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## **SUFFERING: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE**

Stephen Poxon

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*“As the cooling tyre is bound to the wheel, so we are bound to God by our very shrinking after the furnace of trial.”* (Hugh Redwood)

I have no wish to bore anyone with the intricate details of my medical problems. For one thing, there are plenty whose circumstances are much worse than mine, and for another, I should hate to run the risk of anyone thinking I was writing in the hope of gaining special attention. That is not my intention.

That said, it is important that I set a context for this article. Otherwise, it might appear to be grounded only on supposition and guesswork. That would be an insult to anyone who has ever suffered. Therefore, the credibility of this article is at stake, hence the following information.

Ever since 1986, when I somehow managed to contract *Migrainus Neuralgia* (less impressively known as Cluster Headaches), I have suffered periodic bouts of excruciatingly painful headaches that come in, well, clusters, accompanied by severe vomiting. They are deadly things, giving hours of pain that has been described by the 30% of Cluster Headache sufferers who are female as producing pains “worse than childbirth” and as “the most severe pain known to humans” (*The Headache Group, Queen Square, London*). I am reliably informed that this is a “complex neurobiological disorder” for which there is, as yet, no cure. At present, the only relief comes in the form of hospitalisation, expert neurological care, whole European mountains of steroid tablets and a depressing variety of extremely strong remedies, the side effects of which are sometimes painful and difficult to live with.

As a Christian, and as a minister who has prayed successfully for other people to be healed, this condition has led me to consider the question of healing, hence this article. I write in the sincere hope that I might just have something to say that will bring some measure of comfort to someone else who is suffering. That, I think, would be my main objective in doing so.

I have been prayed for by all and sundry, on a fairly regular basis. I have been anointed with oil, in accordance with Scripture (James 5:13-16), and I have had hands laid on my head more frequently than some of Vidal Sassoon’s regulars! The praying has been persistent (see Luke 18:1-8) and passionate (“fervent”, as St. James might say). Mysteriously, the condition has gone into remission for anything between eighteen months and (on one lovely occasion) three whole years, only to return with a vengeance for no apparent reason, and to dash my hopes of a miracle of healing having taken place. I have been prayed for by renowned healers, whose publicity has promised such a miracle. I have been advised on diet and nutrition. I

have received more advice about how to cure headaches than most people. *And still, I am ill.*

To state that I have prayed long and hard, often through tears (as have relatives, colleagues and friends) would be an understatement. To say that I have tried to find God's will and purpose somewhere amidst the agony, inconvenience and misery would also be understating things. I have read around the subject (most notably Joy Dawson's excellent book, *'Some of the ways of God in healing'* – which I wouldn't hesitate to recommend – and at this time of writing *'In Jesus' Name'*, the biography of Lieutenant Colonel Emil Nigg, a Swiss Salvation Army officer blessed with the gift of healing), and have tried to explore different avenues of prayer, repentance, confession and profession. *And still, I am ill.*

Therefore, fourteen years on, I feel entitled to draw some modest conclusions regarding suffering, prayer and healing. Not everyone will agree with what I conclude, and that is fair enough. Suffice to say, I feel my credentials as a sufferer and an explorer are sound.

My first conclusion is probably quite an obvious one: that it is entirely up to God whether or not He heals, and when.

That is to say, there is no magic formula that works to automatically relieve what Commissioner Wesley Harris once wrote of as “the dark mystery of suffering”. That is to say, God is entirely and irrevocably Sovereign, and is nobody's “Divine Automaton”. God is Sovereign even over mystery. Therefore, I have concluded that there is not any one style of prayer, any form of lifestyle, or any set format that moves God's hand in healing more than another. I don't profess to understand what I have just written. I simply recount it as one part of my personal experience.

