

Journal of Aggressive Christianity

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Visions

by: Stephen Court

I will pour out my Spirit on all of you! Your sons and daughters will prophesy; your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. And I will pour out my Spirit even on your slaves, men and women alike, and put strange symbols in the earth and sky- blood and fire and pillars of smoke. (Yahweh, in Joel 2:28-30)

While I can't vouch for the pillars of smoke, I know there are some strange symbols in our tradition; crest, shield, and flag, all under the blood and fire motto. The Salvation Army fights under that war cry, ever mindful of the blood Jesus shed so that our sins could be forgiven, and the fire of Holy Spirit which can ignite our lives to live out the Kingdom of God from day to day.

One of the great warriors of history, General William Booth, exemplified these principles as he devoted his life to winning the world for God. In the heat of the battle for souls, God used William and Catherine Booth to raise up The Salvation Army to take the war to the streets and alleys. Booth was intent on living out the Kingdom of God and inevitably scandalized many with some components of this New Testament brand of Christianity. A burning compassion for souls unrestricted by concerns for dignity ruffled feathers. An unbounded flexibility aimed at doing whatever necessary to reach outside of the Kingdom offended traditionalists. Taking his cue from Jesus (Luke 4:18,19), he ended up confounding purists by actually preaching the Good News to the poor, healing the broken hearted, announcing release to the captives, freeing the downtrodden from their oppressors, and spreading blessing to all. His detractors dismissed it as a social gospel. Army meetings played out like a sequel to the Book of Acts. People were saved. Others were healed. Many experienced 'Glory Fits', combined and described variously today as being drunk or slain in the Spirit, or doing carpet time. Read the reaction today against the Holy Spirit's renewal in its various forms (Toronto Blessing, Promise Keepers, Pensacola/Melbourne, Argentina, the Laughing Revival...) and you can imagine how Booth's Salvation Army was received. And the spiritual gifts were being exercised, enhanced by prophesy, dreams, and visions.

Through the Old Testament and into the days preceding Jesus' birth, visions and dreams are an integral part of God's story. Visions and dreams are a popular means for Yahweh to convey His message to people. Many of our heroes receive these wonderful visitations, and many of our favorite Bible lessons are inter-weaved with them. Dreams and visions come up 223 times in the Bible. And yet the prophet Joel looks ahead to a time when it is not just the Billy Grahams, the famous and powerful, who have visions and dreams, and not just epochal junctures in history, like the Incarnation, when they are received. He sees a day when God's Spirit is poured out on all God's people, and one of the

manifestations of this blessing is that they see visions and dream dreams, both young and old, both women and men, both rich and poor.

Booth was a visionary in this sense. We are increasingly aware of this reality in our days, and a few have written exposing to us the possibilities and expectations. In this as in several other areas, William Booth was ahead of his time. And while many visions speak specifically to their day and circumstances, the visions contained in this volume transcend the century and convey to us, in graphic terms, God's will for us as God's people. We are doubly blessed. Not only was General Booth a man intimate with God, he was also gifted with the pen. Thus we receive these clear expressions of some of his visions and dreams in captivating prose.

This issue of Journal of Aggressive Christianity contains the first in a series of VISIONS articles by William Booth. The changes to the original text are minimal; the updating of a few obsolete words and phrases, the rearrangement of text and addition of subheadings, and the inclusion of complementary comments following each vision. The purpose of this reworking is three-fold: 1) to encourage what God is doing in these days through dreams and visions; 2) to introduce a new generation to one of the great hearts of history; and 3) to inspire God's people at this juncture of history with eminently applicable words of challenge.

May it realize its object in your life.

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Second Chances.

Trudging home, tail between his legs, licked once again by his temptations, he tries to inconspicuously slide into bed. It doesn't work. Covers shuffle, a light switches on, and Alma smothers him in a dripping hug.

God is a lot like Alma. He's the God of the second chance. That's why we love Him. When I drag myself back to Him, still reeling from the stomach-kicking effects of yet another sin, Jesus' mercy heals my innards. When the mirror reflects the reality of the shortcomings of your best intentions, Jesus' mercy frees you to be transformed to reflect His glory. When social blunders or wrong decisions put us behind the eight ball, Jesus' mercy comes to our rescue. If you don't know Jesus, if you've made a mess of your one shot at life, if you can't even imagine the wonders of heaven, Jesus' mercy is ready to forgive your sins, recreate you, and give you a second chance.

It's a beautiful concept, this second chance. The only thing is, the vision we're about to read is just that, a vision. It effectively spurs us on toward love and good deeds; it challenges us to take seriously the eternal consequences of our spiritual slothfulness; it inspires us with the graphically depicted love and mercy of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. But it is not quite true. You see, although God is the God of the second chance, there's a limit. They say there are only two things you can't do in heaven: sin, and evangelize. Implicit in the first exception, no sin, is the harsh truth that there are no more second chances. You see, God set it up for us all to live once, die once, and then face the judgment. Judgment and mercy don't mix. And Judgment Day marks the end of second chances.

What do you think? Did William Booth go too far with his point? What did he mean by the second chance? How does this affect our view of the Judgment Day and, more importantly, how we live this day before us? We would love to hear from you.

S.C.

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In Heaven, But Not Of Heaven

by: William Booth

I HAD a very curious vision of Heaven the other day, and I have been much perplexed as to whether I should tell it to my friends or not. The chief difficulty I find in giving it publicity arises from its apparent uncharitableness. It would seem at first sight as though I made the gate to the Celestial City narrower than the Bible is supposed to do, and therefore shut out a large number of those fully expecting to be welcomed there, and that with a flourish of trumpets.

In this narrowing of the way it will be considered, perhaps, that my vision is at fault, and therefore somewhat misleading; but on its behalf I may suggest, that as Heaven is, as the Negro said, "a mighty big place," it may be only some special part of the vast continent of blessedness that caught my attention, and which is contemplated in my vision. Then, again, I have felt a difficulty supposing myself

to be any other than a good Salvationist, and I have not failed see that this also may lay my story open to objection.

But, as everyone knows that dreams and visions are fantastic and contradictory things, I have thought that these eccentricities might be passed over for the useful lessons they are calculated to convey. I have, therefore, decided to let this one see the light, leaving the reader to judge whether it has any interest for, or any application to, himself. In my vision I thought that, in some way or other, I had ceased to be, what I hope I am in fact, a persistent seeker of souls and a resolute opponent of Satan. I thought that I had been transformed into a Christian of that type which we all know is so very common around us. It may seem strange also, but I was not conscious whether I was connected with The Salvation Army or with any other religious organization. All I knew was the simple fact that I claimed to be a follower of Christ, and regarded myself as having the favour of God, hoping for the enjoyment of the blessings promised to His people hereafter.

In my vision I imagined that, so far as this world was concerned, Solomon's prayer was answered in my circumstances, for I had neither poverty nor riches. All my temporal wants were fully supplied. I had home, friends, and leisure, and all that was really necessary to happiness in those respects. I was, as I have already said, a Christian. Most of my more intimate friends professed to be the same. We visited at each other's houses, and were alike interested in each other's amusements, business engagements, political opinions, and many other things. We bought and sold, and married and gave in marriage; in short, we acted as though the world we were in was going to last forever. I thought also that I took some active part in the Church to which I belonged. I always attended its services on the Sunday, held a prominent position in its financial management, and occupied myself zealously in teaching Bible truths to the children; indeed, I considered myself quite a shining light.

