

# SALVATIONISM

## HOLINESS AND THE NON-NEGOTIABLES OF SALVATIONISM

### A crucial and basic distinction

The challenge rang out: Has not The Salvation Army passed its sell-by date? I was being called to account in a public setting. It felt as though the Army was on trial and I was to be her defending advocate. The Lord helped me. It was necessary first to clarify the question. It turned out that those asking it knew quite a bit about the Army. They knew our structures and methods, our doctrines and policies. So it was not so much a question about The Salvation Army as an organisation, but more an attempt to tease out the nature of Salvationism. It is important not to confuse The Salvation Army with Salvationism.

If 'The Salvation Army' is the ecclesial body known by that name, the vast international organisation that is both evangelical church and social service agency (see the writer's *Who Are These Salvationists? - An Analysis for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Alexandria, Crest Books, 1999)), then 'Salvationism' is the sum total or combination of various distinctive characteristics that are peculiar to the Army. Salvationism is a word that denotes certain attitudes, a particular worldview. It signifies an amalgam of beliefs, stances, commitments, callings that when taken together cannot be found in any other body, religious or secular.

The challenge thus became: Has *Salvationism* passed its sell-by date? To answer adequately meant teasing out the elusive meaning of Salvationism. 'What is Salvationism?' is not the same question as 'What is The Salvation Army?' The latter can be answered pretty well by reference to our history, our methods, and our structures. Salvationism on the other hand is the thing that underlies and undergirds all of that. It is what makes us who we are. It is about our pulse, our heartbeat. It is about the non-negotiables that make us a distinctive people, called out by God. (In this essay I am using 'non-negotiables' and 'distinctives' as synonyms.)

Salvationism was invented by God. The Salvation Army was raised up by God who then entrusted Salvationism to it as a sacred trust. The Army is thus the divinely appointed steward of Salvationism. As already said, it is important not to confuse the one with the other.

This essay is therefore an attempt to restate the essentials of Salvationism. Holiness will be right at the centre of that restatement.

### Obedience to God

It is still important to be able to articulate our distinctives as a Christian body. Voices which today call for less attention to be placed upon special denominational characteristics ought not to be allowed to deflect us. It is true that denominationalism can be, and often has been, a harmful barrier between Christians. In North America, for example, there are some 1,500 denominations and religions. That is why we need, in each succeeding generation, to understand who we are in the light of God's special dealings with us as a people. We are not in the business of proclaiming ourselves better than others, or of pointing a finger at anyone. However, we most definitely are in the business, first of all, of knowing who we are meant to be and, secondly, of obeying God. If He has called us out to be a distinctive people for Him, we cannot risk disobedience. If He wants us to be thoroughly Salvationist, then we are going to be just that. We will persist in bearing the hallmarks of Salvationism, resisting attempts to trivialise or erase them.

The hallmarks I have in mind, distilled after holding Army appointments on five continents and having travelled extensively throughout the Army world, may not be the things often claimed. I am not thinking, for instance, of things like brass bands, ranks, military language or music. We need to go deeper. The lasting marks of Salvationism will not be synonymous with methods, programmes or outward trappings. Usually these are merely a means to an end, though some have, rightly, become dear to us.

### A Salvationist cake recipe?

What then is Salvationism? Of what does it consist? Suppose we were about to bake a Salvationist cake. What would be the essential ingredients? Now other cakes might contain some of the same elements, but only a Salvationist cake will have them all. I want to suggest eight ingredients and I will list them first as nouns:

1. *Realism*
2. *Idealism*
3. *Acceptance (or Inclusiveness)*
4. *Compassion*
5. *Simplicity*
6. *Internationalism*
7. *Visibility*
8. *Audibility*

Our cake is going to need all of these blended in equal measure. Let us take each in turn, but now we shall use adjectives instead of nouns, and say: *Salvationism is an expression of the gospel invented by God and entrusted to The Salvation Army At its best it is realistic, idealistic, accepting, compassionate, simple, international, visible and audible.* It has been in the world now for about 140 years and can be located on every continent in 108 countries.

This description (it is not a definition) calls for explanations. At first sight it may seem a bit bland, as though these are obvious attributes that any church would want to have. So each epithet in the italicised sentence above needs to be unpacked. To this we now turn, because not every denomination would own all of these things. Then at the end I want to add a ninth ingredient called *vulnerability*, because we need to be honest and say out loud to ourselves and to others: *Salvationism is also a vulnerable thing.*

### Salvationism is realistic (Distinctive 1)

Salvationism is realistic. It is absolutely down to earth about human nature and sin. They say you can never shock a seasoned Salvationist when describing the depths of your sinful actions or lifestyle. We believe the Bible when it tells us there are no depths to which we cannot sink.

