

themselves with the poor, so in the media the Church must realise that its riches do not lie in the possession of its own technical resources but in the values it proclaims and in its solidarity with the human race. This means giving up a theology of communication based on a concept of the Church as a self-sufficient, authoritarian teacher with obedient and compliant listeners responding noddingly to words and concepts of a past age. In place of this it has to admit the hesitations and doubts and criticisms of religion that film directors often manifest in their films, because these are often the doubts and hesitations of the age.

It is in the light of this that we have to judge the portrayal of wrongdoing on the screen. Any film that purports to deal with the human situation will have to treat of sin in one way or another and there is always the danger of overstepping the mark when confronted with the attraction and universality of evil. The less skilled directors run the risk of producing effects contrary to their original intentions. Perhaps believers can learn most from those directors who were brought up within a Christian system but have now lapsed. This is because such directors often retain enough of the old language to be understood even though the memories of their childhood religion appear as caricature. They are not always totally wrong in their view of what went on at school and in the home. Nor are they all bitter in their rejection. An amused sardonic smile mixed with nostalgia is sometimes found in Bergman, Fellini and Buñuel and we can be warned by them not to make the same mistakes as the preceptors of their youth did.

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## Holiness and Sin\*

Anthony Baxter

Do you, when speaking informally in your own words, talk of particular other people as 'holy', or say you desire 'holiness'? Christians today vary widely on this—from omission of the word 'holiness', through assorted hesitations, to unselfconsciously terming certain others holy and voicing a wish to be holy themselves. People may often have deep down a lot more inklings regarding holiness than commonly become explicit. But faced here with an invitation to consider how 'our perceptions' of holiness relate to 'our perceptions' of sin, it is wise to note that initial reactions on the former front as well as the latter can prove less than clear-cut. In my own case, I tend to be fairly reticent in singling out specific individuals as markedly holy, while quick—amidst theologizing—to state that all are called to holiness, and that *some* growth towards it is widespread.

The central ideas in this article are the possibility for humans of close relationship with God and alignment with God's purposes; the primacy in this of God's gracious outreach; yet the place also of human personal responsibility. These ideas lie at the heart of my account of holiness; and they help assessment of statements about holiness as 'virtue', or as 'wholeness'. Notions of sin are correspondingly clarified. And light is thrown—so I think—on some issues evident during reflection on engagement within history, including in political arenas.

From biblical times onwards, 'holiness' has been applied to certain collective referents: specially 'People' and 'Church'. 'Sin' terminology too has had collective referents, whether defined religiously or by other social concepts. The immediate focus of this paper is on individuals, and ascriptions of holiness or sin to them. But such focus spans not just any particular individual's private concerns, but also the individual's stances *vis-à-vis* broad social affairs and structures. There is no question here of conceiving personhood, or the human goal, holiness or indeed sin, in terms of isolated subjects without interrelationship, community and solidarity. So, the paper shuns 'Individualism' in all its familiar senses. And what is said here proves crucial in more direct discussion, in ecclesial or other terms, of collectivities.

## I: HOLINESS

### a) *Some basic understandings*

Let me assemble briskly certain understandings held within Catholic Catholic faith which are basic to this study. All humans are intended and invited by God to come to a certain goal: namely, close relationship with God; and as part of this, sharing relationship with other humans and wholeness as persons. The goal may be termed 'salvation', or 'Kingdom'. Humans are called by God to respond cooperatively: to seek alignment with God's purposes—in other words, seek for people (including themselves) that closeness, sharing and wholeness. Discipleship entails such response from 'the human side'. In so far as humans, exercising their personal responsibility, do freely respond thus, God graciously acts among them to bring about change, growth, towards the goal. Advance in the journey towards the final goal can happen within history, and is willed by God—though completion of the process lies beyond the grave. Whenever within history some measure of human response, divine transforming activity, and hence advance occurs, seeds of holiness are there present. Where response, transformation by God and advance occur at a very high level in a person's life, observers of such flowering are liable aptly to remark on the person as 'holy'.<sup>1</sup>

'How do you know that reality is thus?'; 'How can you tell what is aligned with God's purposes, and what contrary?'; 'How does the observer tell *who* is markedly holy?'. The way one handles such questions

plainly brings in a wide range of one's philosophical, theological and other views. A few particular indications are given during the paper.