Now and then - not very often - I visited the sick, in a friendly way, especially when they happened to be connected with my own circle of acquaintances, and in addition to these good deeds I contributed a little money to support missionary operations. In all this I was quite sincere. I had no notion of playing the hypocrite. In fact, I did not do so. It is true I did not stop to think what Christianity really was, although I talked about it freely enough at times, and pitied people who did not profess it. But I seldom seriously considered what were the claims of Jesus Christ and the poor, sinning, suffering world about me, although I occasionally heard them discussed, but more seldom did I meditate upon the length and breadth of those claims in their relation to myself. I had got into a certain rut of thought, action, and profession, and I went on from day to day, hoping that all would turn out well at the last.

But in my vision I fancied that, without any apparent warning, a dangerous fever seized me. I went down most unexpectedly, and before I knew where I was, the doctor pronounced me to be in a dangerous condition; in fact, in a few hours I was brought to the very verge of death. This was a serious business indeed. Every-one around me was in the greatest confusion, while many of those who loved me were paralyzed with despair. Then followed consultations with other

physicians, a hurrying from far and near of my family, many suggestions as to remedies from my numerous friends and acquaintances, together with the most careful nursing which money could procure or affection dictate. But all proved in vain.

For my own part I did not feel any particular alarm about my state. Whether it was the suddenness of the visitation, or the benumbing character of the disease, or the effects of the narcotics which the doctors gave me to procure sleep or soothe the pain, I cannot tell; but, strangely enough, I seemed to be the least disturbed person in the household. I felt as though I were in a dream. I knew I was ill - dangerously ill - for a relative insisted on my being informed of my real condition, and yet I was not distressed by the announcement. I thought I should recover. Most people do, I suppose, until the hand of death is actually on them. And if not, what need had I to worry myself, for was I not a Christian? Had not Christ died for me? Had I not been converted? Did I not believe in the Bible? Had I not lived a moral life? What had I to fear? And then, again, was I not all the time hearing hymns sung for my comfort, and prayers offered for my restoration, and that if recovery could not be granted me, it was as earnestly asked that I might pass away without suffering, and have a happy admission into Heaven? Why should I be very much disturbed?

And even if disquieting thoughts did cross my mind - for I could not help questions arising as to whether I had done my duty to a perishing world with my time and influence, and money and family - it was all in a dreamy way. So it seemed as though it were impossible to do anything different under the circumstances than let things drift. How could I do other-wise, with the burning fever lapping up the vital current, and my brain all confused, and my energies laid prostrate? Consequently, when I complained that I had not much joy, I readily acceded to a suggestion made by my minister, that my condition prevented it. Then I felt, moreover, that if I were not "ready" for the change, I had neither the thought nor the energy required to begin so serious a business over again as the salvation of my soul. Besides, how could I make the confession in the presence of my wife and children and church comrades that I had been mistaken all these years, and that my life had been a failure? No! It was too late, and I was too ill, for any such action. One thing I could do, and that I did: I cast myself with what force of soul I had left, on the mercy of my Saviour and again and again repeated a couplet which had always been a favourite with me:- "I am a poor Sinner, and nothing at all, But Jesus Christ is my All-in-all."

It was with this very sentence on my lips - a sentence taken up and reproduced at the Memorial Service held on the following Sabbath - that a cold numbness came creeping over me, and a great difficulty in breathing followed. My friends were alarmed - I read their apprehension in their faces. Some fell on their knees, and broke out in prayer, while others wept, and my dear ones moistened my lips, and kissed my brow, and spoke their last and lingering farewells in my ears. Meanwhile a strange faintness seized me, destroying my consciousness. My next sensation was altogether beyond description: it was a thrill of a new and celestial existence. I was in Heaven!

After the first feeling of surprise occasioned by this sudden translation had somewhat sub-sided, I looked around me, and took in the situation. It was delightful beyond anything of earth; and yet some of the more beautiful sounds and feelings and scenes of the world I had just left appeared to be reproduced in my new experience after an enchanting fashion. Still, I am constrained to say no human eye ever beheld such beauty, no earthly ear ever heard such music, no human heart ever experienced such ecstasy as it was my privilege to see and hear and feel during the first hours I spent in the celestial country. Above me was the loveliest of blue skies. Around me was an atmosphere so balmy that it made my whole physical frame vibrate with pleasure. By the bank of roses, on which I found myself reposing, there flowed I clearest and purest of rivers, which seemed to dance with delight to the murmurings of its own waters. The trees that grew on its banks were covered with the greenest foliage, and laden with most delicious fruit, sweet to my taste beyond all earthly sweetness. By lifting my hand I could pluck and eat the fruit to my heart's delight. In every direction, above and around, the air was not only laden with the richest of odours yielded by the loveliest of flowers, but rendered vocal with sweetest sounds, and filled with fairest forms. Floating about me were beautiful beings whom I felt by instinct were angels and archangels, seraph and seraphim, cherub and cherubim, together with the blood-washed and perfected saints who had come from the world below, sometimes far away and sometimes drawing nearer. The blue sky appeared at times to be full of white-winged, happy, worshipping, joyous beings, while the whole country - apparently of limitless extent - seemed to be filled with a blissful ecstasy that could only be realized by being experienced.

My sensations may, perhaps, be imagined. At first I was swallowed up with a sort of rapturous intoxication, which was immensely enhanced by the blessed consciousness that I was securely landed in Heaven - that I was safe, and should suffer no more. "Far from a world of grief and sin, With God eternally shut in. And then, strange to say, a new set of feelings began to creep over me. Marvelous as it may appear, I felt somewhat solitary and not a little sad, even in the midst of this infinitude of felicity; for, up to this moment, I was alone. Not one of the happy beings who were soaring and singing in the bright ether above me, or who were hastening hither and thither, each intent upon the performance of some high mission, had as yet approached or spoken to me. I was alone in Heaven! And then, in a still further and yet more mysterious way, I felt in myself a sort of unfitness for the society of these pure beings who were sailing around me in such indescribable loveliness. And yet, how could this be? Had I come there uninvited, or by mistake? Was I not counted worthy of being a partaker of this glorious inheritance? I was bewildered. It was indeed a mystery.

My thoughts went back to earth, and, as though by an angel's hand, the history of my past life was unrolled before my eyes. What a record it was! At first glance I seemed to be able to take in the substance and meaning of my entire earthly career, becoming at the same time strangely conscious of a marvelous quickening of my intellectual powers, realising that I could, in a moment, take in what would have required a day to understand with my poor, darkened faculties when on the earth. With my quickened mind I saw, to my delight, at that very first

glance, that this register of my earthly existence - this super-natural biography - contained no record of any of my misdeeds before my conversion indeed, that part of my life appeared to be very much a blank. Neither was there any mention, to my utmost satisfaction, of the sins I had committed since that time. It was as though some friendly hand had gone through the roll, and with kindly labour blotted out the record of all the evil doings of my human life. Now this was very gratifying. I felt like shouting over and over again - in fact, I made some attempt to do so; and well I might, for was I not delivered, through the mercy of Jesus Christ, from the pain of having these things eternally staring me in the face in this beautiful holy land, among all these holy beings where, it seemed to me, that the very memory of sin would defile? Nevertheless, a second glance at my roll appalled me, for, while the evil things I had done were omitted, it revealed the kind of life required from me by the light I had enjoyed, and the opportunities with which I had been favoured. Nay, the revelation went much deeper, for it described in detail the objects which had influenced me during my earthly career. It set forth the purpose for which my thoughts and feelings and activities had been mainly spent, and brought forth the ends for which I had employed my time, my money, my influence, and all the other talents and gifts with which God had entrusted me to use for His glory and the salvation of men. Every chapter of this roll carried back my thoughts to the condition of the world I had left; and while I mused on it there came up before my eyes such a graphic picture of its hatred of God, its rejection of Christ, its terrible wickedness, with all the wretchedness, destitution, and abominations flowing out of this state of things as appalled me.