We have seen, or actually experienced in our own lives, the true ugliness of sin. Where some might be deterred by this, we are not. We seek divine grace today still to obey the call of yesteryear from our Founder, General William Booth: 'Go for souls and go for the worst souls!' We are called to engage with the lowest. We have to go where they can be found. Salvationism seeks out. It does not sit and wait for the lost to apply for help.

Neither does Salvationism subscribe to the school of thought that sin is OK these days. It is not OK. The Bible says so. Hell will laugh loudly on the day Salvationism fails to uphold boldly, bravely, intelligently and intentionally all godly standards of purity and righteousness. Our grasp of the dreadfulness of sin, of its insidious nature, of its enslaving capacities, is not for weakening. Salvationism is therefore perpetually on its guard. The great Winston Churchill said, 'We must be ready to fend off, at our average moment, whatever the enemy might hurl at us at his selected moment'. He spoke of physical warfare. How much truer then of spiritual warfare!

Salvationism knows that sin is any transgression of the laws or the will of God. It is essentially against God even if the primary victims of our actions are other people. Salvationism sees the sinner as responsible for his own sin, for although likely to sin, people are free agents. We know that sin separates us from God. It involves guilt and attracts divine wrath. It traps and enslaves, darkening the mind and defiling the heart. It weakens the will and dulls the conscience. Its penalty is death, because the sinful and unforgiven soul will not see God. Sin is a terrible evil with dreadful consequences. All this lends urgent wings to our soulsaving work.

However, at the heart of Salvationism is the symbol of the human soul encountering its Redeemer-Creator, the Mercy Seat (Exodus 25:17; 26:34, AV). No Salvation Army place of worship is complete without a Mercy Seat. It is our pulse, our heartbeat. There the sinner finds forgiveness and the saint still further grace. In the midst, therefore, of our realism about sin is a buoyant, unconquerable idealism about the heights to which human beings can rise in Christ.

### Salvationism is idealistic (Distinctive 2)

This is not about being naively idealistic. We are not pie-in-the-sky romantics. We have our share of dreamers, but Salvationists dream dreams and see visions in the realm of the achievable. Taking God at his word, we stake everything on the offer of divine forgiveness found in Jesus of Nazareth, Saviour and Son of God. A man or woman can rise from the lowest pits of sin to dwell here and now upon the highest heights of righteousness and purity. Jesus does this for people. Salvationism believes ardently in the availability of divine forgiveness for sins truly repented. We believe, moreover, that this same forgiveness is freely offered to every person. The atonement made by our Lord was made on behalf of the whole of mankind. All who are willing may share in its merciful provision. God has excluded none He longs for everyone to be saved.

Salvationism thus involves an unquenchable, burning conviction that no person is beyond the love and salvation of

God revealed in Jesus Christ. We are to preach, teach and share on all occasions the matchless love of God for sinners. Jesus proved this love at Calvary when He paid the price for our salvation. He took our place. We proclaim the shed blood of Jesus as the only remedy for sin. It is a message that should permeate our preaching, our teaching, our writing, and our thinking at every level. It is the bedrock of every manifestation of Salvationism across the globe.

However, Salvationism will not stop there. We preach the forgiveness of sins, and the practical prospect of living a holy life. We are a salvation and sanctification Army. In so saying, we have reached a crucial point - some might say the pivotal point - in this essays analysis of Salvationism.

### Idealistic Salvationism and holiness (Distinctive 2 - continued)

We are a holiness people. We must recapture our nerve about the practicality of living a holy life day by day. This book is meant as one more contribution to that process. Explicit, well-informed teaching about sanctification is in danger of becoming a neglected art in our ranks. Yet it is intended by God to be a sacred trust bestowed upon us, a central facet of all we stand for in the world.

Salvationism's Tenth Doctrine affirms: *We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

So distinctive is this teaching (few other churches would subscribe to it, the Church of the Nazarene - still numerically significant in North America - being a noted exception) that, along with our position on sacraments (see below), it amounts to just about the only theological stance of special significance that we have been able to offer among the churches. It goes to the very heart of Salvationism. If you will forgive a touch of rhetorical exaggeration, it might even be claimed that Salvationism is sanctification, so basic is our Tenth Doctrine to who we are meant to be as a distinct people under God.

