 3: 14) and that God intends His people to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8: 29). But how far can we read in such texts and their like a sense that the Christian can be entirely sanctified? How far is the notion of a basically sinless life being expressed in Scripture?

The Case For the Sinless Ideal.

According to R. N. Flew in his excellent survey, *The Idea of Perfection*, the Synoptic Gospels view the Christian life as involving nothing less than the imitation of God's perfection. He believes that this ideal was fully embraced by the early Christian communities: 'For us, perhaps it is difficult to imagine a community where that *logion* ['perfection'] could be taken seriously. Here it dominates the thought.'⁸ They retained, for example, Jesus's teachings from the Sermon on the Mount and His command 'Be ye perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect'(Matt. 5: 48), and they believed, he remarks, that the new religion offered immeasurable power to meet the heightened demands made by their LORD. It was a

⁸R. N. Flew, *The Idea of Christian Perfection: An Historical Study of the Christian Ideal for the Present Life*, London, OUP, 1934, p. 5

covenant of grace: 'With men it is impossible, with God all things are possible'.⁹

Absolutely central to these early Church notions of Christian perfection was the doctrine of sinlessness. Flew suggests that only in the middle of the third century did this begin to wane, and even then not decisively.¹⁰ But for the first two hundred years of the Christian Church, believers expected to live without sin. Indeed, so literally was Baptism said to render a believer dead to sin that there was no little perplexity when it was realised that post-Baptismal sin was actually possible.¹¹

Flew suggests further that the case for the sinless ideal can be drawn from a number of other places in the New Testament. Of the Pauline Epistles he remarks that they '...contain passages which appear to assume that the Christian should, and can, live a sinless life.'¹² He remarks of Paul that while he made no claim to be sinless, and he certainly did not claim that the Christian *could* not sin, there is clear inference from his writing that sinless living was the ideal and that it was possible.¹³ The sixth chapter of Romans contains some of the clearest indications of the apostle's thought: 'Shall we go on sinning that grace may abound? By no means! (vv. 1 -2) . . . the body of sin [has been] done away with that we should no longer be slaves to sin (v. 6) . . . count yourselves dead to sin (v. 11) . . . you have been set free from sin and become slaves to righteousness' (v. 18). Finally, in the Johannine writings Flew believes that no less a standard of the Christian life is expressed; does not the apostle say that 'he who is born of God does not sin, for God's seed abideth in him'(1 John 3: 9)? John's thought, Flew believes, may be well summarised by saying that, basically, the Christian does not sin, that ' . . . through Christ he is the victor over the sin principle.'¹⁴ F. J. Miles offers the identical conclusion¹⁵ on the Johannine writings and in another place remarks that,

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 131 - 137. What reasons may we suggest for the wane in the notion of sinlessness? There are probably two. The first was the diminishing sense of God's nearness. Flew remarks on the overwhelming impression of the reality of God among the early church. There remained, for example, a strong expectation of the end of the age for many years after Jesus's death and resurrection, evidenced by Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. A probable second reason for the diminishing notion of sinlessness is the intellectual wisdom of Graeco-Roman philosophy and Pagan beliefs which began to take hold in the Church following Constantine's conversion in the fourth century. G. Bennet notes how seriously this affected the message of the Christian gospel, profoundly reducing the notion of supernatural, Holy Spirit empowered living. (Bennet in *Commissioned to Heal and Other Helpful Essays*, Evesham, Worcs., Arthur James Ltd., 1979, p. 25.)

¹¹This was observed in Flew, *op.cit.*, pp. 131 - 135.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. viii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 92 -117, partic. pp. 111 -112.

¹⁵ F. J. Miles, *Through the Holy Spirit*, Nottingham, CEU, 1939, p. 52

'We are rightly to suggest that the life in Christ is intended by God to be an unsinning life,. . . Surely God can be satisfied with nothing less. Imputed righteousness in Christ is the prelude that makes possible to us the imparted righteousness of Christ. Our God, 'Who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity' could never be a party to a mere white-washing make believe.'¹⁶

R. A. Torrey declared that, 'It is the privilege of the child of God in the power of the Holy Spirit to have victory over sin every day and every hour and every moment'¹⁷ and J. H. G. Barker remarked,

' There is no suggestion in Scripture that Christians are perfected [in spirit] at death – all the scriptures use words and tenses which indicate cleansing, fullness and sanctification now in order that we might be blameless at His coming. . . Our LORD's beatitude, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God', suggests the possibility of heart cleanness now, and not at death.'¹⁸

Sinless Perfection.

If one was looking to defend a notion of sinlessness from Scripture then Flew's study would be the most helpful resource (although Barker's is also very good). Probably Flew's clearest message is that sinlessness was the ideal for the early Christian communities and they believed they could live it. Furthermore, he strongly cautions,

'If we dismiss Paul's description [of the Christian life] as 'ideal' because we live no-one lives like it, that may be no condemnation of St. Paul, but rather of ourselves. It may be that we have been content to live far below the level of life God intended it to be lived in this world.'¹⁹

At this point, however, a degree of caution is necessary. By contending for sinlessness (or what

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁷ R. A. Torrey, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, Pennsylvania, Whitaker House, 1996 ed., p. 127.

¹⁸ J. H. G. Barker, *This is the Will of God: A Study in the Doctrine of Entire Sanctification as a Definite Experience*, London, Epworth Press, 1954, p. 36 -37.

is now more commonly called 'entire sanctification'), we ought to be sure we are *not* contending for sinless perfection. Sinless perfection says that the believer *cannot* sin. It does this in one of two ways. Either it says that once a Christian is justified, he is also in that same moment, completely sanctified (whether this is *imputed* holiness or *imparted* holiness is disputed); and consequently, subsequent to conversion, any thought the believer may take or action he may commit cannot be deemed anything other than holy, because in God's eyes, he *is* holy. In the past those who have adopted this theology have basically used it as an excuse to live a flagrant life of sin.²⁰ It is antinomianism taken to the extreme.

The alternative doctrine of sinless perfection urges believers to seek a second, decisive experience of entire sanctification, *which then renders sin impossible because the sinful nature has been rooted out* and sin quite simply has no attraction for the believer. John Wesley got close to this on occasion – the notion that all desire for sin had been entirely removed – but, critically, he denied that this was a permanent state.²¹ Sinless perfectionists deny that sin is possible for the sanctified believer, not only momentarily, but permanently.^{22 23}

So, even if we would contend for the notion of sinlessness or 'entire sanctification' it would seem to be extremely unwise to embrace any notion of 'sinless perfection' because implied in it is either the notion that the believer is exempt from the standards of the Law, or that the sinful nature has been entirely destroyed. Both notions seem contrary to Scripture. Although the New Covenant sets the believer free from the law it does not mean he is free to *break* the law. He is free from the law in that he is no longer obliged to fulfill it, *but Christ within him undertakes to do so for him*; the net result is that the Law is still obeyed. Paul says in Romans 3: 31, 'Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.'

With regard to the notion that the sinful nature is entirely rooted out in an experience of

²⁰Instances of such behaviour are noted in John Wesley's *Works*, whose doctrine of Christian perfection was not infrequently distorted into this form of sinless perfectionism. See for example, Volume VI of Wesley's *Works*, Michigan, Zondervan, 1872 ed., Sermon XL, Christian Perfection, pp. 1 - 23.

²¹*Ibid.*, e.g. p. 5. Advocates of 'entire sanctification' have frequently been accused of preaching a doctrine of sinless perfection. John Wesley is the most obvious example. Because he spoke much of 'perfect love' and the possibility of living without known sin he was often misrepresented as a sinless perfectionist. He strenuously denied and refuted the charge whenever it was made.

²²A further, very important objection to sinless perfectionism is that it must necessarily include perfection of knowledge and understanding. If there is no perfect knowledge then the believer is prone to sins of omission.

²³Most who adopted this perfectionist theology would tend to live very pious lives - they were not antinomian - but should they fall into 'sin' they would simply claim that it was impossible since the sinful nature had been expunged.

entire sanctification, we might observe Andrew Murray's apposite comments regarding 1 John 3: 8, 10:

'Note the difference in the two statements (ver. 8), "If we say that we *have no sin*," and (ver. 10), "If we say that we *have not sinned*." The two expressions cannot be equivalent; the second would then be an unmeaning repetition of the first. *Having sin* in verse 8 is not the same as *doing sin* in verse 10. *Having sin* is having a sinful nature. **The holiest believer must each moment confess that he has sin within him – the flesh, namely, in which dwelleth no good thing.** Sinning or *doing sin* is something very different; it is yielding to indwelling sinful nature and falling into actual transgression. . . **The evil nature, the flesh, is unchanged in its enmity towards God.**'²⁴

Murray's words express an extremely important point regarding sanctification. Scripture does *not* give license for claiming that the believer *cannot* sin. On the contrary, *in his present body, he shall always carry a measure of the fleshly nature*, and consequently he is always prone to temptation; hence John the apostle's assurance, 'If we do sin, we have an Advocate in heaven' (1 John 2: 1).

At this point we are not examining *how* one comes by an essentially sinless life, only whether Scripture testifies to it as the Christian's calling. What it is probably safe to say is that provided one does not begin to claim that the Christian *cannot* sin, the notion that sin can be exceptional in the Christian life is probably scripturally defensible.

The Case Against the Sinless Ideal.

There is however, an equally strong, perhaps stronger, case *against* notions of sinlessness. It might be contested from three fronts. The first regards a person's understanding and awareness of sin. While most may be agreed that an obvious contravention of the Ten Commandments constitutes sin, others will emphasise that even the thought of such an action has need of forgiveness. The latter have scriptural support for this in, for example, Jesus's words regarding adultery (Matt. 5: 28), but then it must be observed that some people are more prone to introspection than others. Or, perhaps put more clearly, people's

²⁴Andrew Murray, *Abide in Christ*, Pennsylvania, Whitaker House, 1979 ed., p. 172, author's italics, but bold added.

consciousness of sin is not uniform. One appears to tolerate all manner of 'un-Christian' attitudes and practices in his or her life, and may appear to fellow believers to be little different to a heathen – he has an 'under-developed conscience' regarding sin, we could say. On the other hand, there are also earnest souls, prone to introspection or beset by a sense of inferiority, whose sin consciousness drives them to bouts of self-mortification and the like; we are liable to pity them as having an over-developed conscience regarding sin. These are the extremes to be sure, but the point is to recognise that people's tolerance, understanding and consciousness of sin differs. And so, set against the argument for sinless living, we have to observe that sinlessness can only be subjectively defined.

Our second argument against the notion of sinlessness is quite simply one of experience. For all the scriptural notions about being 'dead to sin' for example, it is patently obvious to most Christians that they are very much alive to it. Sin is probably very much a part of the average Christian experience, however much it may be despised and resisted. The argument from experience is extremely strong.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this study, the notion of sinlessness can be objected to by drawing on Scripture. There is, for a start, the highly convincing seventh chapter of the Book of Romans. The majority of Christian thinkers since approximately the fifth century have read Romans 7 to be the apostle Paul's personal experience. Romans 7 speaks of 'doing that which I do not wish to do', 'being unable to do what I wish to do' and laments this 'shameful body of death'. The apostle depicts the great conflict in the soul and a life of struggle and strife and does little to suggest a sinless life. The following chapter, Romans 8, speaks of 'life in the Spirit'. The dominant view since the fifth century is that these two passages exist side by side – that is, that the experience of Romans 7 and 8 are contemporaneous – they are experienced together in the Christian life and do not represent two distinct, sequential states.