*b) Close relationship, and God's gracious activity*

A crucial tenet is the possibility of two-way, dynamic relationship between humans and God. God's outreaching presence and activity in Jesus and, pervasively, as sanctifying Spirit is prior to human response: and human cooperation and growth depend thereon. Yet people's advance towards the goal cannot occur without free, in a broad sense chosen, human response. If a person opens him/her-self to God, increased scope is there afforded to God's presence and creativity.

We can conceive as the optimal case of response from 'the human side' a person's responding totally to God, and being aligned with God's purposes throughout his or her self, character and actions: spontaneously desiring solely God's will and Kingdom, with no desires independent of that (having in this way purity of heart). Jesus, 'the Holy One', is the distinctive optimal case,<sup>2</sup> though even here caution is needed in construing 'perfection' and 'sinlessness'. Our caution will apply also to depiction of his holy mother. As regards the most saintly individuals at large, I give weight below to questions of deficiencies in such persons, and to problems with 'perfection' language. Nonetheless, certain individuals do approximate to total response to God and alignment with God's purposes. Those are the individuals aptly called 'holy'.

I refuse, however, to *define* holiness just in terms of human character, desires and actions. Surely, to say someone is holy is to avow that a very close, reciprocal relationship holds between that person and God, and is notably to accent the *God-to-human* movement—God's transforming presence and activity within the person, itself enabled by the person's self-opening to God.<sup>3</sup>

Consideration of what constitutes a good, mature relationship in marriage, say marriage between Kate and John, may illuminate matters. Perhaps early on the running came mostly from Kate's side. By now—and contrasting with things at the start—John's main roots (on a human plane) lie securely in his relationship with Kate; openness and trust are developed; not only does John episodically will to please Kate, but his inclinations are largely attuned to hers. Communication and some strong thread run deep between the two of them: transcending, though partially expressed in, behavioural particularities, and transcending also circumstantial vicissitudes. Of course, the analogy only holds in certain respects. Conspicuously, the Kate-to-John movement is not the encompassing source that the God-to-human movement comprises.

Within divine-human affairs there is a further element, albeit one hard to voice. Where a person's self-surrender and transparency to God is thorough, *other* humans encountering the person are liable strikingly to discern God reflected, radiated in the life of that person. Ascriptions of holiness tend to be bound up with a person's having such an impact. All

being well, the others will register what they experience as attractive. They will echo phrases written by Padre Pio in a letter about the holiness of a woman who had just died:

How many times when you were close to her ... have you not ... experienced a strange sense of admiration ... and joy which cannot be put into words? How often ... when you were beside her have you not felt closer to God and an indefinable need to become better? ... Holiness shone forth from her and made her the most perfect and most lovable image of God.<sup>4</sup>

But sometimes humans meeting a holy person are impelled to antagonism. Words we perhaps then recall are those of Jesus in John 15.24: 'If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father'.

My stress on the God-to-human movement within holy individuals, plus my comment on others discerning God reflected, might seem to provide a cue for an assertion, 'It is the holiness of God that is here operative and discerned'. However, I am actually hesitant about such an assertion. In people's minds, the phrase 'the holiness of God' often carries associations of divine otherness and transcendence. Yet what holy individuals reflect of God is more diverse than that, and (as displayed below) spans 'nearer' and 'warmer' features of the divine. Until notions of God's holiness have themselves been revised, we ought to allow that what holy persons convey of God is more than God's holiness!

### *c) Holiness as outstanding virtue?*

General statements are familiar about the 'content' of fitting Christian response to God.<sup>5</sup> It is said, for instance, that Christians should love God, neighbour and self; or again, should have faith, hope and love (charity)—to which is now often added that a vital form of love is doing justice. I myself offer the statement: Christians, taking after Jesus and sharing in the life of the Church, should attend to God in prayer, and have for their human fellows a wide-ranging concern which is expressed, so far as feasible, in action.

These statements indicate requisites for well-attuned Christian living/spirituality/response to God: dispositions or virtues intrinsic to discipleship. The word 'virtue' here pertains not simply to private but also to broad social spheres, and extends beyond just ethical matters. To possess these virtues and act accordingly is to hit the mark as regards alinement with God's purposes. Where a person lives out the array of relevant orientations or virtues to an extremely high degree—thus forming a peak, outstanding instance of discipleship—it is also the case that the person is holy.