As this part of my vision passed before my wondering eyes there came into my ears such a hurricane of cursing and blasphemy, and such wild wails of anguish and woe, as almost stunned me. It was a terrible recollection! I had often seen these sights, and heard these sounds, when on the earth; not too often, it is true, for I had hid myself from them; but, oh! they blinded and stupefied me now, for they appeared to indicate a condition a million times blacker and viler, more wretched and piteous than they had seemed when on the earth. I felt like putting my hands before my eyes, and my fingers in my ears, to shut this hideous apparition out from sight and hearing, so intensely real and present did they seem. They wrung my soul with sorrow and self-reproach; for alongside these horrid recollections, the "roll of memory," at which I had just glanced, showed me how I had occupied myself during the few years which I had been allowed to live amidst all these miseries, after Jesus Christ had called me to be His soldier, and to fight for Him. I was reminded how, instead of fighting His battles, saving souls by bringing them to His feet, and so preparing them for admission to this lovely place, I had been intent on earthly things, selfishly seeking my own carnal interests, worrying about my own personal cares and anxieties, and spending my life in practical unbelief, disloyalty, and disobedience to all my most sacred obligations.

I must say again I felt horror-stricken. Oh! if only at that moment I could have crept out of that "land of pure delight," about which I had sung so much in the past, and gone back to the world of darkness, sin, and misery, which I had just left; that I might spend another life-time fighting for my Lord, combating these

evils, and striving to save the sufferers, by poverty and cross-bearing, how gladly I should have done so. But that could not be. I was a fixture. I was in Heaven. Heaven must be my abode for ever; and, contradictory as it may seem, this thought filled my soul with unutterable regret.

And then came another thought, wilder than all that had gone before it. (You must not forget that it is a vision I am relating.) The thought was this: would it be possible for me to obtain a commission, or rather a permission, to go back to the world, to that very part of it from which I had come, clothed in some human form, and live my life over again; live it in a manner worthy of my profession, my Christ, and my opportunity. Could this be? At that moment, if an answer in the affirmative had been brought me, I would have willingly forfeited my heavenly blessedness, I would gladly have undergone ages of hardship, ignominy, poverty, and pain. I would have given a million of money - nay, a world - had it been mine to give. But I could see no hope of such a second probation. What was to be done?

I had not been musing thus many seconds - for thoughts appeared to flow with remarkable rapidity, as I have said, in this new world - when, quick as a lightning flash, one of these bright inhabitants whom I had watched floating far off in the clouds of glory, descended and stood before my astonished gaze. I can never forget the feelings with which this apparition inspired me. Describe the shape and features and bearing of this noble form I cannot, and I will not attempt to do so. He was at the same time human, and yet angelic; earthly, and yet celestial. I discerned at a glance that he was one of the blood - washed multitude who had come out of the great tribulations of earth. I not only judged this from his majestic appearance, but from an inward instinct that the being before me was a man, a redeemed and glorified man. He looked at me, and I could not help but return his gaze; in fact, his eyes compelled me and in doing so I confess to being ravished with his beauty. I could never have believed the human face divine could have been made to bear so grand a stamp of dignity and charm. But far beyond the entrancing loveliness of those celestial features was the expression that beamed through every lineament of that countenance, and shone through the eyes that were gazing upon me. Those eyes appeared to me, moreover, as sunlit windows through which I could see right into the depths of the pure and benevolent soul within. I do not know how I appeared to my beautiful visitor. I knew not what form I bore, for I had not as yet beheld myself mirrored since I had exchanged mortality for immortality. Nevertheless, I evidently had a deep interest for him, an interest that seemed of a saddening nature, for his features appeared to grow almost sorrowful as I stood there with my eyes fixed on him by a fascinating spell.

He spoke first. Had he not done so, I could never have summoned courage to address him. His voice was soft and musical. I understood him almost before I heard his words, although I cannot now tell what language he used. I suppose it was the universal language of heaven. He informed me that my advent was known throughout a certain district of the celestial region, where were gathered the ransomed spirits who had come from the very neighbourhood in which I had formerly resided. The tidings of my arrival had been flashed through the heavenly

telephone of that particular district. My name had been whispered on every hillside, and echoed in every valley; had been breathed from every tree and flower; had been sounded forth at every turn of the Golden Street; had been articulated in every room of every mansion, and proclaimed from every tower and pinnacle of the stupendous temple in which these glorified saints, day and night, present their worship to the Great Father. All who had known me on earth; all who had any knowledge of my family; my opportunities for helping on the Kingdom of Christ, whom they worshipped and adored, were burning to see me, and to hear me tell of the victories I had won, and the souls I had blessed when on earth, and all were specially anxious to hear if I had been the means of bringing salvation to the loved ones they had left behind.

As all this was poured into my soul by my visitor, I knew not which way to look. Again and again I remembered my life of ease and comfort. What could I say? How could I appear with the record of my life before these waiting spirits? What was there in it better than a long-drawn story of self-gratification? I had no martyr experiences to recount. I had sacrificed nothing for His dear sake worth naming on earth, much less worthy of being published in Heaven. My mind was running in this direction, when I think my visitor must have discerned what I was thinking about, and felt some pity for me, seeing that he spoke again:- "Where you find yourself," he said, "is not actually Heaven, but only one of its forecourts. Presently the Lord Himself with a procession of His chosen ones, will come to take you into the City itself where you will reside, if He deems you worthy; that is, if your service on the battlefield below has pleased Him. "Meanwhile I have obtained permission to come and speak to you concerning a soul, who, I understand, lives near your late residence, and in whom I feel a deep interest. Our knowledge of the transactions of earth is, for our own sakes, very limited, but now and then we are permitted to get a glimpse of what is passing there. Can you," he said, looking at me with an unspeakable longing, "tell me anything of my son? He was my only son. I loved him dearly - loved him too much. I spoiled him when a child. He had his own way. He grew up willful, passionate, and disobedient. My example helped him not; and here a cloud for a moment settled upon that beautiful brow, but vanished as quickly as it came. "Memory has been busy of late with that melancholy chapter of my life" he said, as though talking to himself; and then he returned to the story of his prodigal son. "I myself, through the instrumentality of The Salvation Army, was rescued from a life of sin and shame, washed, regenerated, taught to fight for souls, and had the high privilege of winning many to the blood-stained banner of the Cross. An accident, however, suddenly overtook me while at my employment, and as suddenly swung me into Heaven; and now," he added, "where is my boy? Oh! give me some tidings of my boy. He lived near you, I believe. He had business dealings with you. Is he saved? What did you do for him? Is there any hope? Tell me what his feelings to my Lord were when you last spoke to him!" He ceased speaking. My heart sunk within me. What could I say? I knew the boy. The story of the father's death and his prodigal son had been told me, and yet I had never addressed one serious word to the young man about his soul, or about his Saviour. I had been busy with other things. And now what could I say to his father as he stood there before me?

I was dumb! The cloud I had noticed before gathered again on the face of my visitor, only with a darker shadow this time. He must have guessed it all. He looked at me with a glance, which expressed the disappointment to himself and the pity for me which he evidently felt. Then he turned from me, and, suddenly spreading forth his white wings, he soared away out of my sight.