A straightforward explanation of Salvationist holiness belief can be found in my *Never the Same Again* (Alexandria, Crest Books, 1997), Chapters 5 and 8. The early 20th century classic writings of Commissioner Samuel Logan Brengle are absolutely seminal, and those of the late Commissioner Edward Read will also enlighten. David Rightmire's *Sanctified Sanity* (Alexandria, Crest Books, 2003) is a most welcome refocus on Brengle's life and teaching. This is to mention only a few of the many helpful literary sources open to every Salvationist. The Army needs its soldiers and officers to be steeped in this key distinctive and to be not only teachers, but also role models, of the holy life. Let our personal holiness be contagious. Let it be 'Christ in you', not something dull or restricting. Let the world see hundreds of thousands of sanctified Salvationists, alive in Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, victorious daily over sin and temptation in all its forms. Let our lives ring with holy laughter, let our idealism shine forth as we honour the Lord Jesus Christ by the full embracing and realisation of all He has to offer us in this life and beyond.

The theme of the essays in this volume is practical holiness. Each writer sets out to show, in one way or another, that a sanctified life is possible, that it is attractive, relevant, effective, and in fact quite normal. We want to illustrate (as best we can) that there is no aspect of human existence upon which the implications of holiness teaching cannot be brought to bear. It is an everyday thing. It touches the whole of our beings and the whole of life. Salvation deals with past sin. Sanctification deals with, as it were, future sins - the empirical fact that most saved persons continue to sin after conversion.

Let the Army's leaders scour the Territories and Commands all over the world to identify officers and soldiers who know the holiness doctrine, who have grasped it with their minds, who have let their hearts be impacted by it as taught in Scripture, who have grown skilled in explaining it, who can preach it, urge it, counsel it and promote it with undying passion in the language of today. How we need anew generation of sanctified holiness writers and holiness teachers.

With holiness, Salvationism is thus idealistic in the best sense. We believe in the practical ideal of being like Jesus. We are deadly serious about it. We enter into solemn covenants about it when we become soldiers of the Army. We make covenantal promises about our lifestyles and actions. Officers make sacred, lifelong covenants on being commissioned that they will teach and live out the doctrines. Even little Salvationist children are gently encouraged to accept Jesus as Saviour and to promise that they will live 'a life that is clean in thought, word and deed'. If ever there were a pithy, memorable description of a holy life, this is it. If you were ever a Junior Soldier of the Army, go back to your promise card and read it again, this time with the mind and heart of a mature adult, and feel its power, its simple depth. (See Chapter 11 for more on the making of sacred covenants.)

After that, visit Chapter IV of *Chosen to be a Soldier - Orders and Regulations for Soldiers of the Salvation Army* (London, The Salvation Army, 1977, revised 1991) and contemplate the list of eleven 'self-examination' questions drawn up by William Booth. The Founder was of the opinion that there is great gain in a careful self-examination of

the soul weekly. He took seriously the teaching of 2 Corinthians 13:5 which contains an exhortation for believers to test themselves. Here are a few samples from Booth's question list:

*Am I habitually guilty of any known sin? Do I practise or allow myself in any thought, word or deed which I know to be wrong?*

*Are my thoughts and feelings such as I should not be ashamed to hear published before God?*

*Am I doing all in my power for the salvation of sinners? Do I feel concern for their danger'?*

*Am I in danger of being carried away with worldly desire to be rich or admired?*

Booth's idealistic Army can thus be seen, when at its best and when being all it is meant to be, as completely and utterly serious about the holy life, though I have no idea how much a list like this is used by Salvationists today. I know some who use it, but I suspect few even know of this help to holiness. As a spiritual exercise it stems from a long tradition found in the teaching and habits of John Wesley who used a not dissimilar list long before Salvationism came on the scene. He and his fellow early Methodists regularly asked themselves 22 holiness health-check questions, such as:

*Am I honest in all my acts and words or do I exaggerate?*

*Did the Bible live in me today?'*

*Am I enjoying prayer?*

*Am I defeated in any part of my life?*

Idealistic? Impossible? Not in Christ and in the power of His love. It is the privilege of all believers, not only Salvationists or Nazarenes, to be wholly sanctified.