I maintain, however, that holiness is not well viewed as constituted just by high performance of the relevant virtues, or as definable simply in those terms. Such a view fails sufficiently to allow for the relational dynamism, and notably the God-to-human movement. Jon Sobrino

therefore does not represent matters adequately when in his book *Spirituality of Liberation*, sub-titled *Toward Political Holiness*, he writes: 'In general, by holiness I mean the outstanding practice of faith, hope, and especially charity and the virtues generated by the following of Jesus'.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, believers adopt two perspectives towards persons with the relevant virtues. We stress the person's free, responsible choices and efforts to live thus. Yet concurrently, we affirm the virtues to be the fruit of God's indwelling Spirit. Surely no one can actually attain to outstanding practice jointly of faith, hope and love without being in close, conscious relationship with God. Essential to a balanced account of holiness is explicit avowal of the relational, and notably the God-to-human, dimensions: and depiction of virtuousness as at once requisite to human response, and a manifestation of the relationship and grace.<sup>7</sup>

#### *d) Holiness as psychological maturity and healthy integration?*

Christians today frequently talk along the lines, 'people are called by God to grow towards wholeness and holiness', where the process and destination, plus the training commended, are then specified largely in categories of psychological maturation and general health. There is stress on an individual's becoming: autonomous; free from (often initially unconscious) inner blockages, distorted perceptions and destructive impulses; and integrated in body, mind, feelings, spirit. Wholeness so construed is prone to be treated as either necessary for, or equivalent to, holiness. My own overall outlook accords scope to such concerns. There are many tie-ups with points elsewhere in this article.

However, and speaking figuratively: even if high scores in the assessment scale at a holistic well-person clinic are somehow *intrinsic* to 'salvation' and 'Eschaton',<sup>8</sup> good scores on that scale are best regarded rather as *apt aids* to holiness. For example, without food, and without some insight into the workings of one's psyche and release from disabling anxieties, the prospects for one's relationship with God and alignment with God's purposes would normally seem to be reduced. A mass of tricky issues can here be discerned.<sup>9</sup>

## II: SIN

### *a) Construal in terms of God's purposes for our race*

Are holiness and sin to be conceived as invariably standing in some contrast or polarity? Is it the case, 'in so far as not holy, then sinful'? How those questions are answered hinges on which among certain large-scale, rival conceptual schemes are invoked.

For example, 'the holy' has often been taken as allied with 'the sacred', and 'the consecrated'; and contrasted with 'the profane' and 'the secular'. The latter categories may not have been treated as *essentially* sin-laden.<sup>10</sup> But on certain views about God and the world, the profane and

secular have been understood as so permeated by sin that contrasts between *them* and holiness, and contrasts between *sin* and holiness, have extensively overlapped. Moreover, according to Rudolf Otto for instance, encounter with the holy prompts in people certain experiences which can be called equally experiences of self-disvaluation, unworthiness, absolute 'profaneness', defilement, and sinfulness.<sup>11</sup> We need to be vigilant regarding the fundamental structuring of ideas.

For Christians, plainly much in the texture of human existence familiar to us does not conform with God's ultimate purposes for the human race. Relative to what we envisage as the nature of the final goal (the fullness of salvation), much here and now falls short of that, stands at variance with it. Some of what is at variance seems readily expressible as 'incompleteness' or 'deficiency'; some seems to require stronger terms such as 'deformation' or 'distortion'.

Notions of sin should at root, I think, be construed theocentrically, as some lack of conformity with God's purposes for our race: not just in 'horizontal' language, whether of ethics plus politics, or psychology.<sup>12</sup> We may indeed have problems with ideas of sin as violation of God's honour, or of God's order of retributive justice or legal code; or again as source of displeasure to an arbitrary divine sovereign. But it does not follow that we should sit loosely to all forms of theocentric emphasis.

*b) All that objectively is at variance/personal responsibility*

Granted that sin somehow concerns discordance between human lives, characters, social patterns, and *God's purposes*, a major conceptual issue arises when 'sin' is talked of. Suppose we consider someone named Fred, the issue can be put succinctly thus. Is the word sin being applied broadly, to all in Fred's character and actions that is out of alignment with God's purposes and inhibiting Fred's relationship with God—all that objectively is disordered? Or is the word sin being applied in a more limited fashion: just to whatever lack of alignment, and block in relation, Fred is personally responsible for—through his choices with lucid knowledge, plus his negligence? Presupposed in that formulation of the issue is that God has purposes for Fred which hold objectively—whether or not at any moment Fred knows them or would do but for negligence. Presupposed, in other words, is that things can be out of alignment with (in that way against) God's purposes, without Fred personally being responsible. Compare the notion that God only wills from Fred at any moment, what at that moment falls within the area of Fred's personal responsibility.