A further Biblical text of some importance is the First Letter of John. In 1 John 3: 6, 9 the apostle asserts that, '... No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him.' That is cited as a strong argument in *favour* of sinlessness. But then, in 1 John 1: 8, we read that '... if a man claims to be without sin then the truth is not in him,' and

in 1 John 2: 1, ' . . . if we do sin, then we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ.' Clearly, sin is not impossible; we can probably go so far as to say the apostle is assuming that the Christian will sin and so assures us that provision has been made.

There are a number of other portions of Scripture that might be or have been cited to refute the ideal of sinlessness. Paul's letters to the Corinthians indicate that there was the need to correct sinful practices on more than one occasion (1 Cor. 3: 3; 1 Cor. 5: 1 -2; 2 Cor. 13: 2); Jude remarks on immoral persons among the church (Jude 3 – 5) ; Paul remarks in Philippians 3: 12 'Not that I have already obtained all this, *or have already been made perfect*'; and James observed that 'we all stumble in many ways' (James 3: 2). But in objecting to the notion of sinlessness probably the most convincing evidence remains the seventh chapter of Romans. It has so often been the testimony of Christians throughout the history of the Church that it is regarded as the apotheosis of the Christian life. Perhaps because of its centrality in this regard it is also the most controversial chapter of the book of Romans. The issue is unlikely to be resolved in a few short paragraphs, but we can state the case *against* Romans 7 as the present ideal of the Christian life as it is frequently presented.

The view favoured among those who believe in 'entire sanctification', is that Paul was not, in Romans 7, describing his personal experience but the experience of either (1) the Christian living still under the law or, (2) the unregenerate man. Romans 8, on the other hand, is held to have been his experience at the time of writing, a life of rest, freedom from struggle and victory over sin.²⁵ He has passed into the full blessings of Christ's salvation and lives gloriously in the new covenant of grace. M. Eaton says of Romans 7:

'It is quite impossible that Paul should be referring to the 'normal' Christian. The 'norm' of the Christian is not to say 'I am carnal'. The Christian says the exact opposite, in the sense of being dominated by sin. The normal Christian is not ignorant of what he is doing (7 : 15), nor is he beset by failure (7: 19 -21). . . It is also quite impossible that the normal pagan can be referred to here. The man of Romans 7: 13 -25 and even in the whole of 7: 7 -25 is an extraordinarily 'spiritual' person! He has known sin (7: 7) and has had a battle with it. He does not want to sin. This in itself puts him apart from the average person, the 'person in the street'. The

²⁵Unless otherwise stated victory over sin, sinlessness or other such expressions do not mean a permanent and unchangeable state, incapable of falling.

average person in the street does not care very much about sin. . . [No] *the wretched man of Romans 7: 7 running right through to Romans 7: 25 is a description of the maximum the holy law of God can do in the unconverted person.*¹²⁶

C. Finney offered the same conclusion: 'Whoever has no experience but that of the seventh chapter of Romans is not justified at all'.²⁷

In fairness the verdict that Romans 7 refers to one still outside the justified state is not as common as the view that it is a description of the Christian still living under law. Writes one commentator,

'We must admit that some of what he [Paul] describes here [Romans 7] is not a Christian experience, but none the less many Christians do experience it. What then is the teaching of this chapter? Romans 6 deals with freedom from sin. Romans 7 deals with freedom from the Law. In chapter 6 Paul has told us how we could be delivered from sin, and we concluded that this was all that was required. Chapter 7 now teaches that deliverance from sin is not enough, but that we also need to know deliverance from the Law. If we are not fully emancipated from the Law, we can never know full emancipation from sin.'²⁸

With regard to Romans 7 it may be prudent to recall Reinhold Niebuhr's remark. He observed that one's understanding of Romans 7 – whether it was intended to be purely retrospective or was meant to express a tension which even the redeemed experience, '*... is an exegetical problem which is answered according to previous doctrinal assumptions.*'²⁹ It is an extensive topic. In this study we are reduced to the observation that the chapter provides a powerful, but certainly not irrefutable, objection to notions of sinlessness.

After Romans 7 the First Letter of John is the most frequently cited as a case against the sinless ideal; the apostle declares 'If we say we have no sin then the truth is not in us'. In defence of the sinless ideal at this point we might recall the distinction Andrew Murray made between *having* sin and *doing* sin: all Christians *have* sin – it is the indestructible flesh – but that is not to say that all Christians *do* sin and that sin is inevitable. Further, those who contend for

²⁶M. Eaton, *Living Under Grace*, Milton Keynes, Word Publishing, 1994. Pp. 187 - 188, author's italics.

²⁷C. Finney/L. Parkhurst, *Principles of Liberty*, Minneapolis, Bethany House Publishers, 1983. p. 95

²⁸W. Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*, Eastbourne, Kingsway, 1961. Pp. 102, 1996 ed.

²⁹Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, London, Nisbet, 1943, p. 110. [italics added]

the sinless ideal point out that the apostle's words 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves' (1 John 1:8) may be made into the unconscious justification for a low standard of Christian living. Their suggestion is that it is far more desirable to overstate the possibilities of sanctification in an honest desire for holiness than to understate them in a complacent satisfaction with a traditional holiness.³⁰ But the plain words of the text seem to be at the least an assurance that all Christians will sin; at their most sharp they are a rebuke to the very notion of sinlessness.

The Measure of Sanctification Possible in this Life - Summary.

The preceding remarks have explored the notion of sinlessness as an ideal for the Christian life. It was accepted that Scripture calls the Christian believer to be holy but then asked how far this implied sinlessness. According to R. N. Flew, until at least the middle of the third century the Church preached sinlessness as the normal Christian life. Following his observations it was suggested that Scripture *could* support a notion of sinlessness (or what is now commonly termed 'entire sanctification') so long as this did not mean sinless perfectionism. The common objections to the notion of sinlessness were then discussed – the variable and subjective interpretation of sin, the experiential testimony of the great majority of Christians, and finally the significant Biblical evidence against the sinless ideal.

The major issue thus far has been the **measure** of sanctification one might expect in the present life. One's answer to this question is a fairly decisive part of one's sanctification theology. If, when one reads the Scriptures, one believes that 'entire sanctification' or the Romans 8-type experience is the present ideal, one's opinion as to how this occurs will in all probability differ considerably from his who accepts the Romans 7-type experience. This is what we will observe in our following question – How is the Christian believer sanctified?

The Means or Mechanism of Sanctification - How is the Christian Believer Sanctified?

It was noted at the outset that notions of sanctification are an important means of expressing how the practical life of the Christian is transformed. This is very much the point at

³⁰See, for example, F. J. Miles, *op. cit.*, p. 52 and R. N. Flew *op. cit.*, p. 60.

issue here. The Christian Church through the centuries has found three broad but distinct ways to answer the question 'How is the Christian believer sanctified?'. The first is the [sacerdotal](#) approach, exemplified in traditional Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. The Church and the sacraments are deemed (in the former at least) quite literally indispensable to an individual's sanctification, and, indeed, to his salvation.

The second approach we might call, for want of a better term, '[progressive sanctification](#)'. Progressive sanctification is the dominant theology in the Reformed Church and has been so since, particularly, the time of the Puritans. It teaches that the believer is sanctified through his many experiences, a good number of them difficult and painful. In the words of E. Y. Mullins,

'The means of sanctification is chiefly the truth of the Gospel (John 17: 17), but truth can be learnt through all the means of grace – in the church, in preaching, in fellowship, in temptation, trial and conquest...in short, the whole circle of life's activities is to minister to Christian growth.'³¹

Generally, doctrines of progressive sanctification presumes that Romans 7 is the present ideal for the Christian life.

The third approach could be termed [sanctification by crisis](#). The Pentecostal tradition calls it 'the second blessing'; the Holiness tradition favours 'entire sanctification' or 'endowment with power'. The terminology is, for the moment, not important, but the theology basically says that there is a second, definite and decisive experience, subsequent to regeneration, by which the Christian believer is sanctified (frequently 'entirely'). It is a moment of crisis, sometimes preceded by much anguish for the believer. The effect on his life is not infrequently claimed to be at least as dramatic as his conversion. Every Christian theology which teaches sanctification by crisis has its roots in John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection. Crisis sanctification doctrines generally assert that Romans 8 is the Christian's present and realisable ideal.

³¹ Mullins, *op. cit.*, p. 423

The Sacerdotal Approach: (i) Roman Catholicism.

The traditional Roman Catholic doctrine of sanctification can be summarised as follows.³²

A man or woman believes that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of mankind. He or she desires to enter the Catholic Church. Accordingly, he or she is baptised in water and receives a measure of 'justifying grace'. Justifying grace is imparted (rather than imputed) and it is God Himself – it is the divine nature. Notwithstanding this, the believer cannot thenceforth be sure of his eternal salvation. He needs to increase his justifying grace (his partaking of the divine nature) in order that he may be more likely to be eternally saved. To increase his justifying grace he performs 'salutary acts' ('acts necessary to salvation') with the aid of 'actual grace' bestowed through the sacraments. Salutary acts entitle him to sanctifying grace - ' . . . a just man merits for himself through each good work an increase of sanctifying grace. . . .'³³ - a grace that effects the purification of his 'soul substance'. Sanctifying grace is *not* God Himself; it is ' . . . a created, supernatural gift, really distinct from God'.³⁴ Greater sanctifying grace merits him more justifying grace that he might be more confident of his eternal salvation.

We must make a number of simple observations. First, obviously, the Catholic believer cannot be certain of his eternal salvation:

' . . .except by divine revelation no-one can know with the certainty of faith if he be in the state of grace. . . whether he has fulfilled all the conditions necessary for the achieving of justification.'³⁵

³²Of all of the doctrines of sanctification here examined, Roman Catholicism's is examined at the greatest length to avoid misinterpretation. It is an extremely intricate theology and, naturally, heavily bound up in the Roman notion of justification. Further, it is acknowledged that the doctrine represented here is the *traditional* Catholic doctrine, that which is confirmed by the Vatican, and the largest wing of the Roman Church worldwide. In the course of this study the writer spoke with a highly educated and devout American Catholic who confessed that the intricacies of sanctification doctrine completely eluded her. Yet her received understanding of the doctrine demonstrated that Vatican teaching was being faithfully, if simply, continued. The primary source for this summary of Catholic doctrine is L. Ott's, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, Cork, Mercier Press, 1963. Ott is a Catholic apologist.

³³L. Ott, pp. 267 - 268.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 254

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 262, and, 'He may hold a high moral certainty that he is justified and his conscience may bear him witness, but he may not, apart from divine revelation, be certain.' (Ott)

Consequently, (and this is our second observation) the Catholic believer is always working to secure his salvation. *His certainty of salvation may be in direct proportion to the measure of sanctification he attains.* His sanctification is increased by the performance of salutary acts (commonly called 'good works' but literally defined in the Catholic tradition as 'acts necessary to salvation'³⁶).

Salutary acts cannot be performed without grace. Grace is not a disposition of God, but a kind of *substance* which 'inheres in the soul-substance'³⁷. It imparts strength to the believer's will and enlightens his understanding.³⁸ The primary means of grace are the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. The Catholic sacraments are consequently more than occasions of remembrance or representations of the divine. Rather, '...the sacraments 'contain' the grace which they signify and bestow it upon those who do not hinder it'³⁹ ; '...all the sacraments of the New Covenant confer sanctifying grace on the receiver.'⁴⁰ Particular emphasis is given to the sacrament of baptism which is believed to '... imprint an indelible spiritual mark on the soul which is never removed', even by mortal sin.⁴¹

If sanctifying grace can be increased it can also be hindered or even lost; if it is lost then the acquired justified state is threatened. The indelible imprint effected by baptism is no assurance of salvation, of perseverance to the end in the justified state. If a person falls into 'grievous sin' a just person may regain his state of grace by the sacrament of penance – a particular act, or acts, considered as satisfaction offered to God as a reparation for sin committed. The believer's sanctifying grace is, on completion of his penance, restored to its previous measure.