I accept that James 5:16 states that the prayer of a good (righteous) person is “powerful and effective”. I accept too that this particular verse is written in the specific context of physical healing. Therefore, it might be gleaned from this verse that God pays more attention to the prayers of holy people than he does others. That might well be true; I honestly don't know. What I do know is that I have been prayed for by people with various reputations of holiness and spiritual calibre, *and still, I am ill.*

If, then, God is Sovereign, He is under no obligation to explain to the likes of me, nor even the multitudes holier than me, why He moves as He does. Psalm 18:30 tells us that God's way is perfect, and I doubt whether any of us has the capacity to understand perfection. Therefore, there is not a lot of point (at least, not this side of Heaven) in God taking the trouble to explain His every move. We simply don't have the ability to understand His ways (see Isaiah 55:8,9). We might as well ask an astronaut to explain to an ant what it is like to fly to the moon – it would all be rather pointless.

We can respond to that Sovereignty in one of two ways; with humility and faith, or with anger and frustration. Our personal response depends, ultimately, upon our view of God; as a loving Father to be trusted even in the heat of the furnace, or as a careless despot who has lost control and is not worthy of our trust. How we

perceive Him in times of suffering has an enormous, crucial bearing on how we respond when the heat is on. We can evolve and develop spiritually, or we can retreat into self-pity and immaturity.

God is under no obligation at all to fit into any of our chosen and preferred frameworks. The fact that He sometimes does is sheer grace in action. We would be quite mistaken to think that God has moved because we have pressed the right spiritual buttons, as it were. (Compare 2 Kings 5:1-14.) Naaman questions the ways of God in healing, yet receives no specific answer or explanation. Grace is not to be confused with obligation. Similarly, Job receives no direct explanation. He is simply reminded that God is Sovereign and that there is much more to running the universe than he would be able to comprehend anyway. How easily we sing the words of SASB 397: "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey" – and with what difficulty we apply them when suffering crouches at our door!

My second conclusion is offered more by way of counsel than anything else. I have discovered the worth of being perfectly honest with God. It is entirely acceptable.

There are those who would have me "pretend" that I rejoice in my situation because it is obviously what God has ordained for me, and that I should, therefore, regard as pure joy the fact that I am privileged to carry a cross. It seems to me that some people attach to suffering an odd, unrealistic kind of pseudo-spirituality, more akin to eastern asceticism than anything to do with Christ. I have immense difficulty with this style of theology. If I wanted to take this route towards greater spirituality, I would go and live in a chilly cave for thirty years, or else strap a bed of nails to my back. Quite what it would actually achieve in turning me into a better person is beyond me, and it is for precisely that reason that I am inclined to reject the notion of suffering as privilege.

What I can and do accept is that the *fruit* of suffering can be beneficial, in that prolonged physical pain does prompt me (if I allow it to) to become something more like Jesus (God's ultimate aim for me – see Romans 8:29) in terms of compassion (for others who suffer), patience (in that there are no quick fixes) and perseverance. This is to name but three spiritual qualities each worth nurturing, which perhaps would not be nurtured otherwise, in the everyday run of things.

There is also the important, inescapable fact that suffering was part of Jesus' earthly experience. Therefore, if I want to be like Jesus (and chorus 107 SASB would encourage that), then perhaps I need to consider the reality that suffering is part of the pilgrimage. He was, as Isaiah 53 reminds us, "a man of sorrows and familiar with grief". How, then, is my own imitation of Christ authentic if it excludes suffering? I may well be like Him in some ways, but the ideal is to be like Him in *every* way, surely? This stark fact prompts the question: "to what extent do I wish to become like Jesus?" That is to say, do I want just the nice bits, or will I accept suffering if it means I am more Christ-like in my own experience?

Throughout, I need to be true to myself, and true to God. That being so, I cannot pretend to be grateful that things are as they are. That, quite simply, would

be a lie. The truth is, I would much rather be without blinding headaches that last the best part of two long hours. Furthermore, it strikes me as an odd and rather perverse theology that expects me to thank God for them – and I'm not sure what such a theology says about God.

Although I am (slowly) learning to be grateful for the lessons suffering brings, I can't pretend to thank God for the actual, literal agony. There is a subtle, crucial distinction.

In SASB 290, General Albert Orsborn writes, "I speak to Thee my need and tell my true complaint" (see also Job 7:11). Possibly, General Orsborn is referring more to matters of the soul and salvation than matters of healing, but I take liberty to apply the same principle – that of a freedom to be honest with God. Therefore, my approach to God in all this is utter honesty – no pretence, no false saintliness. For one thing, honesty can't be the wrong policy, and for another, God is surely big enough to cope with that. Isn't He?