It often helps to be clear, when the word 'sin' is used, whether this is in the broad or the more limited sense. The conceptual issue as regards Fred is not dissolved by noting the truth that, for various elements in Fred discordant with God's purposes which are outside *Fred's* personal responsibility, possibly *other* humans *do* bear some personal (as well as merely causal) responsibility: namely Fred's parents/forebears, and others past and present in the environment and structures Fred occupies.<sup>13</sup> The

conceptual issue remains, even if agencies responsible for discordant elements in Fred are visualized (illuminatingly or not) as Adam and Eve in a primeval paradise, or indeed Lucifer and other recalcitrant angels.

Now, it has to be recognized that some strands in biblical and later tradition favour a broad usage of 'sin': such that all in people's characters and actions that objectively is against God's purposes counts as sinful. This goes for the egocentricity and destructiveness working within us prior to our responsible endorsement of these traits, and so forth. Unconscious desires at variance with God's purposes are somehow sinful; so too are choices made without realization that they run against God's design. The word 'sin' spans involuntary states which humans endure, and rightly seek to be rid of.

However, the idea of sin to which I accord prominence in this article, and which notably meshes with my earlier account of holiness, is the more limited one. Mainstream Christians adhere to the belief that it is possible for humans, exercising their personal responsibility, to *choose not* to respond positively in the face of God's invitation: *not* to seek alignment with God's purposes for our race of intimacy with God, sharing and wholeness. People can, as responsible agents, resist close relationship with God and the opportunity for holiness. Those assertions display the central, paradigm case of sin as here accented: of personal sin. To be sure, the assertions are awesome and mysterious. And many points in principle require study.

This idea of sin focuses on a particular element in human variance from what God intends: namely, responsible refusal to make the cooperative response God calls for. Not all that objectively is wrong, unjust, destructive, evil, is by this idea sinful. Phrases commonly linked with the word sin—'fault', 'guilt', 'culpability', and then divine 'forgiveness'—apply in the paradigm case in ways matched within horizontal, ethical discourse, where those terms presuppose personal responsibility. (Compare, on the broader usage of sin.) How far we severally approximate to the paradigm case of sin during our lives is another matter. A lot of the time we are at most in a borderline, shadowy region. Specific, confident ascriptions of personal responsibility and sin prove elusive—for familiar reasons. Wisdom suggests being quick to allow in our minds for others' difficulties (and anyway, in what respect is it our business to judge?): while for ourselves being none too free with excuses, and prompt in praying, 'Lord, forgive me, a sinner'. The good news is that if we now turn to God repentantly, the precise contours of our past responsibility *vis-à-vis* God are hardly pertinent. Let me add that I am not in this paper pursuing questions about an *ultimate* fundamental option against God.

I stress that on my terminology collective, social responsibility for sin is a *mode* of personal responsibility, not an alternative type.

Just as relevant virtues for which a person is responsible are integral to response to God and to holiness, so vices for which a person bears

responsibility are integral to personal sin. On several counts, a Virtue/Vice analysis of our situation before God possesses greater cogency than an analysis of Keeping Laws/Transgressing Laws. A notion of sin as 'missing the mark', failing to attain a goal, lies behind the Old Testament word *ḥata'*, and then the New Testament word *hamartanō*. The core both of holiness and of sin, however, should be seen in terms of human-divine relationship. Further, whereas holy persons reflect, image God to others, sinfulness can obscure or distort for others the purposes of God, and in the strict sense scandalize them.

