

HOLY LIVING, SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Salvationist ecotheologian **MATT SEAMAN** links holiness with sustainability and encourages Christians to make a concerted effort to care for God's creation

Holiness and sustainability – are they unrelated matters, or are they closely intertwined? Consider the multitude of issues faced in today's world, issues such as social and ecological injustices like poverty, pollution and over-consumption.

In our current context, simplicity, self-control, living within limits and considerate consumption can be understood and integrated into our own lives from both perspectives of holy living and sustainable living.

The Salvation Army traces its spiritual heritage through John Wesley and the subsequent holiness movement. Two Salvationists who are well known for writing on the theme of holiness are Samuel Logan Brengle and Frederick Coutts.

Brengle's descriptions of holy living include: "Holiness is ... pure love", and "holiness, then, is conformity to the nature of God. It is likeness to God as He is revealed in Jesus." Likewise, Coutts describes "holiness [as] the unfolding of Christ's own character in the life of the individual believer".

Combined with the biblical call towards holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:7, for example), the journey towards holy living can, therefore, be considered an integral part of our Salvationist "DNA".

Holy connections

Sustainability, on the other hand, may seem like a new buzzword in our society. However, it is certainly not a new idea. Understanding the significant benefits of sustainable practices has been a natural outcome of knowing and appreciating the interconnectedness

that is intrinsic to life on Earth.

Over human history, lessons and skills have been learned about the benefits of being mindful of and planning for the long-term future of the natural resources on which life depends. For example, understanding the long-term agricultural benefits of rotating crops and allowing "rest" periods for the land; and keeping water, soil and air clean for the health and well-being of humanity and our earthly home.

In the biblical narrative, we read of the harmonious relationships God originally intended for life on Earth, and the tightly linked connections between God, people and creation. For example, God considered every thing he created very good (Genesis 1:31); humanity is placed on earth to cultivate it and to care for it (Genesis 2:15); and Genesis 2:18 provides background for the importance of community and togetherness.

Various principles within the Old Testament link holy living and sustainable living, and speak of keeping healthy and whole relationships between God, God's creation, and people as part of God's creation.

Think of the scriptural calls to respect the "Year of Restoration", giving the land time for rest and restoration for one year every seven years (Leviticus 25:2-6, 20-22); and the "Year of Jubilee" where land ownership and property rights were to be recalibrated every 50 years, keeping in mind the fact that all things are from and belong to God (Leviticus 25:8-14).

Biblical passages emphasise the links between living holy, God-centered lives in community and living in safety and abundance in

the land (Leviticus 25:17-19).

It is interesting to consider that issues and problems arise in the scriptures when people ignore or do not consider their connection with God, with other people, and with the land. This fact is still of great significance to us today.

In Matthew 22:36-39, Jesus states the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul and mind. The second commandment Jesus affirms is that we are also to love others. Hence, John Wesley can say with conviction that "the gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness."

Minimising impact

If we as Salvationists are called to live holy, spirit-filled lives, growing and developing Christ's character in our own lives (Coutts), and living out pure love (Brengle) for God and all God's creation, it then follows that living in sustainable ways that minimise negative impacts on fellow humanity and the rest of God's loved creation is an integral part of holiness.

As a holy and a listening people, we must not only be open to the cries of suffering people, but also to the groans of creation around us. This means not just recycling and other "green" actions, but taking a bigger picture view like evaluating the liveability and sustainability of our homes, our church, our local area.

As followers of Christ, as Salvationists, as contributors to the healing of people and place, we should then be aware of the conditions of life and death, of health and disease that surround us.

Nick Spencer and Robert White

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