### Salvationism is accepting / inclusive (Distinctive 3)

Salvationism adopts a stance of arms wide open to others. It is a stance signalling welcome. It is inclusive. Let me mention six short examples of how this works in practice.

*First*, Salvationism accepts that the gospel is for the whosoever. Nobody is beyond its reach; nobody has sunk too low; nobody has been born destined or predestined to damnation. Our songbook is full to overflowing with songs of invitation to come to the Saviour. The invitation is to everyone.

*Second*, a stance of acceptance is seen in an absence of snobbery. Salvationism is classless. The universal need of grace, and the knowledge that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, is a great leveller. Some are better educated, some better off financially, some higher born, but none of this matters to Salvationism. Its focus is on Christ alone, and kneeling before Him we all seek the same Saviour.

*Third*, Salvationism makes no distinction of gender when it comes to acceptance for ministry opportunities. Nothing is made a male or female preserve. Commissioned officership is open to women and men alike. Married couples are deployed mostly together, and as equals, in ministry appointments. Gender snobbery is banned. So too is academic snobbery. In testing vocations for full time service as officers, Salvationism does not look primarily at formal educational qualifications (though these are not ignored) but leaves the door wide open for the gifted, Spirit filled, called and committed John or Jane Average, who will become key achievers in winning others for Christ. A holy passion for souls, harnessed to a burning hatred of sin, will not be spurned by Salvationism.

*Fourth*, Salvationism has a sense of humour. Salvationists laugh a lot, often at themselves. We like jokes about our foibles, of which there are plenty. We try not to take ourselves too seriously. Laughter is present in most worship services and this is a healthy sign.

*Fifth*, Salvationism, while carrying with poise and a measure of self-assurance the distinctives given it by God, is accepting of the place and roles of other church denominations. Salvationism has something to offer at the ecumenical table. It also knows it has something to learn. The sharing of insights is a two way process. (For a formal statement on The Salvation Army in relation to other churches, see the Appendix at the end of this Chapter.)

*Sixth* and last, mention should be made of Salvationism's accepting attitude to those of other faiths. We long for their conversion to Christ, but we will respect their beliefs and, in accordance with the wise counsel of the Founder, never offer criticism. Instead, Salvationism prefers a quiet, positive, courteous word of personal witness when the opportunity arises.

#### Salvationism is compassionate (Distinctive 4)

Today everyone who knows the Army expects Salvationism to manifest itself with a face of compassion. Salvationism is the friend of the poor. It is biased toward the social underdog. Compassionate Salvationism is aligned with need, so much so that according to one famous, but supportive, TV journalist here in New Zealand, Salvationists 'have the smell of the streets' on them. This was said as an enormous compliment. It struck home.

The public has high expectations which can be fulfilled by the Army only in the power of Christ. A classless Army, we follow our working class, carpenter Saviour, whose hands were smeared and worn with manual toil, whose finger nails were not always clean, and whose disciples too knew the meaning of sweat and labour. We get our hands dirty if need be among the downtrodden and vulnerable. Some have seen Salvationism as 'Christianity with its sleeves rolled up'. There is much to live up to.

Salvationism has been endowed by God with a marked giftedness and capacity to love the loveless and to serve the outcast.. It represents so huge a burden of responsibility that we tremble at the thought. Compassionate Salvationism's tool kit comprises the basin and the towel, both literally and metaphorically. Feet get washed and spirits healed through programmes for: addictions, homelessness, domestic violence, broken families, abandoned children, illiteracy, health education, income generation, job training, food parcel distribution - the list seems endless. It is all sustained in being by God. He garners the resources. He provides the drive, the energy to keep going. Sometimes He takes us by surprise and opens up the way for innovative, imaginative expressions of compassionate action. In the city of Christchurch, New Zealand, God is working out his purposes through a Salvation Army boxing club and, more recently, through a tattoo removal program, something especially meaningful to new converts whose tattoos can feel like seemingly unbreakable bonds with an unregenerate past.

#### Salvationism is simple (Distinctive 5)

Salvationism is essentially simple. In this context I am using 'simple' to mean uncomplicated, or not complex. Simplicity ought not to be confused with superficiality. Salvationism has depth, but seeks to avoid complications.