I was so intently gazing on the receding form of my visitor that I failed to notice a second glorified being had occupied his place. I turned and looked upon the newcomer. It was a spirit of the same order, belonging to the ransomed multitude who were once dwellers on the earth. There was the same dignity of bearing, the same marvelous expression of inward power, and purity, and joy ; but in this case these graces were combined with a beauty of a more delicate and enthralling mould. Divinely fair as I thought my first visitor, more beautiful than any conception or dream of earth could be, yet here was a beauty that surpassed it. My former visitor, I have said, bore the form of a glorified man; this was evidently the form of a glorified woman. I had, when on earth, sometimes wished that I could have looked upon Eve in the hour when, young and pure and beautiful, she came forth from the hands of her Maker, and had imagined something of what her lovely figure must have been on that bridal morning, bearing as she did the fair image of her Creator, and being, perhaps, the most marvelous work of God. Now here I saw Eve reproduced before my eyes, clothed in immortal youth, as pure, as beautiful, nay, more so than her first mother could possibly have been; for was not this the Divine Master's finished workmanship? But I was soon awakened from my reverie by the voice of the fair creature, who, from her manner, evidently wished to speak to me on some matter of great importance.

She introduced herself somewhat after the fashion of my previous interrogator; she, too, had come from the very same neighbourhood where I had lived so long. She told me her name. I had heard it before. She was a widow, who had struggled with great difficulties. Her husband's death had been her life. Converted at his grave, she had given herself up unreservedly to fight for the Lord. Her children had been her first care. They had all been converted and entered the battlefield, except one. That unsaved one was a girl, who had been her mother's delight. She had grown up lovely in form, the village pride; but, alas! had gone astray. It was the old story of wrong and seduction and cruel abandonment, with all the consequent train of miseries. The mention of that name brought a similar saddening cloud over her lovely face to that which had dimmed the bright visage of my first visitor; but, as in his case, the cloud vanished almost as soon as it appeared. I listened to the story as it came from this mother's heart. I had heard something of the painful incident when on earth; but I had turned my ear away from it as being no concern of mine. Little did I ever think I was going to be confronted with it in Heaven. And now the bright spirit turned on me those beautiful eyes, gleaming with love and pity, and spoke again "My daughter lived near you; you know her. What have you done for her? Have you saved my child?" At this I must have cried out in agony. I know I put my hands before my eyes, for I could no longer bear to meet her glance. How long she continued to look on me with her powerful, piercing, pitying eyes I know not;

but when I withdrew my hand she was gone, and the silvery sheen of her dazzling wings marked her out to my searching gaze like a speck on the distant blue. Again I gasped out, "Oh! my God! is this Heaven? Will these interrogations go on for ever? Will the meanness and selfishness of my past life, with all their sad consequences - from which I had hoped for ever to have got away in this country - haunt me every day and every hour throughout the coming eternity? What shall I do? Can I not go back to earth, and do something to redeem myself from this wretched sense of unworthiness? Would it be possible for me to live my life over again?"

This question had hardly passed through my mind when there came another rush of wings, and down beside me alighted another form, resembling the first that had spoken to me; and yet, oh! so different. But I will not stay to describe him. You must imagine him. His introduction was much the same, but his story was different. He had been a great sinner, but had been awakened and won to Christ by The Salvation Army a short time back, and had joined its ranks. Much forgiven, he had loved much. All his desire when on earth was to get free from the entanglements of business, and devote himself as a Salvation Army Officer, to the work of saving men. When just about to realise his wish, he had been sent for to Heaven; and here he was a spirit of glory and joy coming to enquire from me concerning the Corps in which he had been a Soldier, and of the crowd of unconverted companions he had left behind. Did I know his old Corps? he asked. Their Hall was close by my house of business. Had I helped them in their struggle with difficulties? Had I done anything for his old mates, who were drinking, and cursing, and fighting their way to hell? He had died with prayers for them on his lips - had I done anything to stop them on their way to ruin? To all this searching appeal, what could I say? I knew his Corps, but I had never given them a word of encouragement. I knew the hovels in which his old mates lived, and the drinking saloons in which they spent their money; but I had been too busy, or too proud, or too shame-faced, to seek them out with the tidings of a Saviour's love. Again I was speechless. He guessed my feelings, I suppose, compassionated me, and left in sadness - at least in as much sadness as is possible in that happy land. For myself I was in anguish, strange as it may appear, considering I was in Heaven. But so it was, and wondering whether there was not some comfort for me, and involuntarily looking round me, I saw, or thought I saw, a marvelous phenomenon on the distant horizon.

All that part of the heavens appeared to be filled with a brilliant light, surpassing the blaze of a thousand suns at noonday and yet there was no oppressive glare rendering it difficult to the gaze, as is the case with our own sun when he shines in his midday glory. Here was a brilliance far surpassing any-thing that can be imagined; and yet but for my recent experiences I should have looked upon it with indescribable delight. As I gazed and wondered what it could mean it appeared to move a little closer, and I perceived clearly that it was coming in the direction of the spot on which I stood; for I had not left the banks of the beautiful river where I first found myself. And now I could distinctly hear the sound of music. The distance was a great many miles according to the measure of earth, but the atmosphere was so clear, and I found my eyesight so strong, that I could

readily discern with the naked eye objects which on earth would have required a powerful telescope to see. The sound came nearer. It was music beyond question, and such music as I had never heard before. But there was a strange commingling of other sounds, which altogether made an entrancing melody, composed, as I afterwards discovered, of the strains that came forth from a multitude of musicians mingled with the shouts and songs that proceeded from innumerable voices. Gradually the rapturous hosts drew nearer - rapidly, I might have said, but that my curiosity was so strongly aroused to know what it signified that a few minutes seemed an age. At length I was able to comprehend the marvelous sight that approached me. But who could describe it? The whole firmament was filled, as it were, with innumerable forms of beauty and dignity, far surpassing those with whom I had already made an acquaintance. Here evidently was the representative portion of the aristocracy of Heaven accompanying its King, who, as my first visitor had informed me, was coming to welcome into the Heaven of heavens those who had fought a good fight, who had kept the faith, and who had overcome in the conflict, as He had overcome. I stood transfixed with awe and wonder. Could it be possible? Was I at last actually going to see my Lord, and be welcomed by Him? In the thought of this rapture I forgot the sorrow which, only a moment before, had reigned in my heart, and my whole nature swelled with expectation and delight. And now the procession was upon me!

I had seen some of the pageants of earth - displays that required the power of mighty monarchs and the stored wealth of prosperous nations to create - but those when contrasted with the scene that now spread itself before my wondering eyes, were each, or all combined, as the gleam of a feeble rush-light to the blaze of a tropical sun. I have to say of this, as I have already said of other scenes that have passed before me, I cannot attempt a description. It would be impossible. Moreover, I was so agitated and excited that the whole spectacle was to my eyes simply one vast sea of glory, and to my ears an overwhelming rush of harmony. But on the procession came: and as it neared me I fell prostrate before it. What wonderful beings these heavenly spirits appeared! each one looking in himself; to my poor untutored eyes, like a god, so far as greatness and power could be expressed by the outward appearance of any creature. Rank after rank passed me by, each spirit turning his eye upon me, or seeming to do so, and to everyone I could not help feeling that I was somewhat an object of pity. Perhaps it was my own feelings that made me imagine this; but it certainly appeared to me as though these noble beings regarded me as a craven, cowardly soul, who had only cared for my own interests on earth, and had only been induced to come up there from similar selfish motives. However, onward the mighty cavalcade swept. I have said "cavalcade," for while part of the procession filled the heavens with their shining wings, and another part walked with upright mien, the picture of dignity itself, there was a host, as imposing as any, or more so, mounted upon the most beautiful white horses, more beautiful than ever were beheld by any human eye. On they came! Thousands passed me, yet there appeared no diminution of the numbers yet to come. I looked at the train as it stretched backwards, but my eye could see no end to it. There must

have been millions upon millions of spirits. It was indeed "a multitude that no man could number." All this mighty host were praising God, either in hymns expressive of adoration and worship, or by recounting, in songs of rapture, the triumphant victories gained on earth in the name of Calvary's Prince, or in describing some of the wonderful works of Jehovah in other parts of the vast empire.