Finally, it is also notable that Catholic doctrine teaches that sanctification continues after death. It is said that, '... the souls of the just which, in moment of death, are burdened with

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 255.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 225.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 328

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 232

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 332. We ought to note that in Catholic doctrine the believer is not deemed to have received his first measure of justifying grace until he has been baptised. It is not his believing on Christ that confers upon him his new status; it is the very act of baptism.

venial sin or temporal punishments due to sins, enter Purgatory'.⁴² The 'cleansing fire' (*Purgatorium*) is a place and state of temporal penal justification. Just souls who have departed their earthly life with true repentance and love for God but who were unable for whatever reason to render efficient satisfaction for their trespasses through the sacraments and penance are believed to be purified after death with 'the punishments of purification'.

Observations Regarding Roman Catholic Doctrine.

The Catholic doctrine of sanctification presents us with four very important questions. One, how and to what extent is sanctification related to justification? Two, what grounds do we have for believing that sanctification continues after death? Three, how are we to understand the Biblical concept of grace with regard to sanctification? And, four, what may be rightly said of the sacraments as a means to sanctification? Is their esteemed role supported by Scripture, for example?

To the first question. In what manner and to what extent is sanctification related to justification?

The Roman Church understands the whole concept of justification differently to the Reformed Church. There really is no grounds to suggest otherwise.⁴³ The Catholic Church believes that justification is a process which lasts an entire lifetime. The Reformed Church says that it is the work of a moment. The Catholic Church believes that it is a work of cooperation between the believer and God, the Reformed tradition understands that it is an act of God alone. The Catholic Church says that justification accompanies *objective righteousness*, the Reformed Church says that justification is an act regardless of objective righteousness.⁴⁴

Of justification the Reformed position is that Scripture teaches a once-for-all-time, completed justification for any who believe in Christ as their Saviour. It is pointed out that the

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 483.

⁴³This was the contention of H. Kung in his work, *Justification*, London, Burns and Oates, 1964. It betrays the fundamental misapprehension of the differing nature of justification in Catholic and Reformed thought.

⁴⁴In a very real sense the Catholic Church teaches that justification *follows* sanctification, whereas the Reformed Church says that sanctification follows justification. Lest this be thought to contradict the observation made earlier in this paper that sanctification cannot occur outside the justified state, it ought to be understood that according to the Catholic Church the justified state is initially entered at baptism. This may be lost (by mortal sin), but it may also be confirmed and deepened (by sanctification). In that sense, justification follows sanctification.

Biblical word for justify or justification is '*dikaioo*' which denotes a declarative act, a pronouncement, and something that is completed, not ongoing.⁴⁵ Justification does not mean, in its literal sense, that God has *made* the believer righteous, nor that the believer has, of himself, become righteous. There is no sense that the believer has done anything to merit this declared righteousness before God except believe in Christ. The Scriptures say, 'For we maintain that a man is justified by faith, *apart from works of the Law*.'⁴⁶ ; 'Therefore *having been justified by faith*, we have peace with God through our LORD Jesus Christ'⁴⁷ ; and, 'To the man who. . . trusts *God who justifies* the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness...[How blessed] is the man to whom God credits righteousness *apart from works*.'⁴⁸

The Reformed tradition contends that if the death of Christ forgave all sins, and if it fully satisfied the divine penalty due to them, and if God declares all believers righteous on the basis of their faith in Christ, then nothing else is needed to permit entrance into heaven.

The Catholic response to this understanding is that it is 'forensic' justification. It is, says Rome, 'something purely external, a kind of acquittal or declaring just that takes no account of the actual condition of the person so acquitted'.⁴⁹ Catholic doctrine contends that if there is any sort of justification, ' . . . it must happen in him as well as for him'⁵⁰; remarks Ott, ' . . . [for] it would be incompatible with the veracity and sanctity of God to declare the sinner to be justified if he remains in reality sinful.'⁵¹ In the Catholic tradition, justification is understood to be a process whereby the believer becomes more and more *objectively pleasing* to God by becoming more and more sanctified. Consequently, one *earns* heaven because of the righteous life one has lived. In Catholic thought, *one is justified only so far as one is sanctified* and therefore *sanctification is the means to greater justification*. This is demonstrated by the words of Catholic apologist, Karl Keating:

'Christ did His part, and now we have to cooperate by doing ours. If we are to pass through those [heavenly] gates, we have to be in the right spiritual state. . . The Church teaches that

⁴⁵ Mullins, *op. cit.*, p. 389.

⁴⁶ Romans 3: 28, NASB., emphasis added.

⁴⁷ Romans 5: 1, NASB, emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Romans 4: 5 - 6, emphasis added.

⁴⁹ J. MacQuarrie's words describing the Catholic objection, *Principles, op. cit.*, p. 305.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 306

⁵¹ Ott, *op. cit.*, p. 251

only souls that are *objectively good* and *objectively pleasing* to God merit heaven, and such souls are ones filled with sanctifying grace. . .the Catholic Church sees justification . . . as a true eradication of sin and a true sanctification and renewal. The soul becomes *objectively pleasing* to God and so merits heaven. It merits heaven because now it is *actually good*. . .The Bible is quite clear that we are saved by faith. The reformers were quite right in saying this, and to this extent they merely repeated the constant teaching of the Church. Where they erred was in saying that we are saved by faith *alone*.⁵²

Regrettably, some Catholics have misunderstood the Reformed position here, thinking it means that mere assent to doctrine saves entirely and that Reformed believers have little concern for good works or sanctification. On the contrary, Scripture affirms that good works and sanctification are crucial – the very knowledge of grace itself (in the Protestant sense) produces good works and growth in holy living.⁵³ However, it must surely be asked *whether Scripture indicates that the believer's justification is dependent on his good works and sanctification*. Is not more correct to understand that good works do not secure justification, but are a consequence of it? Placing any sanctifying or justifying value upon good works is difficult to substantiate with Scripture. Are not works evidence of a sanctified life rather than a means to it? Brunner very sensibly warns (and this may be heeded by all traditions although it seems particularly apposite to the Catholic tradition) that,

' . . . all energetic ethical activity carries with it a great danger. It may lead to the opinion that by such activity deliverance from evil is being accomplished.'⁵⁴

Away from justification, Catholicism also presents us with the notion that [sanctification continues after death](#), in Purgatory. The Catholic apologist, L. Ott cites scriptural evidence (which is more precisely *Apocryphal* evidence) for the existence of Purgatory, which he describes as 'only indirect'.⁵⁵ The major 'proof' for its existence lies in the testimony of the Fathers, particularly the Latin Fathers, and, says Ott, reasonable speculation:

⁵² Karl Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The Attack on "Romanism" by "Bible Christians"*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1988, pp. 166 - 168, 175.

⁵³ See, for example, Ephesians 2: 8 - 10; 1 Peter 5: 12; 2 Peter 3: 18; Colossians 1: 6.

⁵⁴ Emil Brunner, cited in Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p. 195

⁵⁵ Ott, *op. cit.*, p. 483.

'... the existence of the cleansing fire can be derived from the concept of the sanctity and justice of God. The former demands that only completely pure souls be assumed into heaven (Apoc. 21: 27); the latter demands that the punishments of sins still present be effected, but on the other hand, forbids that souls united in love with God should be cast into Hell. Therefore, an intermediate state is to be assumed, whose purpose is final purification and which for this reason is of limited duration.'⁵⁶

Purgatory is a place of cleansing and of punishment. The fact of being in Purgatory and enduring punishment for one's sins is believed to cleanse individuals from the remnants of sin – to sanctify them – even if the guilt of those sins has already been forgiven by the sacrament of penance. Broderick in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, says,

'The purpose of purgatory is to cleanse one of imperfections, venial sins, and faults, and to remit or do away with the temporal punishments due to mortal sins that have been forgiven in the Sacrament of penance...purgatorial punishments may be relieved by the offerings of the living faithful, such as masses, prayers, alms, and other acts of piety and devotion.'⁵⁷

The notion of Purgatory is based on two assumptions which deserve scrutiny; the one that God demands that each believer is 'objectively righteous' before Him, the other that the penalty for sin must be paid by the one who committed it. However, we could contend from Scripture that God imputes Christ's righteousness to the believer who need not acquire a righteousness of his own, and teaches that *full* forgiveness of sin, *including* its penalty, occurs exclusively by grace through faith in Christ alone. His death on the Cross was entirely adequate – it was a full propitiatory atonement. Hence, further sanctification after death is not easily reconciled with the Biblical witness; in addition, the fact of a state or place of Purgatory is nowhere directly attested to.

The third area of importance pertains to the nature of grace. [How are we to understand the Biblical concept of grace?](#) Roman doctrine still conceives of grace as a substance, hence its ability to 'inhere in the soul-substance' and strengthen the believer's will. McGrath locates the

⁵⁷Robert. C. Broderick, ed., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, revised and updated, Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987, p. 502.

source of this understanding in the early and medieval veneration of Mary and the mistranslation of a crucial biblical passage.⁵⁸ In Luke 1: 28, the Archangel Gabriel addresses Mary as 'one full of favour' in Reformed translations; in the Catholic Vulgate she is acclaimed as 'one full of grace'. This endorsed the idea that Mary was a receptacle of grace and one who bestowed it – hence increasing her veneration- and that grace was a kind of substance. McGrath implies that the idea is no longer prevalent, but Ott's modern contention that grace is '... a substance in reality separate and distinct from God' suggests otherwise.⁵⁹ Certainly it is the consistently implied notion of grace in the most recent Catholic Catechism.⁶⁰ Does Scripture give us grounds for seeing grace as a substance? Is not grace either an attitude of God, that disposition of God that moves Him to love men freely; or the power that He bestows to enable men to live rightly before Him, the power which is God the Holy Spirit, *not* a separate and distinct substance? While the Catholic position may be commended for its basic recognition that the believer has need of supernatural aid if he is to be sanctified⁶¹, Reformed theology would probably much prefer that the emphasis was on the Holy Spirit rather than a created substance of grace.

Fourthly, the Roman Church's understanding of sanctification ought to lead us to consider the role of the sacraments. Their importance in the Catholic Church really must not be understated. Three of them are deemed absolutely indispensable to salvation, and since salvation is dependent on sanctification their importance in *that* sphere is none the less. Says one writer, 'For the Roman Catholic, his whole life from the cradle to the grave, and even beyond the grave in Purgatory, is conditioned by the sacramental approach.'⁶² Does Scripture suggest such an esteemed role for the sacraments?

The Reformed Church generally believes that the Scriptures testify to the efficacy of two (perhaps three) sacraments, baptism, Communion, and the Anointing of the sick. The Catholic Church celebrates seven. However the primary Protestant objection is not to the number but the meaning and purpose of the sacraments. Protestantism sees its sacraments

⁵⁸ A. MacGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1988, pp. 57, 88. He also demonstrates how this understanding was a major source of revenue for the Vatican in the Middle Ages as believers gave alms in order to 'purchase' grace.

⁵⁹ Ott, *op. cit.*, p. 254

⁶⁰ *The Catholic Catechism*, London, G. Chapman, 1994 ed, p. 489, Note # 2023.

⁶¹ Ott writes, 'St. Paul teaches us that we are by nature incapable of salutary acts which lead to our eternal salvation'; '... without the special help of God the justified cannot persevere to the end. . .'. *op. cit.*, p. 231.