Conclusion No. 3 would be that I honestly don't know whether or not physical suffering is or isn't God's will.

There are those who would swear it is not, and that all sickness and disease is from the devil, pulling out every proof text there is. I'm not so sure. As I don't wish to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses, I have little or no interest in exchanging proof texts. Anyone can do that, and it usually proves very little. Nevertheless, I would still cite Exodus 4:11,12 and John 9:1-3 as some evidence that God can bring about sickness if He wishes to, for His own purposes. Furthermore, I would contend that it would take a very peculiar reading indeed of Exodus 4:11,12 to hold the devil responsible on every occasion (much as that would be convenient)! Interestingly, in my years of investigating healing, and sometimes frantically hoping to be enlightened, I have never heard those texts expounded to my satisfaction.

No, I do not think the devil is always responsible. Sometimes, God uses sickness for His own ends. Therefore, it would appear to be His will, on occasion, although I have dreadful struggles in reconciling that statement with my faith in a God who is the epitome and embodiment of love (1 John 4:8). J.R. Miller, D.D., in his excellent little book *'Daily Readings in the Life of Christ'*, comments well on John 1:11; "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" when he writes, "...Especially do we reject Christ when He comes to us in the garb of pain or sorrow. Many times the blessings He brings to us then are the very richest and most precious in all His store. But how many of us receive Christ as gladly, and take the gift from His hand as cheerfully and gratefully, when He comes in grief or suffering...as when he comes in the garb of worldly prosperity? He never sends pain unless pain is best."

Is suffering God's will, or is suffering something the devil tries to trip us up with, as with Job? I would need to conclude that for me personally, the Bible provides no absolute, clear-cut answers. To follow the good advice of St. Augustine, I have had to teach my tongue to say, "I do not know"..

My fourth conclusion is that there is definitely some good in suffering, even though our human instinct is to try to avoid it, and even though it is probably not what we want (see John 21:18,19).

Somewhat paradoxically, suffering is not always to be despised, any more than the crown of thorns was an entirely despicable object. Suffering can include aspects of transformation and even beauty, in that it contains the power to make the sufferer think again regarding sin and confession (see John 5:14). Suffering can provoke serious reflection regarding one's lifestyle, both physical and spiritual. There is no doubt it can serve as a pointer towards a deeper prayer life and communion with God. Suffering can help to encourage the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the believer. Likewise, it can produce generous love and sympathy from those who witness and serve one in distress.

In that context, then, there is undoubtedly some good in pain. Perhaps if we were never brought to our knees, we would never start to become more like Jesus. If suffering is a tool in God's hands to that end, then there are definitely aspects of the dark mystery that the Christian should embrace. If God sometimes calls us "through deep waters and fiery trials" (see Isaiah 43:2,3 and SASB 653), then should we not welcome purification via the Refiner's fire?

Commissioner Helen Clifton, writing in *The Officer* magazine dated December 2000, touches on this, in her reference to "the discipline of silence which was imposed upon Zechariah" when she says, "... There are times in the life of any spiritual leader when he or she is stopped from fulfilling a calling in the expected way. Waiting for a baby, looking after a sick child or parent, suffering some kind of illness..." Such times are not necessarily to be prayed against, or regarded as interruptions in the will of God for our lives (as some would teach). As was the case with Zechariah and his enforced period of silence, God was very definitely in control, and the circumstances were always under His hand, even in the midst of what Commissioner Clifton refers to as a crisis of "confusion and frustration". Zechariah emerged from his crisis wiser and more reflective.

The prayer of The Methodist Covenant Service includes the words, "Put me to what you will...put me to suffering...And the covenant which I have now made on earth, let it be ratified in Heaven". My own covenant as an officer in The Salvation Army states that I will "love and serve Him supremely all my days." If part of my covenant is to experience suffering, in the ultimate belief that God is good (Matthew 19:17), then I need to come to Him asking for more sustaining grace (see SASB 579). And I need God to be gracious enough to absorb my conclusions, such as they are.