And now the great central glory and attraction of this stupendous procession was at hand. I gathered this from the still more dignified character of the beings who came marching past, by the heavier crash of the music, and the louder shouts of exultation which came pealing forth from all around. I was right; and before I could prepare my spirit for the rapturous vision of the King, the King was here! The procession halted, and at the word of command in an instant formed up in three sides of a square in front of me, the King standing in the centre immediately opposite to the spot where I had prostrated myself. In the midst of these circling hosts, rising, tier above tier, high into the blue vault above, each gazing upon Him with eyes lustrous with the love they bore him, I beheld the celestial form of the God-Man who once died for me upon the cross. What a sight that was! Surely, it was worth toiling a lifetime to behold. Nearest to the king were the patriarchs and apostles of ancient times. Next to these worthies, rank after rank, came the holy martyrs who had died for Him. Then followed the army of warriors who had fought for Him in every part of the world; while around and about, above and below, were myriads and myriads of spirits redeemed from the earth who, although never heard of outside their own neighbourhood, or beyond their own time, had with self-denying zeal and untiring toil laboured to extend God's Kingdom and to save the souls of men. Then, circling the gorgeous scene, was an innumerable host of angelic beings who had kept their first estate, proud, it seemed to me, to minister to the happiness and exaltation of the soldier saints who had faithfully lived and died for their Lord in the poor world from whence I came. I was bewildered by the spectacle. The songs, the music, the shouts of the multitude, like the roar of a thousand cataracts, echoed and re-echoed through the sunlit mountains, and the magnificent and endless array of happy spirits ravished my senses with unspeakable delight.

All at once, however, I recollected myself, and bethought me of the High Presence before whom I was bowed; and lifting up my eyes, I beheld Him gazing upon me. What a look that was! It was not pain, and yet it was not pleasure. It was not anger, and yet it was not approval. Anyway, I felt that in that countenance, so transcendently admirable and glorious, there was yet no welcome for me. I had read this in the faces of my previous visitors; I read it again in the face of my Lord.' That face, that Divine face, seemed to say to me—'for language was not needed to indicate what His feelings towards me were "You will find yourself little in harmony with those who were once the companions of My tribulation, and are now partakers of My glory, who counted not their lives dear unto them in order that they might bring honour to Me and salvation to men." And as He spoke, He waved His hand, and gave a look of loving admiration at the host of apostles, martyrs, and warriors gathered around Him.

Oh, that look of Jesus! I felt that it would be worth dying a hundred deaths at the stake, or being torn asunder by wild beasts, to gain one such loving recognition. The angelic escort felt it too, for their responsive burst of praise and song shook the very ground on which I lay and the vaulted skies above my head. Then the King turned His eyes on me again. How I wished that some mountain would fall upon me, and hide me for ever from His presence. But I wished in vain. Some invisible and irresistible force compelled me to look up, and His eyes met mine once more.

I felt, rather than heard Him say to me, in words that engraved themselves in living fire upon my excited brain; "Go back to earth. You shall have another opportunity; and if you prove yourself worthy of My name, and show to the world that you possess My Spirit, by doing My work, and by making yourself a saviour of men, you shall return hither, and I will give you a place in My conquering train, and a share in My everlasting glory."

What I felt under that look and those words, nor heart nor mind could possibly conceive, nor tongue nor pen could ever describe. They were mingled feelings. First came the unutterable anguish arising out of a full realization of a wasted life, a life squandered on the paltry ambitions and trifling pleasures of earth, which might have been filled with deeds that would have produced a never-ending harvest of celestial fruit, won for me the approval of Heaven's King, and made me worthy to be the companion of these glorified heroes. But, combined with this self-reproach, there was also a gleam of hope. My soul's desire to return to earth was to be gratified. Perhaps it was in response to the longings which I had felt ever since the consciousness of my earthly failures had dawned upon me, that this favour was to be granted me. I should have the privilege of living my life over again. True, it was a huge responsibility; but my Lord would be with me, and His Spirit would qualify me for my task. I embraced the opportunity with all my heart. And then I closed my eyes, and gave myself over, body, soul, and spirit, to live and fight, and die, not for my own salvation, but for the glory of Christ, and the salvation of men. The King spoke again, this time pledging His word that His presence should go with me back to earth, and make me more than conqueror through His blood. And with the joy of this assurance I awoke. The crowd of shining ones had vanished. The music was silent, and behold it was all a dream.

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Interview: Eric Despreaux

Journal of Aggressive Christianity: Tell us about your background, how you came to know Jesus and how you came to know The Salvation Army.

Eric: *I was born into a traditional Roman Catholic family in France. I was educated in the Catholic Church from the age of seven years and so I followed all of the typical teachings of the Catholic Church. I was very intrigued in the faith of the people I met. I had the chance to be taught by a good Christian priest and a monk to taught me theology. Even when all of my comrades left the church, I continued my studies. I was even involved in the Catholic youth movement. When I turned fifteen the priest and the monk who taught me were stationed elsewhere and a new priest came to fill their positions. This new priest was not a good man, so I left the church. I was a teenager seeking after truth, I was looking for a new way to live my life.*

At the age of sixteen I started to become interested in politics. My godfather was a believer in the Communist Party. Once he joined us for holidays for one month and there was plenty of time to talk with him and to see how he lived. I was just out of the Catholic Church and to me the French Communists seemed to be more christian-like than those inside the church. Of course, I started to become very interested in their politics and wanted to become more involved. As I entered university at seventeen, I remember skipping out of my English classes to join a group of political radicals. That is why my English is poor today! The significant thing that came out of those meetings was a shift in my thinking from a more passive communism towards a more revolutionary communism. I did not believe in the Stalinist form of communism but in Trotskism, which is much more aggressive than Stalin's form. About that time I started to study Russian in university because I wanted to go to Moscow to study at the Political University in Moscow and to be recognized as a member of the Communist Party in France. I think that my theology, my coming to the Salvation Army, has been touched by these two things: Catholicism and radical communism.

What is very interesting is that while I was still a thinking about being involved in the Communist party I came to know that The Salvation Army was looking for volunteers to hand out soup in Paris to homeless people. When I heard about this I thought that I should do it because it would show that I was serious about being a good communist and about helping others. Most of my revolutionary friends were constantly talking but rarely acting on their convictions. I found the address of the headquarters and I wrote to the Salvation Army. The chief secretary wrote me a very kind letter. I phoned a corps and soon found myself talking to some officers. In my first appointment with the officers they told me, "Jesus is knocking at your door. Do you want to ask him to come into your life?" For me the question was a surprise because I had only asked the officers for the opportunity to serve soup. I was not expecting my life to change. It was as if

Jesus was waiting for me. I left the corps and the interview that day with a Bible and a War Cry. I went home and went to my room, shut the door, and started to read the Bible. I was saved that night kneeling beside my bed. The date was 23 February, 1983.

J.A.C.: How are you involved in the Salvation Army today?

Eric: *I am the Regional Officer for the Ukraine, Russia/CIS Command. My wife Rosemarie and I, along with our three children, were appointed to the Ukraine in 1994, where we worked for four years in the Central Corps. Now as Regional Officers for Ukraine we are helping give leadership to nine corps and two distribution centers. We have fifteen national officers in Ukraine.*

J.A.C.: What are your dreams for the Salvation Army?

Eric: *I am dreaming of a much more aggressive Salvation Army. By aggressive I mean evangelism and in terms of the way we can change the world. I would compare the Salvation Army to a "Knights Order" who are given a mission to go and fight against the devil to save people in captivity. This means that a Salvation Army officer and soldier must give his life for Christ in order to be prepared to do everything to help Christ save the people.*

J.A.C.: Which authors would you say have helped shape you into who you are today?