This is seen in our worship styles. We adopt no complicated liturgy, no set forms. Directness is the key; spontaneity the spirit. Preparation is crucial, but plans can be instantly changed or abandoned altogether if God's Spirit so leads. Preaching is meant to be simple - over nobody's head - but deep enough to appeal to the most thoughtful person present. Meetings and worship events mount steadily to a moment of simple choice: for Christ or not; for sanctification or not. The goals are simple: first to honour God, and then to bring out in the attendee a verdict, a response in the heart. The inspiration is the pattern set by Jesus in telling his parables, each calling forth a watershed response on the part of the hearer Simple, yet deep.

Salvationism's simplicity is found also in Salvationist ceremonies. Each one - the dedication of children, weddings, funerals, the making of new soldiers, and so on - is intentionally simple, avoiding frills.

The aim is dignity with accessibility. No mystery for its own sake. No hype just for effect. No complexities or grandness that could ever lead the participant mistakenly to think it is the ceremony that imparts grace, requiring no faith in the heart.

Very close to this is the simple, thought-through absence of sacraments. Salvationism rejoices in a God-given liberty from sacramental ritual. Instead it embraces a simple belief in, and worldwide witness to, the immediacy of divine grace. Salvationists have been spared the tortuous, divisive disputations found wherever sacraments are debated and made central. We need take no sides in the age-old tensions about format and theology. We can simply look on in slight, but always benign, bewilderment as others, all sincerely intent on obeying what may never have been commanded, follow widely different rituals based on endless varieties of theologies while claiming authenticity for their own 'this' over someone else's 'that'. In its simplicity, Salvationism stands called out by God to show in daily living the viability of holiness and Christly compassion free from sacraments or anything that might be mistakenly understood to be a sacrament. (See further *Who Are These Salvationists?*, Part II - Chapters 4,5,6 )

Salvationism's formal Doctrines are also simple, pared down statements of belief. The eleven Articles of Faith are all short and pithy. The language is almost monosyllabic, the content consistent with mainstream, orthodox Protestantism. The *Handbook of Doctrine* in each edition (the 1940 edition is especially powerful) manages an exposition that can be grasped by simple, straightforward folk. It is profound stuff, handling revealed truth in

language that is accessible and in a style that does not threaten. Simple Salvationism.

### Salvationism is international (Distinctive 6)

In saying that Salvationism is international we mean much more than that The Salvation Army can be found in a large number of countries. Salvationist internationalism is about holding all people as brothers and sisters under one Heavenly Father, the Creator of all Salvationism.

Salvationism sees no race, no ethnic group, no skin colour, and no culture as superior to another. It affirms natural feelings of patriotism, proper pride in one's own country and its achievements, but eschews nationalism with its overtones of racial superiority.

Salvationism teaches that Christians are citizens of the world before they are citizens of their own countries.. 'All lands, said General Bramwell Booth, 'are my fatherland, for all lands are my Father's'. God has given us the whole globe as our arena, and therefore we can regard no person as our enemy, even in time of war. Salvationism is as serious as that about being international.

### Salvationism is visible (Distinctive '7)

Invisible Salvationism is a contradiction in terms. Salvationism seeks everywhere a high profile in order to be seen and heard. The impetus for this is sometimes to attract funding for social programmes. A better reason is to draw attention to the claims of Christ. With a highly visible profile we can, as it were, punch beyond our weight. We can impact for God far beyond our numerical strength.

Salvationism wears a uniform for two reasons: as a witness to Christ, and as a means of announcing one's availability to others. Salvationism lives for others. It longs for others to be saved, and cannot rest while others are in need. Only those committing to soldiery in the Army are entitled to don the uniform, but soldiers have a choice. The uniform is not mandatory. However, we need more wearing it than not wearing it if we are to remain visible. It has always seemed to me a worthy motive for becoming a soldier of the Army, namely the chance to wear the uniform and be seen to be Christ's person. Visibility is a sacred privilege. Salvationism does not take it lightly.

### Salvationism is audible (Distinctive 8)

Mention of audible Salvationism will attract wisecracks about loud brass bands and rattling tambourines. That is OK. It is a great experience to hear Army musicians and congregations raise the roof in praise of God. There is, however, something else to be said. If invisible Salvationism is a contradiction in terms, so too is silent Salvationism. We must make our message heard. This is true of the gospel message for the unsaved. Nothing could be more urgent, more important. Some of you reading this will want to 'leave your nets' to become available in the Army for full time service. You can spend your whole life, devote all your energies to making the Good News of Christ audible.