⁶² H. M. Carson, *Dawn or Twilight? A Study of Contemporary Roman Catholicism*, Leicester, Apollos, 1976, p. 128.

primarily as symbols and memorials of vital theological truths; Catholicism sees the sacraments as actually changing a person inwardly, by some sort of spiritual empowering. In Protestantism a sacrament underscores a promise of God; in Catholicism the sacraments infuse a special grace into the soul in order to meet a special need. Says Ankerberg, 'Catholic sacraments are . . . an outward sign of an infused grace.'⁶³ The heavily sacerdotal tendencies in traditional Catholicism are built on the rather questionable understanding of grace previously noted.

In this matter it may also be observed that sacerdotal religions frequently display a proclivity to 'objectify' the supernatural, which is adapted to the limits of naturalistic metaphysics so blurring the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. As a result participants experience only the *symbolisation* of the supernatural rather than its *reality*, as they believe. Says Nicholas Berdayev of this tendency, symbolisation 'loads men with chains when it is regarded as being already realisation.'⁶⁴ So with regard to sanctification believers assume that the sacraments are bringing them into contact with the necessary supernatural assistance, when at best they are unknowingly only acknowledging its presence. While we may commend the recognition that supernatural assistance is required for sanctification, it could be suggested that the sacraments actually hinder its efficacy. Further in this regard, strong sacerdotalism consolidates grace (without which no spiritual life has been considered possible) in the hands of an organised hierarchy,⁶⁵ so denying the individual believer the opportunity to receive it through alternative means.

So the traditional Catholic doctrine of sanctification requires a clear examination of some fundamental questions. Most significantly it underlines the need of a scripturally sound doctrine of justification. From a Reformed perspective any notion that the believer must sanctify himself in order to be justified must be questioned very closely. Does the Bible suggest at any point that justification is conditional on sanctification? Moreover, the Catholic position demonstrates the need to look at how grace is defined and how it is said to work for the believer. Are there any biblical grounds for seeing grace as a created substance distinct from God; still more, are there any grounds for believing that this substance is directly bestowed

⁶³ J. Ankerberg/ J. Weldon, *The Facts on Roman Catholicism*, Oregon, Harvest House Publishers, p. 14.

⁶⁴ For N. Berdayev's observations see his *Truth and Revelation*, London, G. Bles, 1953, pp. 140 -146.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

through the sacraments?

The Sacerdotal Approach.

(ii) The Eastern Orthodox Understanding of Sanctification.

The Eastern Orthodox Church has a different theology of redemption to the Catholic Church, so although both are sacerdotal in their understanding of sanctification they are not identical.

Orthodoxy tends not to use the term 'sanctification'. It prefers 'deification' or '*theosis*' - literally defined as 'becoming as God or as a god'. So we read Athanasius remarking that God became man that man might become God, Basil describing man as a creature who has been given the order to become a god and another (unnamed) Greek Father writing that '... the true aim of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God.'⁶⁶ Accordingly, in the Orthodox Church the question is likely to be put differently. The believer will not be asking 'How can I be sanctified?' but 'How can I be deified?' The thrust of the question is very much the same; the terms sanctification and deification *are* used synonymously, but the Orthodox preference for the latter stems from its unique understanding of the Fall.

Orthodoxy understands that at the Fall Adam and Eve rebelled against God. In consequence they were guilty, rendered mortal, and lost their 'god-likeness'. Every descendant of Adam and Eve does *not* inherit their guilt *nor* their estrangement from God – if they are guilty before God or estranged from Him it will be the result of their personal rebellion. However, there does remain the central issue of mortality. Adam's descendants assuredly inherit his mortality and it is an ill source of motivation. Man is constrained by a fear of death, consequently strives for self-preservation and is rendered deeply self-preoccupied. Such an existence, if it is life at all, is extremely deficient and defective. It is not, says Orthodoxy, the life for which man was intended by God. He needs to lose his mortality and then he will be able to participate in the divine (the pre-Fall state) once again. How does he do this? It is best explained by John Zizioulas in *Being as Community*, an intricate but faithful explanation of the

⁶⁶ T. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1963, p. 241.

full Orthodox doctrine of redemption. Zizioulas draws out the highly developed theology of 'theosis' and demonstrates the esteem the Orthodox Church has for itself as a community and the sacraments it administers.⁶⁷

Of 'theosis' Zizioulas says that it means 'participation not in the nature or substance of God , but in His personal existence. The goal of salvation.. [therefore].. is that the personal life which is realised in God should also be realised on the level of human existence.'⁶⁸ Salvation is consequently identified in the Orthodox tradition with the 'realisation of personhood in man'. A man has not, according to Orthodox understanding , gained his personhood until he is saved (or, more precisely until he has been baptised) because he is deemed to have inherited through Adam that defective form of life which is, among other things, 'bound by mortality , inevitably sinful, and lacking in freedom from the Prince of this world.'⁶⁹ The humanistic concept of the person is rejected. Personhood may only be realised in Christ for only here is 'true and natural life' and only here does man acquire the very being and nature which God originally intended. At baptism he becomes 'alive in spiritual energies'.⁷⁰ In this way, like the majority of sanctification theologies, Eastern Orthodoxy rejects notions of sanctification outside justification.

Zizioulas terms the pre-baptismal life 'the hypostasis of biological existence', and the post-baptismal state 'the hypostasis of ecclesial existence'. The former (biological) is interwoven with individuality and death and constrained by biological laws, although God had always intended man to exist freely, eternally and in communion with others. But Man has been born out of an 'ecstatic fact' (erotic love) which is 'inherently bound up with the 'passion' of ontological necessity'. Ontologically, nature precedes the person and dictates its laws to him (by so-called 'instinct'), but of course thereby destroys freedom at its ontological base. This 'passion' is closely connected with createdness and to be free from it man must be rooted or constituted in an ontological reality which does not suffer from createdness. Hence he needs to be 'born anew'. To use Zizioulas's term, he needs to 'realise his ecclesial hypostasis'.⁷¹

⁶⁷ J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, London, Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1985, particularly pp. 49 - 65

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49

⁶⁹ J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, Oxford, Fordham UP, 1975, p. 193

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 194

⁷¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 56.

How may he do that? Through, in and by the Church. In early Patristic literature the image of the Church as a mother is common, suggesting that the Church may bring about a new birth. This occurs at baptism. A man is born anew. His relationship with the world changes. He is no longer bound by the laws of biology but now transcends them. So, for example, his brothers are now the members of the Church and not of the family. In his biological hypostasis he was obliged to love exclusively – he loved those who were his blood. But a characteristic of man in the ecclesial hypostasis is that he transcends exclusivism - he has become part of a great network of relationships which are not determined by biological obligation but by a communion with God. Consequently only in the Church has man the power to express himself as a catholic person which was God's original intention.

Observations Regarding the Eastern Orthodox Understanding of Sanctification.

The Orthodox doctrine of sanctification is a less complicated variant on the traditional Roman Catholic position. Says Timothy Ware,

'There is nothing esoteric or extraordinary about the methods which we must follow in order to be deified. If a man asks 'How can I be god?' the answer is very simple; go to Church, receive the sacraments, pray to God 'in spirit and truth', and follow the commandments. So long as a man sincerely tries to do this then however weak his attempts may be and however often he may fall, he is already in some degree deified.'⁷²

While Orthodoxy is essentially a sacerdotal religion this aspect is less pronounced than in traditional Roman Catholicism. The sacraments remain important – they are 'the means appointed by God for the receiving of the Holy Spirit'⁷³ - particularly the Eucharist and Baptism, but the notion of penance is much less emphasised – one writer suggests it is, in the present day, very rare.⁷⁴ Similarly the veneration of relics and saints is considerably diminished.

The Eastern Church does not entirely accept the Protestant notion of justification by faith,

⁷²Ware, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

⁷⁴Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

but then it does differ from the Catholic position as well. It prefers, first, to speak of 'reconciliation' by faith ⁷⁵. Once an Orthodox believer is baptised, he is deemed to be united or 'reconciled' once more to God and need not work to secure this standing any further. The works a believer undertakes and the sacraments he receives are not deemed to earn him justification ('reconciliation') because that has been effected at baptism. However, it is possible to lose this state of reconciliation should he commit a mortal sin (adultery, murder or apostasy), in which case he is to perform a penance in order to regain his position.

The Eastern believer does not earn eternal salvation by his sanctification in the same way as the Catholic believer does. When he performs good works or participates in the sacraments it is that he might be sanctified, that he might partake in the divine nature more fully. While there is still the assumption that these activities actually sanctify the soul, and that sanctifying grace (in Eastern Orthodoxy, God's sanctifying Spirit) is bestowed through the sacraments, the motivation for them is more the appreciation of the Godhead than a fear of losing one's salvation.

Reformed theology is probably more comfortable with the notion that the sacraments may communicate grace to the believer, so long as grace is not seen as a substance, and something distinct from God. Similarly, it may find the Orthodox understanding of good works more amenable than the Catholic alternative, because they are not so entwined with justification. However, there remains the disputable tendency to see works as having intrinsic sanctifying value. The Reformed tradition prefers the notion that works are more an outworking of one's salvation.

Orthodoxy distinguishes itself in its view of God as the divine Physician waiting to heal rather than the divine Judge seeking full propitiation. Sanctification is consequently viewed with less fear and more thanksgiving as one believes that one is gradually being taken further into the life of God, rather than being a constant assumed need to appease God with a righteousness of one's own. Further, the preference for a notion of '*theosis*' rather than sanctification has the welcome implication that the believer is very really partaking in the divine nature. Sanctification tends to suggest only the eradication of something evil within, which of course it

⁷⁵See, for example, D. Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, New York, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980, pp. 184-185.

is, but it rather reduces the extraordinarily positive side of the process – the forming of a holy, loving and spontaneous character. The same can be said for the Orthodox concern for personhood, and the observation that this is basically unrealised outside of God. Mullins, a Baptist theologian, makes the observation that a person is never more deeply conscious of his own personality and freedom than when the Holy Spirit moves upon his spirit.⁷⁶

So if our notions of sanctification could include more developed notions of one's personhood and the unconscious (in the sense of spontaneous) exhibition of the divine nature we would be richer for it. Regrettably, sanctification carries with it the discouraging thought that one's true nature will be lost in, or suppressed by, God, rather than the truer notion that it is true life and liberty. Eastern Orthodoxy redresses the balance somewhat and ought to be strongly commended. It does retain however a fairly strong predilection for tradition and form, particularly in its church services.⁷⁷ A claustrophobic formalism will clearly inhibit spontaneity and become imbued in the personal spirituality of its members. As we cautioned of Roman Catholicism's tendency to 'objectify' the supernatural and the spiritual so too must we sound the same caution regarding Eastern Orthodoxy. While *theosis* may be strongly represented in the life of the Orthodox believer, we may be less sure how much it is being realised.⁷⁸ Likewise we may observe that believers are under the misapprehension that because they participate in the rituals and life of the Church, what Brunner termed 'the evil within' is diminishing. Is participation in ceremony properly inductive of holy character?

The Progressive Understanding of Sanctification.

The doctrine of 'progressive sanctification' is the overwhelmingly dominant theology of sanctification in the modern Reformed Church worldwide. It is probably most fully presented in the teaching of John Calvin and his successors, the Puritans. Among the Puritans was John Owen, author of *Works*, and *On the Mortification of Sin in the Believer*, both texts still a frequent resource for many concerned with personal Christian spirituality. Progressive sanctification is today given most clear and consistent expression by Anglican Evangelicalism

⁷⁶ Mullins, *op. cit.*, p. 362

⁷⁷These were described by one Eastern Orthodox theologian as being very much a choreographed play. (N. Zernov, *Orthodox Encounter*, London, Clarke, 1961, pp. 90 - 91.)