Eric: *I would say the best French writer is Esmisola, who wrote books about the situation of the labour workers in France at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. For foreign writers I would say Steinbach, probably for the same reason. For poets: Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Baudelaire, just because they have a good perspective on the world.*

J.A.C.: What is the best sermon you have ever heard?

Eric: *The best sermon I heard was in France at a congress led by Colonel John Gowans. He was preaching on the Holy Spirit and what impressed me was his passion.*

J.A.C.: What is God teaching you these days?

Eric: *The thing that I have learned being in the Ukraine is that I have no right to do anything in my own strength. Even when I feel capable I have to be enabled by God. And this last year as a regional officer, I have also learned a deeper sense of humility.*

J.A.C.: Who are your heroes?

Eric: *I have two Christian heroes. The first one is in the Salvation Army and is Commissioner Francy Cachelin. He was the man who was capable to ask me "How is your soul?" He cared about my spiritual life, my purity, and my health. He also taught and showed me how to get people saved. He was my mentor as a warrior for Christ. My second hero Ditrich Bonhoeffer because he did not fear to give his life for the sake of Christ.*

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This article was originally published in [DISCIPLESHIP: Vision and Mission](#) (Editor: Commissioner Edward Read, The Salvation Army Canada & Bermuda Territory). Captain Ryan is currently the Regional Officer for The Salvation Army Russia South. He lives in the city of Rostov-on-Don with his wife Sandra and their children.

What reactions do you have to this article? Do you agree with the assertion that the Salvation Army in first world nations has an identity crisis? Do you concur with the call to "seize the vision"? If so, how will you personally respond to that calling?

J.N.

JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY
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To Be or Not To Be

Geoff Ryan

"God will not have His work manifest by cowards" (Emerson)

I have sat through countless classes and seminars on evangelism. I have almost 30 different books in my library on evangelism. I have been told 'how' to do it (get someone saved and then disciple them- in Salvation Army parlance: "soul-saving and soldier-making") more than enough. And I've come to the conclusion that we (by "we" I mean the Army, as part of the evangelical church) have put the cart before the horse in this whole area of winning others. Why is this?

Who are we

It is a more a matter of who we are, rather than what we do. We tend to focus our efforts on what we should be doing and how we should be doing it, before we have really settled who we want to be. In other words, it is not so much a matter of "what" and "how", but of "who". I realize that this is hardly a Damascus road revelation and not the first time this idea has been expressed, but let's push the idea a little further than it is usually pushed and focus not just on our identity as "Christians" and "Evangelicals", but specifically as "Salvationists."

The contention is that anyone who wishes to be an effective disciple and therefore reproducing disciple (getting others saved) needs to take seriously the question of his or her denominational identity and loyalty or be destined to fruitlessness and frustration. There is a correlation between the depth and intensity of one's Salvationism and the effectiveness of one's efforts in the area of evangelism. Personal experience in pioneering and church-planting brought this to my attention and the global picture confirms it- wherever in the world the Army is growing, that is where Salvationists take seriously their calling as Salvationists. They know who they are, who to be, and from that naturally follows what to do. The seminars and books are optional extras because the harvest of souls occurs as it always was intended to- automatically, and inevitably, a sequential by-product of a passionately held belief and not, as we so often attempt to make it, an end in itself effected through formula and technique.

The problem in the West (as opposed to the East or the Third World) is that we're all slightly embarrassed by having to be Salvationists. The uniforms, the flags and bands and ranks and arcane terminology- the whole military metaphor seems so out of joint with the times and societies in which we live that we try to tone it down. We try to blend in with other denominations and make it easy for "the world" to understand and accept us- an apologetic Army, cap I hand to both prevailing cultures of which we are a part (the Canadian culture and within that the Evangelical subculture), seeking to entice people into our fold with innocuous deceptions ("We call ourselves an Army but really we are a church") with a "nudge-nudge, wink-wink" about all these Army euphemisms.

And herein lies the crux of this whole evangelical puzzle. Evangelism means bringing people into the Kingdom of God. To be a part of the Kingdom is to join the community of believers. We express that as members of one branch of this community- The Salvation Army. Evangelism, to be complete, entails discipleship and growth and constancy in the new believer. This takes place in the context of the community. Thus evangelism has not occurred unless the convert joins the Church and for our converts this means joining The Salvation Army by becoming a soldier (junior or senior) as recruits classes are our form of discipleship and the soldier's covenant is our form of baptism and membership. This cannot happen- and therefore by definition evangelism cannot happen - if people are not joining us because who we are is vaguely defined and apologetically presented by people who do not believe it, are not committed to it or simply don't understand.

You see, people will follow almost any person (no matter how bad an example) and believe almost any teaching (no matter how crazy) as long as the presenter is passionately committed to what he or she lives and espouses. Most cults can assemble a greater number of followers on any given day than most Salvation Army Corps in our territory can on a Sunday morning. Why is this? We teach the truth, the Gospel of the living God, while they teach nonsense. Is something wrong with our message? Of course not. Therefore the conclusion is that something is wrong with our packaging or our presentation of the truth.

Name Brand Christianity

And what is wrong is not our denominational trappings (the packaging)- most of the cults, to continue the analogy, have weirder fashions and far more silly rituals than we do. The point is that their adherents (both leaders and followers) believe passionately in who they are. They present their identities with conviction, never apologetically; defiantly countercultural, they evangelize. In a world that lacks conviction, they convey deep conviction and a passionate belief in who they are. That is what people are looking for. As long as you believe in something you will be able to find people to follow you anywhere. "Well, I do believe in something!" you say. "I am a Christian and that is the most important, the rest (i.e. denominational allegiance) is secondary and not really important. When I stand before the Lord it will be as a Christian and not in my Salvation Army uniform!" you say.

Don't be so sure. To state blandly that you are a Christian is not enough. I can state that I'm a "husband." Does that therefore give me the right to join any family or no family, to lie with any woman who is similarly labelled a "wife," to assume

patriarchal authority over any smaller people labelled "children?" Of course not. I have my wife, my family.

Similarly, the Church is our family. There is the bigger family unit (the Church Universal) of which I have cousins and distant relatives that I see from time to time (Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, etc.). But my loyalty is to my immediate family, The Salvation Army. I was called into it and consequently I chose to become a soldier. It is a calling for me, and God always holds us accountable for our callings. He has never been happy with unfaithfulness in any form and that holds true for our denominational ties as much as it does for our duties in a biological family unit. Therefore I believe that one day I will stand before the Lord in my "Army uniform" and that He will inquire of me how faithful I have been to my calling as a Salvationist.

To state you are a "Christian", and leave it at that, can be nebulous when presenting to the world (i.e. when evangelizing). What is a Christian? One hundred different things to 100 different people: from a polyester-clad TV preacher from Alabama to an incense-obscured Eastern Orthodox priest; from a cave-dwelling Coptic hermit in the hills of Eritrea to a machine-gun toting partisan in Beirut; from a charismatic tongue-fest in suburban Toronto to the Pope in Rome. People likely will not know what it means when you say Christian- they need more definition before their interest is piqued. Simply Christian is abstract- few people commit to abstracts. To say you are a soldier in The Salvation Army is concrete. It will define who you are and what you do, and will not obscure the Cross or the message. It will provide a framework within which inquirers can place themselves and their questions and, hopefully, their eventual commitment.

The Salvation Army Ideal

More than that, when passionately believed and properly lived, The Salvation Army becomes a powerful and irresistible ideal which excites and challenges and draws people. In its purest form, The Salvation Army embodies the heroic ideal- a concept that has never failed, and will never fail, to inspire people. The bottom line is that everyone wants to be a hero. It is as simple as that. The desire is deep inside each one of us and will never be washed away by fashion or time. Christ's call to follow is radically romantic and dangerously daunting and heroic. It is an ideal best exemplified in concrete terms by The Salvation Army. Sure, we're odd and counterculture, confusing and easy targets for ridicule and misunderstanding, but so is everyone and everything that is passionate, independently unself-conscious, prophetic, and romantic- so were all the prophets, so was Jesus.