*c) 'Only a saint knows what sin is'*

It does not take a saint to realize that humans constantly mess up other people's lives, and their own. If there are grains of truth in the adage, 'only a saint knows what sin is', one surely is that those who are holy open their lives before all else to conscious, prayerful relationship with God, and receive through that enhanced insights into the nature of the human shortfall. Michael Hollings writes as follows:

Sin and holiness essentially have to do with relationship to God ... The giving of space and time to God in prayer as a first essential to spiritual living, leads ... to action in God's world for God's people. Action may not necessarily be the right word ... What I am saying is that if you spend time with God deeply and in stillness, you will become aware of evil and sin, in yourself and the world; you will be sensitive to injustice at home and abroad; you will feel a solidarity with the oppressed. Just how far such solidarity is expressed in action or how far it is solidarity in mind, heart and prayer has to be sorted out in each particular person's life.<sup>14</sup>

Holy individuals yearn that human existence be changed at all levels towards what God intends and finds pleasing. Such individuals discern in trust the heights to which humans are called: and the extent of God's readiness, however hopeless things currently seem, to draw the good out of people, create for them fresh opportunities, and build them up.

It is his or her *own* flaws, resistances and need to be changed that the holy individual tends specially to be alert to. And the person humbly recognizes how far, relative to tangles of their past life, release and advance have already occurred. Perhaps this grounds a further adage, 'only a saint knows what God's grace and mercy are'. Here is another passage by Michael Hollings, part of a reflection on being a counsellor:

With the counsellor trying to do what he can to live a life of prayer, service and love, he knows because of his prayer just how far he can fail and fall. But he is undismayed, in that he also faces God every day in depth and so in an obscure fashion grasps that he is a sinner who is utterly subject to God's loving mercy and forgiveness and demand ... It is often not only 'there but for the grace of God go I', but 'there, despite God's grace, I have been, and now by his grace I am moving on and



up and out into freedom. Come with me.’<sup>15</sup>

Discussions of holiness have long cited the words in Matthew 5.48, ‘You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect’. However, for many reasons we are wise to be reserved about equating the notion of holiness with language of ‘perfection’. We may wonder how far holiness, and disorder or sin, can and do concretely coexist in a person. Recurrent avowals by holy individuals not only of past but present failures and ‘sin’ require attention—even if anyone aptly deemed holy can hardly now be lucidly, significantly choosing to refuse God’s call. How far all forms of good order and virtue, at outstanding levels, are in practice jointly possible in a single individual this side of the grave, raises deep issues. So also does inquiry into the relevance of particular lacks in discernment and in psychological wellbeing.

### III: ENGAGEMENT WITHIN HISTORY

#### *a) ‘The world’*

We rightly insist that the broad texture of historical existence—‘the world’ in that sense—can mediate the movement of God to humans and humans to God, and should be cultivated to do so the more. This texture spans the embodied, the sexual, the pleasurable, along with the institutional and so on. Notions of holiness which entail that it is as such fitting ascetically to flee from the world so conceived are misplaced. We insist, encouraged by *Lumen Gentium* chapter 5, that the call to fullness of Christian life and holiness applies to all members of the Church, not only to the ‘enclosed’, priests and religious, or consecrated celibates.

We have to take very seriously also what was surveyed in the last section: that the texture of historical existence contains a multitude of sombre, shortfall elements, some of which come within a category ‘personal sin’. Powerful tendencies run contrary to God’s purposes and Kingdom—are ‘worldly’ in that sense, including tendencies expressed in particular institutions. We rightly seek diminution of such tendencies.

Moreover, even where possible enterprises are in principle worthy, in practice for any specific individual’s life not all can be pursued. As part of that, surely in order for conscious, prayerful relationship with God to develop, some space generally needs to be made in people’s lives, free at that point from other, as such proper, pursuits and pleasures.

#### *b) Prayer, and concern plus action: Both/And*

General statements recur on what dispositions or virtues are essential to Christian life—as we remarked earlier. I myself offer, as one way of putting matters, a statement which identifies two orientations as intrinsic to well-attuned discipleship and to holiness. Christians—taking after Jesus and sharing in the life of the Church—should lovingly attend to God in prayer, and have for their human fellows a wide-ranging concern which is expressed,

so far as feasible, in concrete action. Those two orientations in someone's life flow into and stimulate each other. (Note the words by Michael Hollings above.) The orientations are facets of ongoing personal relationship with the God who purposes human closeness to himself, sharing and wholeness. Obversely, the orientations are geared to diminution of whatever is discordant with God's purposes.