⁷⁸For N. Berdayev's observations see his *Truth and Revelation*, London, 1953, pp. 140 -146.

in the writings of such men as John Stott, J. I. Packer, Richard Foster and John White. It can be summarised thus:

At the moment of justification, whereby a man may know that he is saved, he is also sanctified. 1 Corinthians 6: 11 states that, '...you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in Christ Jesus.' In this instance 'sanctified' means the act of setting apart – it does not signify the complete inward transformation into a holy character. It is not an impartation, but an imputation of holiness so, in the tradition of Luther, redeemed man is *simul justus, simul peccator*. At justification God washes a man's sins in the blood of Christ, and He separates him from his natural love of sin and the world. He puts a new principle in his heart and makes him practically godly in life.

However, since the old nature (the flesh) remains, practical godliness is not always the result - 'the Spirit and the flesh lusteth against each other'(Gal. 5: 17). Consequently, there is a considerable spiritual conflict in the inner man and a good deal of mental discomfort. These are actually healthy symptoms. They are the mark of an 'advanced saint' to use Ryle's term.⁷⁹ They testify to a conscience which is sensitised to sin by the Holy Spirit and a delight in the inner man regarding the law of God. It is apparently Paul's experience in Romans 7.

This conflict in the inner man will continue, possibly in many different areas of the earthly life, until death. The actual measure of sanctification - judged by the extent to which the old nature is mortified and the fruit of Christ's Spirit exhibited – may, in fact, be feeble. However, it is the believer's responsibility to live as sanctified a life as possible. Where there is no sanctification it is because his faith is not genuine – we are to doubt whether there is true justification.⁸⁰

There are certain steps a believer may take to deepen his sanctification. One, he may avail himself of the appointed means of grace. Ryle comments that,

⁷⁹ 'In so far as Anglican Evangelicals had one acknowledged leader in the last third of the nineteenth century, J. C. Ryle was that man.' (J. I. Packer) Ryle's *Holiness* (1879) remains one of the classic expositions of Anglican evangelical spirituality. In the latter half of the 20th century, his mantle arguably fell to J. I. Packer. Quote taken from Ryle's *Holiness*, Avon, Clarke, 1985 ed., p. xxi.

⁸⁰ J. MacArthur, *Faith Works*, Milton Keynes, Word Publishing, 1993, pp. 25 - 26.

'It [sanctification] depends greatly on a diligent use of Scriptural means. . . Bible reading, private prayer, regular attendance at public worship, regular hearing of God's Word and regular reception of the LORD's supper. . . I lay it down as a simple matter of fact that no-one who is careless about such things must ever expect to make much progress in sanctification. They are the appointed channel through which the Holy Spirit conveys fresh supplies of grace to the soul and strengthens the work which He begins in the inward man.'⁸¹

The second means of deepening one's sanctification is variously described in Scripture. Christians are to 'walk in the Spirit' (Gal. 5: 16, 25). They are to 'put off' as a garment, the 'old man' and 'put on' as a garment, the 'new man' (Col. 3; 9ff; Eph. 4; 22 -24), they are to 'mortify the desires of the flesh' and 'make no provision for the sinful nature'. How, in practice, is this done? Packer says,

'The experience of holiness requires effort and conflict. Holiness means, among other things, forming good habits, breaking bad habits, resisting temptations to sin and controlling yourself when provoked. . . Regarding the putting to death of the misdeeds of the body (Romans 8: 13), this too is hard. It is a matter of negating , wishing dead and labouring to thwart, inclinations, cravings and habits that have [perhaps existed] for a long time. Pain and grief, moans and groans will certainly be involved for the sinful self does not want to die, nor will it enjoy the killing process. . . mortifying a sin could feel like self-mutilation.'⁸²

Mullins writes, '[sanctification is effected] . . .by repeated acts of our own wills, by repeated acts of holy choice, by successive victories we are enabled by God's grace to achieve the ideal.'⁸³ Thirdly, and very similarly, regarding the Christ-like habits which Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit, they will be found, 'by setting ourselves, deliberately, to do the Christ-like thing in each situation.'⁸⁴

Progressive sanctification is consequently a matter of starving the inner urges which lead to the outward acts of sin. It is a matter of discipline, of acts of the will, and persevering determination. Yet, all actual achievement in sanctification 'must be ascribed to the Holy

⁸¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 20

⁸² J. I. Packer, *Passion For Holiness*, Nottingham, Crossway, 1988, p. 174 - 175.

⁸³ Mullins, p. 421.

⁸⁴ Packer, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

Spirit, however much sweat and self-denial it may have cost us'. Without the aid and direction of the Holy Spirit there could be no conquest of sin or reshaping of the life of righteousness.⁸⁵

Observations regarding the Progressive Approach to Sanctification.

The progressive approach to sanctification deserves credit on at least two fronts. First, it does not seek to appease any other authority than Scripture. Arguably, some of the more contentious aspects of Roman Catholic doctrine, such as the sacraments, derive from a regard for tradition sometimes equal to that of Scripture. Secondly, the progressive understanding of sanctification is frequently confirmed by experience. Probably most committed Christian believers can testify, at some time or other and to varying degrees, to the experience which progressive sanctification describes. The constant struggle to do that which they know they ought, and the battle not to do those things forbidden is, remarked Ryle, 'the recorded experience of the most eminent saints in every age.'⁸⁶

On the other hand, we might make three fairly important observations. The first concerns the nature of Man and the role of the Holy Spirit. Puritan theology started with a very low estimation of Man, but a very high estimation of the Holy Spirit. It was believed, for example, by John Owen, that man (even regenerate man) could do nothing of himself – he could not even properly repent. Consequently, believers who sinned often repented 'in the flesh', which is to say that they felt great remorse for a sin and resolved not to fall like so again, but invariably did. True repentance is induced by the Holy Spirit Who, in His primary role as revealer of the things of God (John 16: 14), shows the believer the sin through God's eyes. This is sufficient to destroy its hold once and for all.

Owen's regard for the Holy Spirit was informed by his understanding of the nature of man. He believed that man, even regenerate man, would always carry about the *entirely* corrupt

⁸⁵The importance of self-denial and discipline in progressive sanctification is evidenced by a number of Packer's Evangelical contemporaries. Elisabeth Elliot's *Discipline: The Glad Surrender* (1982), Donald Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (1991) and Dallas Willard's *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (1988) have received wide attention and praise in Evangelical circles. Even more popular is Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* (1978) and R. Kent Hughes' *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (1991), both widely read outside evangelical circles. The quote is taken from Packer, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

⁸⁶Ryle, *op. cit.*, p. xxii

body of death which would at all points assert itself, even in the service of God. But, flesh was flesh, and it could in no way please God who desires worship 'in spirit and truth'. Only that which is born of the Spirit, that is, only that which is inspired, initiated and indeed undertaken in, the Spirit, could be acceptable to God 'that no flesh may glory in Thy presence'. All that was initiated by the flesh would not endure. A basic contention of those who follow Owen's thinking is that the unaided, human will, even in the regenerate man, cannot endure constant temptation. In the same way, no amount of self-discipline and resolution will secure to the believer the fruits of the Spirit. However much he resolves to be less talkative, he will soon find his garrulous nature reasserting itself; the more he endeavours to love his enemy the more his anger with him deepens.⁸⁷

More recent doctrines of progressive sanctification are extremely reluctant to see corruption so deep in the regenerate man that he cannot offer right service to God. In addition they plainly assert and call upon the ability of man's will, through discipline and determination, to overcome sinful appetites. But Owen's position is not beyond Scriptural support. Jesus told the disciples that 'apart from Me you can do nothing' (John 15: 5) and said of Himself that He only did what the Father told Him to do (John 8: 28). Similarly, Philippians 2: 13 states that '... it is God who works in you to will and to do His good pleasure.' The real issue at stake is how far the believer's will can be called upon, without the direct, illuminative action of the Holy Spirit day by day, to put off sinful appetites.

The second aspect of progressive sanctification that is worthy of examination concerns the sanctification effected at the moment of justification. It was noted at the very outset of this study that theologians distinguished two meanings of the verb 'to sanctify' and its components. The first sense of the word meant set apart to the service of God, the second meant made inwardly holy. It was noted that the former was found most commonly in the Old Testament, the latter in the New. It was also observed that in not every single instance was it agreed in which sense it was being applied. The example given was 1 Cor. 6: 11: 'For you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the LORD Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.'

⁸⁷John Owen's understanding of man and the role of the Holy Spirit is best illustrated in his work *The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Mortification of Sin*, Vol VI of his *Works*, ed. W. H. Goold, Edinburgh, Johnstone and Hunter, 1852. See particularly pp. 16 -21.

The majority view (and the standard view of progressive sanctification theologies) is that, in this instance, sanctified refers to a setting apart; it is not necessarily an inward transformation to holiness – this occurs over a lifetime. The same conclusion is generally reached regarding 1 Cor. 1: 30 'For Jesus Christ is made unto you wisdom from God, both righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.' However, is there necessarily any reason to assume that we have in these instances reverted to the Old Testament usage? Could it not be that, in fact, sanctification in the sense of making inwardly holy, does occur, in its entirety, at the moment of justification. This is the position of the Brethren Churches and there does not appear to be any unequivocal evidence in Scripture to suggest it is wrong – the problems probably come later when one tries to explain why, if perfect holiness is found at justification, sin still persists. That point will be examined in due course, but for the moment, are there any grounds for maintaining that the believer is not made entirely holy, in Christ, at justification?⁸⁸

A study of the sixth chapter of Romans indicates that the death to sin has already occurred: 'We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?' (v. 2) 'you were crucified with Christ. . . anyone who has died has been freed from sin' (vv. 5, 7); 'You have been set free from sin' (vv. 18, 22). In Paul's letter to the Colossians it is recorded that 'He [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son' (Col. 1: 13); 2 Cor. 5: 17 says that, 'if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone.' And, returning to the 1 Cor. 6: 11 text, the same is seen: ' You were washed, you were justified, you were sanctified.' We may observe from this verse a number of things. First, that it is in the past tense. When one accepted Christ, one was justified; and one was also *sanctified*. It is not, grammarians will point out, in the present continuous. The believer is not 'in the process of being sanctified'. It has been done. Secondly, the tense is 'passive', rather than 'active' which indicates that the believer (the object) was 'acted upon' in this transaction. He was sanctified. He did not sanctify himself. The Bible may be seen to indicate that, one, the believer is now in the state of entire sanctification, and, two, that he did not effect it – it was done to him or for him.

Can one not, on this evidence, start from the belief that the believer is entirely holy from the moment of the new birth? Thereafter, his life is one of *appropriating* that holiness. It is a

⁸⁸D. Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, Winchester, MA, USA, Allen and Unwin, cites the Brethren position on pp. 157 - 158.

growing *into* (or, even better, a growing *in*) what he already *is* in Christ (or has already been made). Hardman suggests this when he notes,

'The biblical doctrine of sanctification disallows any idea of becoming progressively holy. What God has once made holy in election and redemption is thereafter always holy – there can be no degrees in the state of absolute holiness....Our moral growth is not a growth into holiness out of a state of comparative unholiness, but a growth in holiness effected by a supernatural act of God.'⁸⁹

Is there any advantage in this position? Perhaps simply in that it is a more faithful witness to what the New Testament indicates about the believer's position and identity in Christ. It ensures that the new birth is given its fullest significance, recognising that the believer has not only been declared righteous (Rom. 5: 1), but that he has been raised up with Christ, hidden with Christ (Col. 3: 1- 4), that he is now alive to God (Eph. 2: 6), a slave of righteousness (Rom. 6: 18), united to God and one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6: 17). The progressive position perhaps tends to minimise the benefits and effects of the new birth and consequently diminishes the expectation of a new life. It tends to erode the believer's identity in Christ which is a defining influence on his behaviour.

