ABSTRACT
SANCTIFICATION AS VIRTUE AND MISSION: THE POLITICS OF HOLINESS

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This dissertation considers the political implications of the doctrine of holiness. I proceed by demonstrating the neglect of holiness in political theology, the viability of the holiness movement as an embodied witness of the political implications of the doctrine of holiness, and a biblical trajectory in Leviticus that extends into the New Testament. I describe this scriptural holiness as vocation for all of God’s people through personal formation and outward societal action to extend God’s holiness.

With attention to the approaches of political theology and formation, I demonstrate that the holiness movement of the nineteenth century offers an example of holiness in practice that addresses societal problems (e.g., urban housing crisis, intemperance, and slavery). I then propose three theological issues that undermined the political vision of the holiness movement in the twentieth century. First, the scope of sin narrowed resulting in a less hopeful expectation of sanctification’s power. Second, most of the holiness movement adopted premillennial eschatology, which altered the way it viewed social structures. Third, the holiness movement was marginalized by its theological rejection of the Third Great Awakening, which served to influence religious and civil approaches to social problems in the twentieth century (e.g., the New Deal and Social Gospel).

Three case studies (race, global missions, and temperance) demonstrate the influence these respective theological shifts had on social action. I argue that a theological interpretation of Leviticus 17-26 guides the holiness movement to embody the vocation of holiness as an alternative vision to the formation of modern politics regarding social orderings. I extend Israel Knohl’s insight that Lev 17-26 responds to prophetic critiques of cultic practices and reconceives holiness to address social challenges. I argue that Jesus picks up this stream when he recites, “love your neighbor as yourself,” and that Christian embodiment of this Scriptural holiness sustains the political vocation of holiness in changing contexts (including the modern bifurcation of life into private and public spheres). I conclude that vocational holiness enables a Christian understanding of political community.