I do not view talk of attending to God in prayerful stillness as simply a hangover from a cloistered ethos, irrelevant to modern or at any rate lay spirituality. Moreover, I maintain that loving attention to God within prayer and faith *always* has generically, and at least in embryonic form, a 'contemplative', 'mystical' character; *in kind*, 'contemplation' and 'mysticism' are not restricted to a few 'set apart'.<sup>16</sup>

Concern for human fellows should in principle be unlimited in range, from one's immediate circle to global matters and at every level of affairs. Regard is due specially to those disadvantaged, poor. Markedly included in the concern ought to be politics in its familiar sense—governmental and economic institutions, policies, personnel, power. Throughout, Christians should foster in human relationships what is right, just and conducive to Kingdom values; and should side against what impairs or distorts. But along with those high affirmations, we have to recognize that any particular individual can only concretely *do* anything about some proportion of what overall concerns him or her. Not all caring about fellow human beings is usefully labelled 'action'; and paths of practical service are diverse.

I hold, then, that for well-attuned Christian living and for holiness, prayer (contemplation) and concern plus action are at root a *Both/And*. They are not an *Either/Or*; nor is one simply to be discounted. The styles and weightings of the two orientations in people's lives will greatly vary. But the basic dual-orientation pattern of discipleship-open-to-holiness remains constant. Through pursuing this pattern, Christians can be instruments in God's purposes of freeing humans from shortfall and sin, and bringing about the Kingdom.

My presentation here can be seen to contrast with Sobrino's in *Spirituality of Liberation*—though much in that book, as in Sobrino's other work, I applaud. After Sobrino has defined holiness as outstanding virtue (a definition whose insufficiency I showed above), he describes two distinct 'environments' or 'spheres', with two corresponding 'types' of holiness. One sphere is 'personal asceticism, contemplation, the exercise of charity in the form of almsgiving' (page 80); later the word 'prayer' is used for this sphere, instead of 'contemplation' (84). Virtues apt to this sphere have widely been perceived as furthering holiness. However, indicates Sobrino, there is a sphere of 'political action', to which the virtue most notably apt is 'political love'—a stance opposed to 'structural injustice' (and 'objective sin'). Practice of such political love comprises for those in *this* sphere the way to holiness (80ff). An impression left by the chapter headed 'Political Holiness' is thus that as regards coming to be holy, prayer (contemplation) and political action are at best an *Either/Or*. If the distinction Sobrino really

intended was between outright withdrawal from politics and a life *combining* prayer and action, and if he himself would agree that without prayer in close relation to God a person can hardly rise to outstanding political love,<sup>17</sup> his phraseology does not effectively communicate those points.<sup>18</sup>

*c) Political or military measures as holiness combating sin?*

Discipleship and holiness entail wanting that in human affairs there be less objective divergence from God's purposes and less personal sin: and doing all that is feasible, amidst due respect for others' choices, to bring this about. How far is that stance appropriately termed one's 'fighting against sin'? Such phraseology can plainly apply when one is addressing one's own need for conversion. However, when dealings with others are at stake, a distinction is called for.

Sometimes, it is clearly others' will that one play a part in their relations with God and their fellows: assisting them in their choices and their battles with their own sinfulness (through counselling, liturgy and so forth). Here one is fairly unproblematically 'helping in the fight against sin'. But consider the opposite pole (I do not now pause on the myriad possible intervening cases). Suppose that a particular group of people is wronging fellow humans, contravening at least objectively God's purposes: such that certain political or military measures are right, and—in the already 'broken' setting—what God wants. The rightful political or military measures *ex hypothesi* clash with what the other people will—in that sense the measures are coercive.<sup>19</sup> Is one's support for political pressure or lethal force against participants in injustice and destruction fittingly represented as holiness combating sin?

Over the years, various positions involving such use of terms have been espoused. The terminology is used today by some who portray unjust political regimes and structures as 'objectively sinful', so that people upholding them are agents of 'objective sin'. That approach evidently lies behind these words by Sobrino:

Objective sin ... is substantially whatever puts persons to death by structural means—by structural injustice, by institutionalized violence—in a word, by repression. The holiness that constructs the reign [of God] is altogether conscious of its struggle with sin ... Holiness [cannot] come into being apart from this mortal combat with sin.<sup>20</sup>

I myself am wary of such use of terms. Detailed questions concern context, and again efficacy, of such speech, and the assuredness of assessments relied on. But certain issues mesh directly with themes in this paper. How satisfactory is it to accord this sort of place to a notion of 'objective sin'? (We may note that 'structures' are not abstract forces; and that whether the particular people campaigned against lack sincerity or are negligent does not seem to be envisaged as germane.) How far can coercion overcome sin? And if, as I have stressed, the categories 'holiness' and 'sin' accentuate *relations between (responsible) humans and God*, is it

not intrusive and an occasion of disquiet for those categories to be invoked as banners in political or military mobilization?<sup>21</sup> Let me add, however, that any comprehensive, rigid disallowance of such invocation is liable to be undermined by certain striking counter-examples. These complex and difficult issues are here only touched on.