There is, however, another aspect to Salvationist audibility. We have already looked at compassionate Salvationism and the addressing of human need. Compassionate Salvationism is not complete unless it is also an audible Salvationism. Salvationism is a voice for the voiceless. It is willing to take risks to be heard on behalf of those who cannot speak. This is a natural consequence of being biased toward the poor.

Need gets revealed in symptoms, yet there never was a symptom that had no cause. Audible, intelligent Salvationism can never be satisfied with dealing only with symptoms. It is the causes of need which cry out for attention. *Why* are children hungry? *Why* are women battered? *Why* are food parcels still needed in rich countries in the 21st century?

Advocacy in the public arena on the causes of social deprivation is a demanding pursuit. There are those who will warn us off, citing possible loss of financial support if we upset some by being truthfully and penetratingly audible. That will not do. Salvationism that ducks the issue is no Salvationism. We are called as much to social action as we are to social service.

Salvationism will be heard. Salvationism needs to show up in the debating chambers of the nation, in the halls of influence, in the TV studio and radio station. Salvationism has world-formative things to say and dare not, cannot be silent. When Salvationism speaks, it speaks for Christ. The price of silence is unthinkable.

This brings us now to that additional, final characteristic of Salvationism, vulnerability.



## Modern Salvationism is vulnerable

Modern Salvationism is vulnerable in ways that have crept up on us sometimes unperceived.

In seeking to set down eight key, distinctive elements (I have called them non-negotiables) of Salvationism. I have intentionally written about Salvationism at its best, as though it were always and everywhere just so. Now, of course, things are not quite like that. Today Salvationism is vulnerable. In the final part of this essay, let us examine this.

Already we have said that God invented Salvationism, but handed it over to folk now called Salvationists. That was a divine risk. God knew what he was doing when he gave it all to *flawed human beings* I cannot think of any religious body that would not say the same of itself. So Salvationism, on a human level, is in the hands of far from perfect mortals. These are constantly in need of more grace, regularly seeking forgiveness.

Though the Army is growing globally, it is experiencing *damaging numerical losses* in-too many places. This has been happening for quite some time. Growth in Africa and South Asia is tremendous, but not in Europe or in the western, English-speaking democracies. In the land where Salvationism was born, the United Kingdom, losses in numbers of Army soldiers are very high year after year. Child conversions are also less frequent. Some corps officers in places I have visited around the globe seem no longer to know how to lead a child to Christ. We are seeing a new phenomenon: Army corps that have no junior Soldiers at all. This neglect will return to haunt us.

Vulnerability is seen also in *uncertainty about our identity* and mission in recent years. Not all Salvationists can articulate just who we are meant to be under God. There has been some loss of nerve, with waning confidence in Salvationism's distinctives, the very things this essay is about. This has shown itself in occasional attempts to water down the essentials of Salvationism, and to retreat from the beauty and ongoing relevance of soldiership in the Army. Some corps have tried to become pale reflections of other evangelical churches, to our lasting detriment. We are witnessing here and there a lack of poise, a diminution of the conviction that God invented Salvationism and that God raised up the Army. Once these truths are recaptured, recovery might begin in those places where it is needed.

Salvationism is vulnerable to *financial pressures*. So vast is the social programming, so costly the endeavour, that we are forever in need of money. Vulnerability arises when we start to trim our Salvationist sails to the winds of the world and the dollar. We cannot always expect to be popular. Jesus was not. The apostles were not. William Booth was not. Today, however, mostly we are. Why is that?

The ongoing *secularisation of our employee force* is another potentially disastrous source of vulnerability. The genius of Salvationism has from the outset been that its mission is carried out by saved persons. Each employee was to be a partner in mission. Although we have many fine Christians on staff, this basic concept has all but been abandoned. Salvationism has been left vulnerable.

Threats are arising also from a growing *uncertainty about officership*. Roles once carried out only by called, trained, covenanted-for-life officers today might be found being performed by lay employees, not all of whom, as already noted, are committed Christians. The morale of officers is at risk. The attractiveness of officership is in danger of being affected in proportion to its distinctiveness being undermined. Vulnerability thus arises from the blurring of lines between the functions of ordained and commissioned officers, and roles assigned to others willing to serve as lay Salvationists or as employees. There are many parts of the Army world where these things need to be quickly addressed. It is not too alarmist to say that in some lands officership is at risk. The risk deepens wherever those who have made a lifelong vocational covenant are marginalised in favour of those whose intentions are explicitly short term or transitory.