You see, The Salvation Army makes sense only if lived as an all-encompassing dynamic within which every other aspect of our lives is either given purpose or perspective- or discarded. This is what the Church is supposed to be like. Our structure and symbols facilitate it more easily than any other form of church organism. It was Paul who said, "Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs..." (2 Timothy 2:3,4a). In others words, "All or nothing"- passion wedded to purpose. This dynamic will intrigue and captivate people and then evangelism will occur. Not because of anything you have done or said- but because of who and what you are.

This approach will meet with many objections from the naysayers in our ranks: "People do not feel comfortable with our militarism,"- "the uniform is a barrier to belonging,"- "people are embarrassed to join an Army of Salvation,"- "we're out-of-date and out-of-fashion." Maybe there is something to all this. If so, the question that has to be asked is whether there is something inherently wrong with the concept of The Salvation Army, or with those who represent The Salvation Army to the world? I contend it is the latter. The objections listed above, and 100 more besides, lie only on the surface like all cultural accretions, and are rarely matters of the heart. And make no mistake, it is the heart that we are after. The battle for souls is always fought most fiercely in the minds and hearts of people. Life decisions, breakthroughs and breakdowns, dreams, hopes, goodness, and faith- all of these are hacked out inside people long before they ever show on the surface. And that is where we have an edge because, as stated earlier, everyone secretly wants to be a hero, and the Army's essence is heroism.

Scratch an accountant and you'll find an Indiana Jones; after office hours a dentist may well long for the open range and a loaded six-gun at his side. What a person may snicker at in the broad daylight as she passes an open-air meeting, she will think about late at night, alone in bed with her fears and insecurities, dissatisfaction and disillusionment. Only there will she admit to herself that she wishes she had the convictions, the belief, the guts to take part in something like that. Only in the secret places of people's dreams and fears will the heroic imagery flare and flicker enough for the Holy Spirit to fan and feed it.

Everyone wants to be a hero and God knows that- it is one of the noblest impulses He placed in people. "The word heroic makes us blush. The word seems to big, too romantic, too triumphal. But our embarrassment cannot conceal the truth that to strive to be a hero- to have one's life rise above the mediocre, to really count for something extraordinary, to outshine death, to be capable of the highest generosity and self-sacrifice- is what we most deeply need and want." (1)

The Salvation Army is all about heroes and heroics. That's why God thought us up. The vast majority of His Church was being ignored by three-quarters of the populace. The remaining quarter, it was boring to tears. It was boring Him. It certainly wasn't exciting or igniting many, let alone saving them or bringing them into His Kingdom. So He came up with us and, like all of God's ideas, it worked magnificently, spreading like wildfire around the globe- no apologies, no compromises, no identity confusion.

We didn't just talk about evangelism and read books on it. We kitted up and headed for the front and never stopped to inquire politely of people "would you like to join us?" We lived our heroic lives amid the everyday and people flocked to our colours. The only question we asked was "can you keep up?" We were heroes, to saints and sinners alike. Listen to the author of *Out Of Africa* (Isak Dinesen) writing home from Africa in 1911: "For some it suffices to find adventure enough in learning to drive a car or attend Mrs. Zahle's school, but there are others who must take a different road and lose themselves in a war, become

explorers to the North Pole or join The Salvation Army. It is the destiny of some mothers that their children were fated to take such winding paths." (2)

Seize The Vision

So what has changed? No one and nothing but us, really. The cultural accretions, barely 100 years old, are all cosmetic and have not altered the fundamentals of people's lives. The computer age does not penetrate the secret places, late at night, when solitude surrounds a person and they are left alone to wrestle with their demons and to dream of who they really want to be. No- sin is the same, evil is boringly the same, and most people lead "lives of quiet desperation." (3)

Thankfully God's call is the same. When Dietrich Bonhoeffer said (just before he died a hero's death) "Jesus bids a man come and die," he was paraphrasing Christ as recorded by Matthew. Why did evangelism occur in the Army 100 years ago- why does it occur now in some places? Because the Salvationists, like Christian revivalists of Thoreau's generation, "were seized by a vision that faithful people are called to extraordinary lives of kindness and service, and they were not ashamed to announce to people that God calls them not to blandness but to heroics." (4)

To me, that sounds oddly like the beating of a drum, the unsheathing of a tricoloured flag, and the rustle of dark blue serge. If we know who we are - Salvationists - and it's a non-negotiable point with us, then our passionate commitment, the sheer joyful excitement and the heroic aspects of our identity will never lack in finding disciples. Don't just think about evangelism, don't just go to seminars on it, don't just read books about it. Simply decide to be who you are called to be, a "Blood and Fire Salvationist" and live the life unapologetically, intensely, passionately, heroically.

1. Long, Thomas G. "Beavis and Butt-Head get Saved", THEOLOGY TODAY vol 51, No. 2, July 1994.
2. Dinesan, Isak, Letters From Africa 1914-1931, Pheonix Fiction Services, Translated by Anne Born, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984.
3. Thoreau, Henry David, Walden, 1854.
4. Long, Thomas G. Ibid.

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How To Receive The Greatest Gift

Catherine Booth

"For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him." (Isaiah 64:4).

In the upper room, about 120 disciples waited for the gift of the Holy Spirit. They had an earnest appreciation of its importance. How do you think they felt as they thought of the past, remembered the ignominious crucifixion of their Lord, looked forward to the future, and contemplated the work to which He had called them?

And what had Jesus called them to do? They were not to go and set up an idol or a monument of Jesus Christ alongside other idols in the temples of the heathen gods. They were to go into the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had just been crucified between two thieves. They were to proclaim Jesus as the long-expected Messiah of the Jews. They were to begin setting up the Royal Spiritual Kingdom in contradiction to the temporal and earthly kingdom. Then, God commanded them to go out from Jerusalem and subjugate the world to His sway!

Poor Peter, Thomas, John, Mary and the rest of the women--how would they feel? They would feel, "We might as well stop and die here, as go out as we are, until we do get the equipment of power. We need something more than what we have got." So, they waited and prayed, "Lord, pour it out upon us; we are ready. We are helpless; we are powerless--we can do nothing. You know what you have called us to do, and you have promised us power to perform it. Now, here we are. It is useless for us to begin until we get power." They appreciated its importance.

God never gives the gift of His Spirit to any human being who has not come to the point that he would sell all he had to get it. The Holy Spirit is the most precious gift that God has to give in earth or in heaven. Think of the Holy Spirit filling you, filling you with himself, God taking possession of you. Think of being moved, inspired, energized, empowered by God, by the great indwelling Spirit moving through all your faculties and energizing your whole being for God. That is the greatest and most glorious gift He has to give today.

The Father is not likely to give the Holy Spirit to people who do not highly appreciate Him. You must appreciate Him so highly that you will forego all other gifts for Him--everything else, creature love, creature comfort, ease, enjoyment, and aggrandizement for this one thing. Have you come to this? Are you telling this to the Lord Jesus? Are you seeking the filling of the Holy Spirit? I have often thought of the Savior, when so many who had been hearing Him forsook Him and fled. He had been trying to lead them higher, even to real spiritual union with himself. They were not willing to go all the way--to pay the price--to suffer the

consequences. So, if you want this blessing, I know of no other way than I have just described.