## CONCLUSION

I have hardly begun in this article to probe perhaps the most profound area of all, to do with suffering caused by sin, self-giving heroism in approaching such suffering and its human source, and holiness. As it is, I have continually emphasized the possibility of people's being in close relationship with God and aligned with God's purposes—this by God's graciousness, but with a vital role for human responsibility. The possibility thus scanned is fundamental to both holiness and sin.

- I am grateful to Michael Hollings, Gerard J. Hughes and Richard Price for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
- 1 I have amplified some of these points in *King's Theological Review* 10 (1987), pp. 5–10.
- 2 Jesus is by no means *only* to be portrayed as the distinctive optimal case of human response: see my articles in *Heythrop Journal* 25 (1984), pp. 19–38, *Heythrop Journal* 28 (1987), pp. 144–164, *Downside Review* 107 (1989), pp. 1–21, and as in note 1 above.
- 3 Within history, does God give all an equal opportunity to be markedly holy? Do emergent differences stem just from variations in the fervour of human 'input', and/or from 'contingent' factors? Or does God give some persons particular grace to respond well and become on earth very close to God—this for building up the Church? A full study would explore these issues.
- 4 *Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, Letters*, Volume II (Foggia: Capuchin Friary 1975), pp. 561f.
- 5 Space does not permit probing other religions, and holiness therein.
- 6 *Spirituality of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis 1988), p. 80.
- 7 That the situation is indeed as thus avowed—involving distinctively more than a person's uprightiness and devotion—surely contributes to why we tend to such reserve in ascribing holiness.
- 8 Note my use of the phrase 'wholeness as persons' at the start of section I a).
- 9 Moreover, see note 3 above.
- 10 Profanity or unholiness in the sense of irreverence is a separate issue.
- 11 See R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 2nd Edn. (London: OUP 1950), chapter 8.
- 12 If it is apposite to talk of 'sinning against fellow humans' (compare, doing wrongs against them), this is surely because of the positions of victims and ill-doers relative to God's purposes.
- 13 For a sensitive general discussion of some analytical distinctions regarding the term 'responsibility', see H.L.A. Hart, *Punishment and Responsibility* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1968), chapters 6 and 9.
- 14 *Hearts Not Garments* (London: DLT 1982), pp. 51, 53.
- 15 *Living Priesthood* (Southend: Mayhew-McCrimmon 1977), pp. 92f.
- 16 When elaborating, with due refinements and warnings, this outlook on faith, contemplation and mysticism, I adduce the support among others of L. Bouyer, *Introduction à la Vie Spirituelle* (Paris: Desclee 1960); and I. Trethowan, *The Absolute and the Atonement* (London: George Allen and Unwin 1971), pp. 227–286, and *Mysticism and Theology* (London: G. Chapman 1975).
- 17 Compare Sobrino's comments in *Spirituality of Liberation*, pp. 6f, 21, 68f.
- 18 Moreover, while Sobrino and I both hold that Christians should urgently be concerned with politics, he sets out a more specific norm than I do regarding the style of political action, and analysis of 'structures', to be adopted.
- 19 We should shun any idea that, despite the other people's conscious will, their 'true' selves 'really' will the corrective measures, so that they are not actually being coerced after all. For comments on that 'monstrous' idea, see I. Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: OUP 1969), pp. 132–134.
- 20 *Spirituality of Liberation*, p. 129. In this book Sobrino explicitly indicates that he maintains—as I do—the view that in strictly limited cases, military measures against unjust regimes can be justified: see pp. 82–85.
- 21 Compare objections to citing 'sin', or indeed 'immorality as such', as a ground for coercing by means of the criminal law. I discussed that topic in 'Morality, Metaphysics and the Criminal Law', *Oxford Review* (1968), pp. 83–93.