The greatest threat of all today for Salvationism is a perceptible *neglect of holiness teaching*. Left unchecked, this has the potential to undermine Salvationism right at its very heart. We are less surefooted about it than once we were. William Booth used to say that there are few subjects of which we more frequently speak, or in which we more truly glory, than that of holiness of heart and life. Is this still so? No, it is not. Some among us, well-meaning but misguided, seek to offer the substitute of pseudo-sacraments or imitation sacraments for solid, Bible-based teaching on, and seeking after, the holy life. The blessing of a clean heart is no longer spoken about or witnessed to. Many (most?) Salvationists today would simply not know what we mean by the phrase, 'the blessing of a clean heart'.

God, who raised us up, is calling us to be open and honest about the present state of Salvationism in the world. This same God, however, is good and there are remarkable things being accomplished by His power. The commitment and work rate of Salvation Army officers and staff that I have met on five continents is impressive to say the least. We can recognise that the Army is still fruitful for God, in whose holy heart there once arose an emotion so strong that Salvationism was born.

From the heart of God we came. In the hands of God we are held. In the strength of God we trust. He will bless us as an Army if we remain true to our first calling. Paradoxically, it is largely the old wells that beckon us into the future.

(For insights on the further Salvationist distinctive of 'covenant' see Chapter 11 by Captain Stephen Court.)

## Appendix

*The following statement has been published and used for official purposes by The Salvation Army in the United Kingdom and in New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga*

### **The Salvation Army in Relation to Other Christian Denominations**

#### **A Position Statement**

**(by Shaw Clifton)**

*See Reflections - How Churches View Their Life and Mission* (London, BCC, 1986)

#### **Summary Statement**

1. The church universal comprises all true believers in Jesus Christ.
2. Believers stand in a spiritual relationship to one another which is not dependent upon any particular church structure.
3. The Salvation Army is part of the church universal and a Christian denomination called into and sustained in being by God.
4. Denominational variety is not self-evidently contrary to God's will for His people.
5. Inter-denominational harmony and co-operation are valuable for the enriching of the life and witness of each denomination.
6. The Salvation Army seeks and welcomes inter-church and ecumenical involvement in the 108 countries where the Army is present.

#### **Amplified Statement**

##### **The Church Universal**

1. WE BELIEVE that the church, the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:23), comprises all who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:13). The church universal includes all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and confess Him as Lord.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that the church universal depends for its existence or validity upon any particular ecclesiastical structure, any particular form of worship, or any particular observance of ritual.

2. WE BELIEVE that the church universal is the whole of the worshipping, witnessing Christian community throughout the centuries into whatever groupings, large or small, accepted or persecuted, wealthy or poor, her members may have been structured in the past or are governed in the present.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that an adequate definition of the church can be confined in terms of ecclesiastical structure, but must rather be stated in terms of a spiritual relationship. Members of the church are those who are incorporated into Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:1) and therefore reconciled to God through His Son. All such are in a spiritual relationship one with the other which begins and continues regardless of externals, according to the prayer of Jesus that those who are His may be one (John 17:23). These words of Jesus ask for a oneness as is found in the oneness of Father and Son. This oneness is spiritual, not organisational.

3. WE BELIEVE that The Salvation Army is part of the church universal and a representative of the body of Christ. Christ is the True Vine (John 15:1) and believers are His living, fruit-bearing branches.



WE DO NOT BELIEVE that any community of true followers of Christ can rightly be regarded as outside the church universal, whatever their history, customs or practices when set in comparison with those of other Christian communities. God alone knows those who are truly His (2 Timothy 2:19).

### **Denominational Variety**

4. WE BELIEVE that God's dealings with His people are perfect according to His will, but that human responses are imperfect and prone to error. It may be God's dealings or fallible human responses to those dealings which have brought about the rich and varied denominational tapestry discernible today.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that denominational or organisational variety can automatically and in every case be said to be contrary to God's will for His people.

5. WE BELIEVE that God raised up The Salvation Army and inspired the distinctives of Salvationism according to His purposes for His glory and the proclamation of the gospel.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that The Salvation Army's existence as an independent and distinctive Christian community, having no formal, structural ties with other Christian communities, is an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ or self-evidently contrary to God's will for the whole of His body on earth.