I had to come to this before I received the filling of the Holy Spirit. The last idol of my soul had to be renounced, and it was hard work, as it always is because we love idols. Idols would not be idols if they were not loved. We have to lay our real Isaac, our beloved and only Isaac, upon the altar. It is hard work, but it has to be done because He is a jealous God and will have no rivals. Do you so appreciate this blessing that you are willing to give up your Isaac? If so, you may have the filling of the Holy Spirit today. God will fill you with His Spirit.

The disciples of Jesus Christ waited in obedient faith for Him to fulfill His promise. They did as He asked them. Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem, and they did not go off fishing or to the beach. Peter didn't say, "I can wait as well on the beach as in Jerusalem. I wonder why the Lord told me to go to Jerusalem? I think it was unreasonable. I think I will go back to my fishing nets." No. Jesus had cured the disciples of their unbelief by the last few days' experiences. They had learned better than to dictate to their Master, and they knew He had a good purpose in sending them to Jerusalem. So, they went there and did as He told them. Back to the upper room they went.

They had learned better than to reason, "I have been running about ministering to the Savior a long time. I'm afraid my friends will think I am neglecting home duties and the claims of old friends. I really must go home and see to matters there for a while. I may as well wait there for the Holy Spirit as at Jerusalem." Mary had learned better than that. She went back to Jerusalem. We have their names. They entered the upper room, shut the door, and waited--obedient faith! One of the poets said: "*Obedient faith that waits on Thee, Thou never will reprove.*" God sends the disobedient faith away empty. People are crying out about their faith, but it is a disobedient faith. If the Lord has told you to wait in any particular place, way, company, or time, and you disobey Him, He will not fill you with the Holy Spirit. At last, even if on your dying bed, you will have to come to these conditions.

Obedient faith! While there is one spark of insubordination, rebellion, or dictation, the Spirit will never fill you. Truly, only submissive and obedient people enter this kingdom. Anywhere He tells you to go, anything He tells you to sacrifice, or fly from, you will have to do. The Holy Spirit is one of His choice gifts that He has reserved for His choice servants, those who serve Him with all their hearts--obedient faith.

Dear Father, I confess that I have not fully appreciated the gift of the Holy Spirit as I ought. I have taken His indwelling for granted, and have not sought His filling as I should. Cleanse me, fill me, and empower me to serve you only for the sake of your kingdom. Amen.

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Grace

John Norton

There are rare times when I sit down at my desk to study a biblical text, with hopes of writing a sermon, and instead unexpectedly find the text studying me. The Word becomes a living thing, jumping out of the page, and leaving me running alongside breathlessly trying to keep up. I become like an eager child, seeing some aspect of the gospel new all over again. My intellect begins to overload with too many thoughts racing around all at once and my emotions leave me gasping in wonder.

The following words come from such an experience after meditating on Ephesians 2:4-5. If I were an artist I would take up the brush and put my vision on canvass. If I could form clay I would form my vision into something I can touch. But I, personally, know only the pen and so I wrote. I do not claim these thoughts are a full or fair expression of all that was revealed to me. But I hope that in presenting these words here, others may feel validated in expressing in their own way their visions of Truth.

Ephesians 2:4-5

Grace.

wonder of wonders

beauty upon beauty

all encompassing greatest of gifts,

Grace.

it is music for my soul.

when all my mind is darkness

and my spirit is depressed,

when tomorrow seems meaningless and

I am defeated

sin has the victory

when wrath and pain press upon me,

then a bit of grace comes riding on the wings of the Spirit

like a sweetness I have only longed to know

an instant

overcomes the darkness like a thunderclap

I am propelled by a force I want to identify

then from within me, I know,

it is He, Majesty and Glory are before me

I am racing to find words

running towards Him

yearning to be nearer

pushing and striving
longing
and then, there it is,
Grace.
rest, peace, joy, amazing
Grace.
I am free.

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The Legacy

Phil Wall

Legacy - Article bequeathed; material or immaterial thing handed down by predecessor.

I have the privilege of regularly working with young people and I had occasion recently to ask myself the question as to what kind of legacy I will leave those younger in years than I. This is often thought to be a fiscal issue but I want to suggest to you that every word, attitude and a lifetime of behaviour forms the legacy that we leave. As I considered this, I thought again about the struggle our movement has in recruiting and keeping young adults, even those that are born and bred within the regiment. It is as I reflected on some of the inadequacies within my own life that I recollected some legacy's that I have witnessed being left to young people over the last few years.

I once attended a Corps and observed the teenagers not singing during the traditional hymns that were being sung. I wanted to challenge them about this, encouraging them to join in with the rest of their Corps family in this corporate act of worship, even if it was not particularly 'their thing'. As we moved from a brass accompanied hymn to a contemporary worship chorus it became apparent to me as to why the young people were acting as they were. As the leader started the song, two thirds of the band and a number of the songsters just sat there with their arms folded and their lips firmly sealed. This pathetic kind of immature and inexcusable behaviour by those so called adults was part of the legacy which they were leaving and was already being actively inherited.

I remember being asked at another Corps to speak to a number of young people about senior soldiership. All of them had been through recruits classes and yet none of them had wanted to take the step to become a soldier. This was thought to be a lack of commitment on their part and I was sent in as the hit squad to try and turn this issue round. It became apparent very quickly as to the real reason for this situation. There had been a breakdown of relationship within the Corps between some Census locals and their families. Some of the young people in the room with me were from those families and they stated categorically to me "we won't become senior soldiers because if we do, the two groups that have divided the Corps will force us to choose sides." Once again, the lack of maturity by these particular leaders and elders was already bearing fruit, though thankfully those younger displayed maturity far superior to what they had been shown.

I remember as a young bandsman in my teens, trying out alcohol on a number of occasions. After one such occasion I was cycling home feeling quite guilty for what I had done. Yet as I drove past a shop front office, there was one of our

senior local officers with a cigar in one hand and a glass of red wine in the other. Although it didn't excuse my own behaviour it did enable me to rationalise what I had done. That was his legacy to me.

Stories like this could be repeated a hundred fold around the country, where our young people have been fed an unworthy legacy by those of us that are supposed to know better. The constant debate in our contemporary Army is about the limited amount of young people becoming soldiers. (If the current decline continues, the numbers of Junior Soldiers becoming Senior Soldiers will reach zero by the year 2004). No doubt there are many reasons for this but before we start blaming a CO, DYO or TYS we must first ask the Spirit of God to hold up a mirror before our own hearts, lives and attitudes.

So often young people compromise on their Salvationist stance in relation to alcohol and the like because of what has been modelled to them. Regularly young people struggle with relationships because of the shallowness of what they see around them. Typically many young people have no time or interest other than chasing their piece of the corporate pie to feed their consumption driven and comfort orientated lifestyle, because that is what we have held up before them. Very often they refuse to take on the responsibility of leadership, not because they don't want it nor because God hasn't gifted them for it, but rather the model that has been lifted up to them is often compromised and not something that they would want to aspire to.

Often older leaders will say to me 'We want our young people to be committed.' What they really mean is they want them to be like 'us' and that is exactly what they become. As the old adage goes 'You teach what you know, you replicate what you are'. In truth often our legacy has often been one of shallowness of spirituality, immaturity of relationships and sheer unadulterated compromise on our covenant and commitment to Christ.

If the above is in anyway a reflection of truth, change is desperately needed. It could be that God's words to the Israelites are aposite for us "if my people, who are called by my name, will humblethemselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear fromheaven and forgive their sin and will heal their land." 2 Chron 7:14.

The best pages of The Salvatio Army's history are yet to be written and they will be written by those of us that recognise our shortfall, repent and return to God's ideal. We must return to His call upon our lives and in the words of the prophet Hosea 'sow for ourselves (and others) seeds of righteousness' (Ch 10 vs 12). This then is a legacy worthy of being inherited by those who will follow. What kind of legacy will you leave?

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