Now, even if we accept (and we may not) that a true and complete sanctification was effected at justification, how do we explain the fact that sin persists? The response to this is probably as follows. Sin persists in most believers because they do not know, or cannot accept, or cannot accept entirely, that a complete sanctification took place at justification. They know they have been redeemed from the penalty of sin, but not from the power of sin. Consequently they still sin, because they do not see themselves as anything other than 'a sinner saved by grace'. The more one knows oneself to be dead to sin because of Christ's death on the Cross, the more one experiences the reality.

It is important to note that there is no claim here that the believer who has knowledge of his sanctification cannot sin, and for this reason. The holiness one secures is not one's own, but Christ's. The believer is not holy in himself, but in Christ. He does not lose the body of flesh: it

⁸⁹From *The NI Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Michigan, Zondervan, 1974. p. 876, K. Hardman. It ought to be noted that Hardman does not assent to the doctrine of sanctification presently outlined; only, on this specific principle, he may be cited in support.

always remains, because the body is not yet glorified. He is dead to its nature, but he will need to reckon this whenever it stirs within him. Consequently we can never view sanctification as an inert state, but as a condition and an appropriation to be maintained from moment to moment.⁹⁰

Our third and final observation of progressive sanctification also concerns an aspect of man's identity in Christ. In some ways it contradicts the previous point, but the intention at this stage is not to construct a consistent doctrine, only to observe possible objections to those presented. The progressive doctrine makes much of man's two natures, the spirit and the flesh, or 'the old man' and 'the new man'. Is this notion biblically sound? Since God 'delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His Son' (Col. 1: 13) can we still be in both kingdoms? Since Scripture declares that we are 'not in the flesh but in the Spirit' (Rom. 8: 9) can we be in both simultaneously? Similarly, since it is written that 'if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold all things have become new' (2 Cor. 5: 17), can we be partly new creature and partly old creature?

The New Testament twice refers to man's nature, once in Eph. 2: 1 -3 and then again in 2 Peter 1: 3, 4. The first refers to the nature of those outside of Christ, dead in trespass and sin and 'living in the lusts of the flesh'; the second refers to the nature of man in Christ, a 'partaker of the divine nature'. Ephesians 5: 8 describes the essential change of nature which occurs at salvation: 'You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the LORD; walk as children of the light'. Are we seeing simply the *addition* of a new nature or is it in fact an *exchange* of nature?

N. Anderson contends that a genuine exchange of nature takes place at regeneration; a Christian is no longer in the flesh, *but he may walk according to it*. Being *in* the flesh describes someone who is spiritually dead, who lives independently of God, which would not be a true description of the Christian. However, the Christian may choose to *walk according to the flesh*, which Anderson describes as 'acting independently of God by responding to the mind-

⁹⁰J. Wesley maintained that the holiness one secured was one's own. This proved to be the divisive issue between him and the Lutheran pastor, Count Zinzendorff, who believed that all holiness was Christ's. Wesley's view minimises the need to continually 'abide' in Christ, and suggests a measure of independence from God. J. Moltmann's *The Spirit of Life*, *op. cit.*, contains a discussion between Wesley and Zinzendorff on this matter, pp. 167 - 171.

set, patterns and habits ingrained by living in the world'. So, although the fleshly nature is dead, the believer's thinking must be renewed that he may walk according to the Spirit.⁹¹ The essential point is to reject the notion that the Christian believer has two natures; he only has one, which needs to be educated in the ways of the Spirit, not permitted to passively receive the things of the world.

We are not at this point contending that this is indisputable, only observing that the concept of the two co-existent natures might be carefully examined. Clearly, it pertains to the believer's identity in Christ, which, if not understood correctly, might considerably weaken the life being lived.⁹² Anthony Hoekema comments, 'We who are believers should see ourselves in this way: no longer as depraved and helpless slaves of sin, but as those who have been created anew in Christ Jesus.'⁹³ Anderson's position at least has the advantage of emphasising the need for the believer's mind to be renewed, which in turn would deepen the believer's understanding of his identity in Christ. Advocates of progressive sanctification frequently overlook what would seem to be a significant part of sanctification (the renewal of the mind) and perhaps emphasise too greatly the repeated acts of the will in the moment of crisis.

The most convincing aspect of progressive sanctification is its reality in the lives of probably the majority of Christian believers. It is an extremely practical, earth-bound theory, which lays no great claims to entire sanctification or the like. In that sense it is quite a comfortable theory. But perhaps some unease ought to be registered over the minimisation of the Holy Spirit in sanctification. For the oft-repeated notion that 'all progress in sanctification must be ascribed to the Holy Spirit' progressive sanctification has a rather sparse pneumatology. Even should we not wish to pursue the second and third suggestions outlined above – that entire sanctification occurs at justification, and that man may not have two natures – a more developed doctrine of the Holy Spirit might serve progressive sanctificationists very well.

⁹¹N. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, Crowborough, Monarch Publications, 1992, pp. 71 -87

⁹²A believer's perception of his identity in Christ has considerable influence on his behaviour as a Christian. Mullins notes how the Christian believer often retains a profound consciousness of sin even though God has declared him righteous through Christ. This low self-estimate profoundly affects his dealings with God and frequently induces him to adopt methods for earning salvation. Mullins, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

⁹³Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, Michigan, Zondervan, 1986, p. 110

Sanctification by Crisis.

The notion of sanctification by crisis is rooted in Wesleyan Methodism. Its clearest expression today is found in the Holiness and Pentecostal traditions. Our primary concern in this study is with Holiness teaching; the Pentecostal alternative will be mentioned only briefly.

Holiness teaching originated in America in the mid- 19th century. It was an attempt to preserve the traditional Methodist teachings on entire sanctification and Christian perfection. The first Keswick Convention, the annual week long gathering which was to become the focal point for the new spirituality, was held in 1875 and its message remained basically unchanged until the 1940s. Present day Keswick meetings have departed almost completely from its Holiness roots, but traditional Holiness doctrine is taught in a number of smaller denominations including The Church of the Nazarene, The Wesleyan Church, The Primitive Methodist Church and the Holiness Christian Church in the United States.⁹⁴ The Christian Missionary Alliance also draws on Holiness teaching.⁹⁵

The emphasis of Holiness teaching is on victory over sin (commonly 'entire sanctification) and 'the rest of faith'. Human effort in the Christian life is to cease – the Christian must put away all his own efforts to be holy, because it is entirely beyond him. The sound Reformation principle that salvation was the gift of God received by faith is extended by Holiness teaching which contends that progress in the Christian life as well as its commencement is by faith alone. God is as willing to confer holiness on the believer as He is to confer salvation. J. I. Packer accurately summarises Holiness teaching thus:

'You received a finished salvation through a crucified Saviour by simple faith in him. You did nothing except take the gift. Works, effort, exertion did not enter into it. So with sanctification: you must stop striving and trust Christ to do all in you as He has done all for you...Cease from all effort. Do nothing to secure your sanctification, only trust Christ to secure it to you.'⁹⁶

It is common in Holiness teaching to emphasise the need for 'complete surrender'. The believer is urged to consecrate everything that he possesses to God – time, money,

⁹⁴Keswick now teaches a progressive sanctification doctrine.

⁹⁵There is also, in the U.S., an ecumenical forum for non-Pentecostal Holiness denominations, 'The Christian Holiness Association'.

⁹⁶Packer, in the Preface to Ryle's *Holiness*, p. x.

relationships, employment, ambitions – and count it as lost. Everything is to 'go to the Cross'. God is given 'permission' to withhold or bestow whatsoever He chooses; the believer recognises that he has no claim upon God. When a genuine surrender has been made the believer is 'entitled' to receive the gift of 'entire sanctification'. On the authority of the Word of God he may be assured that God gives him a new heart, upon which is written the Law of God, and a new spirit.

The crisis for the believer is in entire surrender. He must release to God every selfish desire or questionable pastime. He must put right any wrongs the Holy Spirit brings to mind, whatever the cost to him. Often there is one treasured thing to which the believer clings, but, Holiness teaching assures us, God will have all and nothing less. So there is often a period – sometimes lasting months – of painful wrestling, of desiring to surrender all but not being able. On rarer occasions the believer grasps immediately what is required of him and receives entire sanctification very quickly.

Those who receive entire sanctification frequently although not always experience an emotional release, hence it is often called 'the second blessing'. Thereafter their testimony is 'victorious living' wherein their old appetites for sin (in both thought and deed) have little place. Temptation continues but it has not the power that it formerly did; it is expected that a believer may live a life entirely free from sin from day to day. That is not to say that he *cannot* sin, but that he *need not*. Wesley wrote of this, 'Aforetime, when an evil thought came in, they [the believer] looked up and it vanished away. But now it does not come in, there being no room for this, in a soul which is full of God.'⁹⁷ J. H. G. Barker wrote,

'The sanctified soul receives by the presence of the Holy Spirit..a baptism of love and power which actually transforms him. From compromise he becomes aggressive for his LORD. Indecision is transformed to a holy purpose of heart and action. . .sin is cleansed and we see a boldness of witness and absolute truth in utterance. . .'⁹⁸

The Christian Missionary Alliance, a denomination of the Holiness movement teaches as follows:

⁹⁷J. Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Vol XI of his Works, Michigan, Zondervan, p. 379

⁹⁸J. H. G. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 101

'This experience of Christ our Sanctifier marks a definite and distinct crisis in the history of a soul. We do not grow into it, but we cross a definite line of demarcation, as clear as when the hosts of Joshua crossed the Jordan and were over in the Promised Land and set up a great heap of stones, so that they could never forget the crisis hour.'⁹⁹

The world's Pentecostal churches grew from the Holiness tradition, and there remain many similarities. The basic difference concerns the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. Three-stage Pentecostalism teaches that the believer cannot receive the Baptism unless he has been entirely sanctified.¹⁰⁰ When Jesus said to the disciples 'Receive ye the Holy Spirit' (John 15: 3) and, 'Ye are now clean by the word I have spoken to you' (John 13: 10) three-stage doctrine says that the disciples were entirely sanctified in that moment and were thereby fitted to receive the third stage of salvation – the Baptism. Entire sanctification is received in the same way as in the Holiness tradition.¹⁰¹

The original two-stage Pentecostal theologies believe that the Baptism with the Holy Spirit is both an impartation of 'power for service' and a work of sanctification (ideally entire).¹⁰² The largest worldwide Pentecostal denomination, the Assemblies of God Pentecostal Church, teaches two-stage salvation. Its Declaration of Faith declares,

'The Scriptures teach us a life of holiness without which no man will see the LORD. By the power of the Holy Spirit we are enabled to obey the command, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy'. Entire sanctification is the will of God for all believers, and should be pursued by walking in obedience to God's word.'¹⁰³

Since the Holy Spirit is the One who enables sanctification, entire sanctification is unlikely to be realised unless one has been 'baptised in the Spirit.' Thus,

'All believers are entitled to, and should ardently expect and earnestly seek, the promise of

⁹⁹W. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, London, SCM Press, 1972, p. 323

¹⁰⁰The Apostolic Faith Mission (the second largest Pentecostal Church worldwide) teaches 'a three-stage way of salvation'.

¹⁰¹The Pentecostal notion of entire sanctification also rejects the assertion that sin is thereafter impossible.

¹⁰²The doctrine recorded here is that expressed in a Pentecostal Declaration of Faith. It is not presumed that every church holds to it without variation.

¹⁰³Hollenweger, *op. cit.*, from the Declaration of Faith of the Assemblies of God Pentecostal Churches, p. 515.

the Father. . . with it comes the endowment of power for life and service, the bestowment of gifts and their uses in the ministry. This wonderful experience is distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth.^{'104}

In Pentecostal thought, 'endowment with power for life' commonly means victory over sin. Consequently the baptism in the Spirit itself is held to be an experience of sanctification, ideally 'entire', with the additional impartation of gifts for service. The crisis in the believer's life is the baptism in the Spirit.