6. WE BELIEVE that the practices of The Salvation Army have much in common with the practices of other churches, but that being raised up by God for a special work, the Army has been led to adopt the following distinctive combination of characteristics:

- a) its emphasis upon personal religion and individual spiritual regeneration through faith in Christ, leading in turn to a commitment to seek to win others to Christ;
- b) its teaching concerning holy living;
- c) its insistence that the gospel is for the whosoever;
- d) its use of the Mercy Seat;
- e) its avoidance of set forms in worship, seeking to encourage spontaneity;
- f) its teaching that the receiving of inward spiritual grace is not dependent upon any particular outward observance;
- g) its requirement that full members (Soldiers) publicly confess their faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and enter into a formal doctrinal and ethical commitment, the latter including abstention from alcohol, tobacco, and non-medical use of addictive drugs;
- h) its encouragement into Army fellowship of those unable to enter into the formal commitment of Soldiership;
- i) its strong commitment to evangelism, including outdoor evangelism;
- j) its witness through the wearing of distinctive uniform on the part of most Salvationists;
- k) its recognition of the equal place of women and men in all aspects of Christian ministry and leadership;
- l) its vocation under God to serve the needy and to be a voice for the voiceless;
- m) its world-wide structure and its emphasis upon internationalism;
- n) its freedom from, and intentional non-use of, sacramental practices

These are part of the blessings which have come through God's gracious dealings with us through the years.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE it to be self-evidently God's will for His people in the Army that they cast aside in haste the blessings of the years.

## **The Local Church**

7. WE BELIEVE that just as the true church universal comprises all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, so each denominational church comprises a community of true believers who have in common the way the Lord, through His Holy Spirit, has dealt with them as a community. In turn, each denominational church comprises local churches regularly meeting together for worship, fellowship and service in a relatively confined geographical location.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that the validity of a denomination or its local churches depends upon any particular ecclesiastical tradition, structure, hierarchy, form of worship, or ritual. Where even two or three gather in Christ's name there He is present (Matthew 18:20) with a presence no less real than that discerned in larger, more formal or ritualistic settings.

## **The Army's Identity**

8. WE BELIEVE that The Salvation Army is an international evangelical Christian denomination with other Christian denominations and that the Army's local corps are local churches with the local churches of other denominations. The Army springs from the Methodist revival and has remained unassimilated by any other denomination.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that The Salvation Army's history, structures, practices or beliefs permit it to be understood as anything other than a distinct Christian denomination with a purpose to fulfil and a calling to discharge under God. Similarly, its local corps cannot properly be understood unless seen primarily as local churches meeting regularly in Christ's name for worship, fellowship and service. Commissioned officers (both men and women) of The Salvation Army are ordained ministers of the Christian gospel, called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach and teach apostolic truth in the name of Christ and for His sake.

## **The Army and other Churches**

9. WE BELIEVE that it is God's will that harmonious ecumenical relations are built up and sustained, by His grace, between Christians everywhere and between all Christian denominations including their local churches. The Army's numerous and widespread contacts with other Christian communities both in Britain and around the world serve to enrich the Army's spirituality and to enhance its understanding of the work of the Spirit. For this reason the Army welcomes such contacts and seeks cordially to extend and deepen them.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that narrowness or exclusiveness are consistent with God's will for His people, or that God has nothing to teach us by our sharing and co-operating with His people in other denominations.

10. WE BELIEVE that every visible unit of the Church universal is endowed with its own blessings and strengths as gifts from God. We respect, and in many cases admire, those strengths recognising too that because of human frailty every denomination, including The Salvation Army, has its imperfections.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE it is our task or place to criticise or undermine the traditions or emphases of other denominations, and certainly not in relation to the sacraments, on which our stance is unusual, though not unique. It is contrary to our practices to offer hostile comment upon the life of any denomination or local church. We are anxious not to denigrate the doctrines or practices of any other Christian group. The Army places emphasis in its teaching not upon externals but upon the need for each believer personally to experience that inward spiritual grace to which the external observance testifies. We maintain that no external observance can rightly be said to be essential to salvation and that the biblical truth is that we can meet with God and receive His grace anywhere at any time.

11. WE BELIEVE The Salvation Army was called into being by the will of God, is sustained in being by God's grace, and is empowered for obedience by the Holy Spirit. Its overriding purpose is to win the souls of men and women and boys and girls for God, whilst working simultaneously, and for Christ's sake, to alleviate the material lot of those in need.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE that we alone are called to this sacred and awesome task and therefore we rejoice that in other Christian churches we find co-workers for God.