Observations Regarding Holiness and Pentecostal Doctrine.

The Holiness tradition has been served by a number of extremely intelligent and careful theologians including R. A. Torrey, J. Penn-Lewis, H. A. Moule, and E. Hopkins. Each of these, and most others besides, have endeavoured to define their terms and doctrine with the utmost care.

Holiness doctrine does *not* teach sinless perfectionism. No major Holiness thinker in the last century has claimed that the Christian believer cannot sin after the second blessing experience. It ought to be said, however, that the use of the term 'entire sanctification' has proven misleading. Some have thought that Holiness doctrine either negates entirely or, if not, then at least insufficiently acknowledges, the *growth* in holiness which continues after the 'second blessing' experience. While there is probably a measure of truth in this charge, it ought not to be overstated. Holiness teachers are generally careful to draw attention to the necessity of maintaining and growing in the Christian life after 'entire sanctification'.

A similar point may be made regarding the seventh chapter of Romans. Holiness teaching sees this text's primary value in its demonstration of human inability to fulfill the Law. Some may object that the Holiness tradition then dismisses the chapter, as if those who receive the second blessing never again experience the conflict it expresses. This is probably truer than the charge that growth is never acknowledged. Certainly to discount entirely the experience of Romans 7 would seem to be contrary to the Scriptural injunctions to 'mortify the deeds of

the flesh', , 'make no provision for the flesh' and their like. The method of God's Word seems fairly clear: the demands and desires of the flesh are overthrown by a critical and *continuous* appropriation and application of the Cross of Christ which will surely be something like the experience of Romans 7. We would probably like to observe with Niebuhr that,

'The record of Christian history proves that no living man is ever completely emancipated from the inner conflict which the chapter so eloquently portrays.'¹⁰⁵

But there are now two issues that present themselves. One, the very notion of a second blessing, a crisis experience of sanctification. And two, the basic notion of sanctification by faith.

The crisis experience is invariably seen as a second, distinct work of grace, subsequent to conversion. The first observation must be that Scripture does not seem to present many grounds for notions of a second work - the closest is probably Paul in 2 Cor. 1: 15 'And in this confidence, I was minded to come before unto you, that ye might have a *second benefit*.' Secondly, the notion of a second blessing implies that sanctification is a gift that is yet to be *bestowed* on the believer. Would not Holiness doctrine be on stronger grounds if it emphasised, like the Brethren Church, that entire sanctification *had already taken place at justification*? The common Holiness teaching implies (even if it does not explicitly teach) that sanctification can be gained or earned by a sufficiently thorough surrender – only if the price is paid is the blessing bestowed.

Related to this notion of a crisis experience, any sanctification doctrine which speaks of 'second blessings', or even 'third blessings' is in danger of erecting a valid testimony of a work of the Spirit into a law of spiritual experience. This has a number of disadvantages. First, it puts the believer under considerable pressure to be sanctified in a certain way, possibly leading to disappointment or feelings of inferiority when it does not happen. Secondly, it is staking an enormous amount on the one card of spiritual experience, which in turn may encourage emotionalism and individualism. Thirdly, it leads to implications of first, second and third class Christians, depending on how many and which of the 'blessings' one has received. And, fourthly, the imposition of such legalistic standards will tend to mar the ideal of sanctity –

¹⁰⁵Reinhold Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p. 110

holiness will consequently amount to nothing more than conformity to sets of legal standards. G. Fee, referring to Pentecostals (and a Pentecostal himself), notes the anomaly that people who put such strong emphasis on the individual's relation to the Holy Spirit, should 'so completely mistrust the Holy Spirit...by setting up all sorts of rigid rules for conduct in the matter of personal holiness.'¹⁰⁶

So we may present a number of reservations about the notion of a second, critical experience. And what of the notion of sanctification by faith? Is it scriptural? While we may not object that faith in Christ is the *root* of all holiness, nor that the first step towards a holy life is to believe on Christ, nor that union with Christ by faith is the secret of both beginning to be holy and continuing to be holy, do the Scriptures anywhere indicate that the believer is sanctified by faith in the same sense that he is justified by faith? Do they not instead teach the need for personal exertion and work as well as faith? Does the apostle not say 'I fight', 'I run', 'I keep under my body', 'Let us cleanse ourselves', 'Let us labour', 'Let us lay aside every weight'?¹⁰⁷

It is very important here to clearly grasp what Holiness doctrine teaches. It basically says that the Cross of Christ secured for the believer the full forgiveness of sin *and complete freedom from its power* – that is, his justification **and** his sanctification. The majority of believers accept by faith that their sins are forgiven, but are unaware that by the Cross they are made partakers in the latter benefit, too. The second blessing, then, at root, is the reception of this divine truth, the realisation that sin's power has been destroyed.

Sanctification is, in this sense, by faith alone, because it is the simple acceptance of something that was completed on the Cross just as justification was. Just as the believer need take no steps to secure his justification, so too he need take no steps to secure his sanctification. It is a gift, won on the Cross, received by faith alone.

True faith is always marked by works. Consequently, when the Holiness disciple realises that sin has no power over him because this was secured on the Cross, he lives his life accordingly. When the opportunity for sin presents, he sees it with the certain (for 'faith is the **assurance** of

¹⁰⁶ Quoted by Reginald Prenter in The Reformed Tradition, in Chavchavadze, *op. cit.*, p. 87

¹⁰⁷ 1 Cor. 9: 26, 27; 2 Cor. 7: 1; Heb. 4: 11; Heb. 12: 1.

things unseen') knowledge that it has lost its power over him and he can pay it absolutely no heed. The continuous putting off of the flesh does not cease (for at every moment of temptation it must be done) but it is founded immutably on the knowledge that the Cross broke sin's power on his life. In this sense it is always and only by faith. One's victory over sin in every situation is secured not by one's own efforts but by one's assured knowledge of sin's destruction at the Cross. Hence it was not done by the believer, but by Christ.

Critics object on two counts. One, most importantly, because this is perhaps the central contention of Holiness doctrine, that the Cross did *not* break the power of sin from the believer's life, but only secured his forgiveness. And, two, that a sanctification by faith alone does not take account of the biblical injunctions to continue 'putting off the flesh', 'mortifying the flesh' and 'walk by the Spirit' - at its extreme it is a passive, lame excuse for not walking the often bruising highway of holiness.¹⁰⁸

The first charge – that the Cross did not break the power of sin – may be countered with Scripture. The case for the sinless ideal has already been shown. Alternatively, one might adopt the Brethren approach to 1 Cor. 6: 11, interpreting sanctification in its fullest form. Further, one might ask, did 'delivered [us] out of the hand of our enemies' (Luke 1: 74) mean they should still have dominion over the believer? Did 'always causeth us to triumph' (2 Cor. 2: 14) mean only occasional triumph? Did being made 'more than conquerors through Him who loved us' (Romans 8: 37) mean frequent defeat and failure? And what of Him being 'able to save to the uttermost' (Hebrews 7: 25)? To the Holiness tradition these are more than enough evidence that Christ broke the power of sin over the believer's life.

The second charge – that sanctification by faith does not account for the continual putting off of the flesh – in fact probably indicates an incomplete grasp of Holiness teaching. The most faithful Holiness expositors never deny the growth in grace which continues after the second blessing, and acknowledge that this always includes the mortification of the flesh. The confusion may be located in the Holiness impression that this process becomes a source of genuine pleasure for the believer, so excited is he by his Saviour.

We can conclude with two further observations regarding Holiness doctrine, the first

¹⁰⁸ For this charge see J. C. Ryle, *op. cit.*, p. xxvi.

regarding its interpretation of Scripture. Holiness doctrine is frequently very literalist in its approach to Scripture. For example, in the sixth chapter of Romans the believer is declared to be dead to sin, crucified with Christ, and united in His resurrection. Since, says traditional Holiness doctrine, the Bible declares these things to be so, they are to be believed as so, not dismissed as symbolism. Regardless of one's past or present experience, or one's faculty of reason, one is to believe that these things are as the Bible says.

Whether this is for good or ill rather depends on one's point of view. Should one lament the unnecessary reduction of Scripture to symbolism, this position will quickly commend itself. Romans 6 does, indisputably, state that the believer has died to sin. God has said, in His Word, that this is so. If God asserts something, have we any right, or is there any value in, disputing it? On the other hand, it may be objected that it is perfectly obvious that we are *not* dead to sin; indeed, we are very much alive to it – that what we see here is symbolism.

At this point the Holiness tradition asks on what grounds Romans 6 is assumed to be only symbolism. If it is merely because common experience does not support the literal interpretation, then is there not the profound danger of reducing the Word to the level of one's experience? Are we not saying, asks Holiness teaching, 'It cannot be true; it's not my experience, and it's not the experience of anyone I know'? Holiness teaching presses the believer not to reduce the Word to his experience, but, rather, to raise his experience to the level of the Word. When the Bible declares, 'You are dead to sin, and you are dead to the world' it is to be reckoned as so. Therefore, accept it as a fact by faith that you are no longer a slave to hard-heartedness, to pride, to anger, jealousy or covetousness and you shall in due course find that it is indeed so in your experience. The objection to this approach is that it goes against, or at least beyond, reason and apparently obviates the testimony of experience. Why believe something which is apparently contradicted by every other piece of evidence?

How far one can accept the Holiness position depends on one's understanding of the Word of God. But should one not accept the strict Holiness approach one may still be confronted by its challenge not to allow one's interpretation of Scripture to be too bound by experience, or too constrained by naturalist metaphysics that we are reduced to seeing symbolism where there may be literal truth.

Our final observation regarding the Holiness tradition concerns its rare emphasis upon consecration, or 'complete surrender'.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps it is when the believer is challenged to give up, if need be, the things which are to him most precious that the true depth of desire for God alone is seen. The element of complete surrender is rarely included in non-Holiness doctrines and consequently it is possible that believers are rarely confronted with their true motives in a great many things. On the other hand, the same occupation with one's sinfulness may lead to unnecessary despair. J. I. Packer's preface to Ryle's *Holiness* demonstrates an experience which was probably (and may be) extremely common. Packer comments that he, in his younger days, and in his hunger for holiness, embraced the Holiness teaching but that the reality always eluded him. He wrote,

'According to the teaching, all that ever kept Christians from this happy life was unwillingness to pay the entry fee – in other words, failure to yield themselves fully to God. All I could do was to repeatedly reconsecrate myself, scraping the inside of my psyche till it was bruised and sore, in order to track down still unyielded things by which the blessing was perhaps being blocked.'¹¹⁰

The only remaining issue regarding sanctification by crisis at this point pertains to the Pentecostal understanding. The Pentecostal position basically only confronts us with one further issue, that of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit and the central question, to what extent is the Baptism a work of sanctification?

¹⁰⁹A notion which is supported, most often, by Romans 12: 1, '... offer your bodies as living sacrifices to God. . .'. Also Romans 6: 13; and 1 Cor. 6: 19, 20.

¹¹⁰J. I. Packer, in Ryle, p. viii. Packer was not exaggerating. J. H. G. Barker, an advocate of entire sanctification in the Holiness mould, remarks,

'Faith may have been exercised before there has been a full and thoroughgoing entering in to 'the crucifixion of the flesh with the affections and the lusts'. . . We believe that this is the most serious reason why those who say they have faith to be entirely sanctified, yet fail to enter in to the full assurance of faith. The Cross of their Saviour has not been fully applied to their 'flesh'. Part of the price is still withheld, . . .' (Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 65.)

In answer to that it would probably be true to say that Scripture suggests that the Baptism with the Holy Spirit is always connected with and primarily for the purpose of testimony and service. It is not clearly held up as a work of sanctification. This ought not entirely preclude a *measure* of sanctification because, as M. Lloyd-Jones observed, those who receive the Baptism have had a significant experience of God.¹¹¹ The result is frequently a deeper awareness and appreciation of God which is likely to lessen, in some measure, the appeal of sin. Lloyd-Jones suggests another, more indirect reason why we might not see the Baptism as primarily a work of sanctification – certainly not 'entire'. He observes from the books of the New Testament the apparent behaviour of some members of the early churches. It is clear that on a number of occasions there was reason to rebuke or discipline believers for inappropriate behaviour. Lloyd-Jones observed that the early church were extremely keen that every believer had received the Baptism and suggests that what we are seeing therefore are Spirit-baptised Christians sometimes displaying quite obvious sin.¹¹²

Evaluation and Conclusions.

A broad survey of sanctification thought is never likely to be easy in a confined space. The two greatest difficulties in the task are deciding which features to pay most attention to, and then resisting the temptation to follow up the many smaller concerns and alternative angles which inevitably present.

In this instance, there was one enforced omission which was a source of some regret. This was the understanding of man which each doctrine displayed, the way each understood his constitution and his nature. The difference is considerable; at the one end the Catholic belief that grace could build upon nature, at the other the Holiness notion that man is entirely corrupt and that he may do nothing to please his Creator. The Holiness notion is particularly fascinating, returning to the most Lutheran of Reformation roots. My own inclination was that it had much to offer sanctification thinking, but only a considerable amount of space could have done it justice.

¹¹¹M. Lloyd Jones, *Joy Unspeakable: The Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, Eastbourne, Kingsway, 1982, p. 134.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 138 - 142.

There were other omissions, too, which, but for space, would have been avoided: the full role ascribed to the Holy Spirit in doctrines of sanctification; the centrality of Romans, chapters six to eight, in the matter of sanctification; and a more thorough examination of the true *nature* of holiness. However, it seemed that such things were perhaps only components, although very large, of two even greater and more fundamental questions, namely; What measure of sanctification may one expect in this present life? And, How is the Christian believer sanctified? Consequently, that is where our preoccupations lay.

At this point, there remain only two tasks. The first, to draw together, into one coherent whole, all of the conclusions which have been proffered in this study; and the second, much more briefly, to highlight three particular aspects of sanctification thought that became quite striking to the writer in the course of this study.

The very first issue addressed was simply the role of sanctification doctrines in applied theology. They were, it was suggested, primarily a means of expressing how the practical life of the Christian is transformed. In addition they were a means of exploring the true nature of Christian holiness and the extent to which it might be realised in the present life.

Four areas of general agreement among sanctification doctrines were then noted – a suitable definition, the necessity of holiness for the Christian, the contention that sanctification was only properly spoken of within the justified state, and the broad nature of holiness as comprising some form and measure of sinlessness.

The first of the two major questions was then explored – the measure of sanctification possible in this life. It was suggested that Scripture portrays the ideal Christian life as unsinning, but nowhere gives grounds for a notion of sinless perfection, because it nowhere suggests that the Christian *cannot* sin, nor that the Law could be wilfully disobeyed. The case against the sinless ideal was then presented, with the observations that sinlessness is basically subjectively defined, that it is an extremely rare testimony among Christians, and that Scripture yielded a number of cases wherein sinlessness was apparently not envisaged. Romans 7 was highlighted as an area of much exegetical controversy and the opinion expressed that it was of central importance in sanctification doctrines.

One's approach to and interpretation of Romans 7 was observed to be a formative factor (although not the only) in one's understanding of the *means* by which sanctification is effected. This was the chief concern of the remainder of the study. It was observed that there are three broad but distinct approaches to this issue – the sacerdotal, epitomised in traditional Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy; the progressive, the prevailing Reformed understanding, typified in contemporary Anglican Evangelicalism; and the crisis, best observed in the Holiness tradition.

The examination of Roman Catholic doctrine raised the critical issue of the relationship between sanctification and justification. It was suggested that the rejection of the doctrine of *sola fide* affected sanctification thinking profoundly and negatively because it viewed sanctification as a means to justification, rather than a result of it. By such means, salvation is earned rather than bestowed, which would seem contrary to the Scriptural witness.

The Roman understanding of grace and its outworking in a deep sacerdotalism was also disputed. There seems no biblical ground for perceiving grace to be a substance distinct from the Godhead, and it was observed such a strong sacramental theology may only be objectifying the supernatural rather than experiencing it. Eastern Orthodoxy, while not entirely free from the formalism basically inherent in a sacerdotal religion and the tendency to objectify rather than manifestly experience, nonetheless exhibited a theology of redemption which was, in parts, extremely discerning. The notions of *theosis* and the gaining of the ecclesial hypostasis suggest the extremely positive aspects of sanctification where Western churches tend to express the negative. Seeing the Creator as the Divine Physician rather than the Divine Judge puts sanctification in perhaps a more helpful perspective. In addition, the strong emphasis on the ecclesial community lessened a disposition toward individualism which perhaps prevails in alternative sanctification theologies.

The progressive approach to sanctification began with two very strong foundations, its *sola fide* understanding of justification and the testimony of Christian experience – so many could read Romans 7 and utter a regretful 'Amen' to its tale. It was suggested that its pneumatology was perhaps insufficient, and that its understanding of the nature of man and the power of his

will was not beyond dispute, certainly from a Holiness perspective. Further, the notion of the two natures was questioned, as was its apparent dismissal of 'entire sanctification' at justification. The sharpest challenge to the progressive understanding is presented by those who speak of sanctification by crisis, particularly from the Holiness tradition. Such doctrines maintain that Romans 8 is the present ideal for the Christian life and consequently differ markedly in their understanding of Romans 7. Those who speak of sanctification by crisis show the unfortunate predilection for constructing works of the Spirit into laws of spiritual experience, which has a number of attendant difficulties. If we observe or are inclined to teach a 'second blessing' experience, perhaps the most helpful way to relate it is not as crisis experience, nor as the bestowal of some new benefit of Christ. Could it not rather be understood as simply the revelation of some pre-existing divine truth? In favour of the Holiness tradition perhaps is their determination to fit experience to Scripture rather than vice versa, and their exhortation to live only for God so clearly demonstrated by the call to a ruthless surrender of self (which, to be fair, is not entirely positive). Finally, it was observed that Holiness doctrine, rightly understood, was defensible from Scripture. That is to say that the notion of sanctification by faith, properly and fully understood, is not necessarily contrary to Scripture. The difficulty has perhaps arisen from too great a preoccupation with the crisis experience itself, which has implied that sanctification is a work of grace separate from Christ's death on the Cross, that somehow it can be earned (by complete surrender), and that thereafter the believer experiences no internal conflict whatsoever, and is not continually mortifying the deeds of the flesh. But while the Holiness doctrine of sanctification by faith, properly understood, is defensible, it was not contended that Scripture speaks on this matter with an unequivocal voice.

There were three things that most struck the writer in the course of this study. The first was the profound importance of a sound (and by that I suppose I mean a *sola fide*) doctrine of justification. The Roman understanding of justification severely vitiated anything that was built upon it. It led to rather dubious doctrines of grace, notions of sanctification after death, and the supposition that a believer's justification is indivisibly proportionate to his objective sanctification. This, one felt, was a considerable way from the biblical testimony.

Secondly, the writer was struck by the strength of the case for a sinless (not sinlessly perfect) life and that this could not be so quickly dismissed as a mere ideal. R. N. Flew's examination of

the Scriptures in this regard was extremely convincing and strengthened by his observation that the early Church saw *and lived* the essentially sinless ideal. Elsewhere in his study he made the pertinent comment that the early Church was imbued with both the understanding that theirs was a religion *dependent* on supernatural assistance, *and* the sense that this assistance was always and everywhere available.¹¹³

In fact, what struck the writer most of all during the study was this very issue of the supernatural. Modern sanctification theologies appear to have a profoundly diminished notion of the supernatural; one thought perhaps that to regain a fuller understanding of this dimension and to give it better treatment might lead to a greater expectation in matters of sanctification. In the 1950s Nicholas Berdayev regretfully noted that much modern theology minimised the profound distinction between spirit and nature so that 'the supernatural appears as the highest hierarchical degree of the same kind of realities as these in which the natural is found.' Berdayev protested that in fact the spiritual and the natural are realities of a very different order, not various degrees of one and the same reality, and one is inclined to agree. He writes, 'The Creator breathes a spiritual principle into man at the creation. . . the divine element in man is not a natural element. It is the spiritual element in him, a reality of a special kind.'¹¹⁴

This blurring of the distinction between spirit and nature has had a profound effect on modern pneumatology. The primary function of the Holy Spirit is one of revelation (John 16: 14), taking the things of God and making them known to man.

But if man does not see the radical distinction between the Spirit and nature then he will assume (as he increasingly does) that he may know the things of God without the Spirit. There seems to me a danger that the essential, revelatory nature of the Christian faith will be profoundly diminished, and thereby be reduced to a faith based on reason.

This is of exceptional importance, for what is faith? Faith is 'my acceptance of God's fact'.¹¹⁵ It always has its foundations in the past.¹¹⁶ (For example, when does the believer have faith

¹¹³ R. N. Flew, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 17; 44, 45 - 49.

¹¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, partic. pp. 140 -144. Quotation from p. 141.

¹¹⁵ W. Nee, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹¹⁶ What relates to the future is hope rather than faith although faith often has its object or goal in the future as in Hebrews 11.

regarding his justification? Not when he says that God can or will or must justify him, but when he knows that He *has* already justified him.) And how is faith awakened or gained? By one's reason? Most assuredly not. Faith in something that is revealed to the senses is not faith at all. Faith is always based on revelation. We can illustrate this by an example.

A man with no knowledge of the Bible may observe the world around him. From its vastness, its order, and its ingenuity he may conclude that there is a divine being of some sort. He will conclude that this divine being is extremely powerful, intelligent and creative. But he will conclude also that this God cares not to intervene about suffering, nor pain, nor injustice. He is essentially an unloving or maybe simply disinterested Being. By revelation (the Bible), however, we may know otherwise. Not only may we know that a God exists, but we may know His character, too. So revelation is essential to the Christian; without it his faith will be poorly placed, reliant as he is only on his senses.

Now in regard to sanctification the importance of revelation seems to lie in the believer's understanding of his own identity in Christ. N. Anderson – he who contested that the believer has only one nature – made the observation that one's perception of one's identity is a profoundly formative influence on one's behaviour because, '... no person can consistently behave in a way that is inconsistent with the way he perceives himself.'¹¹⁷ Consequently, should the believer exclude or seriously minimise what revelation (basically, the Bible) tells him, he will construct his own identity too heavily around his senses. In this regard Holiness teaching seemed profoundly commendable. Not only did it exhort believers not to reduce the Word to their experience, but it sought to establish the fullest understanding of the believer's position in Christ. Were something not manifested to the senses, it was not dismissed as symbolism, but accepted as revelation of a spiritual reality. One's Christian life was based upon one's *revealed* position in Christ, rather than upon what one's natural mind could conceive. The result, one suspects, was a deeper understanding and experience of sanctification.

So what is the basic point being contended? Simply that the blurring of the spiritual with the natural which Berdayev observed has reduced the essential, revelatory character of the Christian message, and consequently deprived it of its vital, supernatural aspect. Sanctification is viewed too exclusively within the limits of naturalistic metaphysics, when in

¹¹⁷ N. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

reality it is indivisibly bound up in an entirely different – spiritual – order of existence. This, to the writer, seemed the most consistent, striking and regrettable feature of sanctification theology. If he were to urge one thing it would be that the profound distinction between spirit and nature be once more regained.

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kristian1973@hotmail.com

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