Perhaps, at a snail's pace, I am moving towards where He wants me to be in my understanding. This is simply where I find myself today. As Terry Waite wrote in his book *'Taken on Trust'*, "Somewhere deep within lies the secret of my survival. It lies beyond family, beyond friends, beyond simple desires and hopes. Somewhere, somehow, I must touch the mystery that is God".

If any suffering I experience helps and enables me to, “touch the mystery that is God”, then it behoves me to keep moving towards Him, and not away from Him. Therein lies not only “the secret of my survival”, but also the welcome prospect of hope and progress.

“...I will trust Him...if I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him...He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink...still He knows what he is about”. (Cardinal Newman)

## CHRISTOMORPHOSIS

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Paul was immersed in cross-cultural ministry. Establishing several Corps in Galatia, throughout parts of Turkey, Paul dealt with the realities of Greek culture, Roman rule, and Jewish heritage.

In his highly critical missive to his soldiers, known to us as “Galatians”, Paul chides them for starting off with the Holy Spirit and then reverting to the law. He compares them to heirs of the estate who, while minors, are treated like slaves, under the strict control of a *paidagogos*, tutor whose responsibility was to train up the child to become an adult.

Within this cross-cultural environment Paul alludes to the various rites of passage with which the people of Galatia would be familiar to press home his point.

A Greek boy was under his father’s control until he turned 18, at which time they held a festival called *apatouria*. He was declared an *ephebos* (cadet) and began to serve the clan or city state for a two year period. The key recognition is that this individual was now able to offer meaningful service.

The Romans celebrated a *toga virilis*. We get the word ‘virile’ from this, ‘pertaining to manhood, the ability to procreate’ or reproduce.

The Hebrews still practise the bar mitzvah. Among other things, the father prays a prayer abdicating responsibility for the child, and the child prays a prayer accepting responsibility for his actions (John MacArthur. GALATIANS. 1987. p104).

Paul rebukes the Galatian Christians for remaining adolescents, even though they should be spiritually mature. He compares them to children and to slaves.

In Psalm 2, Father God prophetically takes God the Son through His rite of passage: “You are My Son; today I have become Your Father” (2:7). This event probably happened physically at Jesus’ baptism, the first witnessed unity of the Trinity, at which point the Father spoke, “You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased “ (Luke 4:22). Up until that point, Jesus, although ‘truly and properly’ God from before birth, was ‘truly and properly’ a regular man, albeit a sinless one. Up until that point, although He was heir to the Kingdom, He offered no meaningful service, took no responsibility, and demonstrated no ability to reproduce Himself in others.

In this Psalm 2 prophetic passage, the first thing that the Father did upon accepting the Son’s maturity was to deal with the inheritance. “I will make the nations Your inheritance, the ends of the earth Your possession” (Psalm 2:8). This sounds like the ancient cultural practice: the first thing the father did was to give the son the keys to the family business - inheritance. For Jesus the inheritance is harvest!



Peter's rite of passage occurred in a question and answer time with Jesus when he recognised Jesus' divinity. He got a name change and keys to the family business. Remember? Jesus said, "I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

It was at the baptism that Jesus began His public ministry. He took on responsibility, offered meaningful service, and began to effectively reproduce Himself.

Paul is dealing with Christians here. They have been saved and are going to heaven. But they are living like slaves to the law, without responsibility, without meaningful service, and unable to reproduce.

Those who are mothers can relate to Paul. He feels that after a long labour and delivery, he has to give birth to them again! He is committed to seeing them through the Christian rite of passage: Christomorphosis. You may not have heard of it. That's not as important as having experienced it. Paul is labouring until Christ is fully formed in them (Galatians 4:19). The term comes from 'Christos', meaning Christ, and 'Morphoo', meaning to form and has the idea of the 'faith that shapes us in the form of Christ' (Allister McGrath. SUFFERING AND GOD. 1995. p79).

And until they experience Christomorphosis, they are slaves, irresponsible, unable to meaningfully serve, and unable to reproduce. And until they experience Christomorphosis, they have no inheritance. They lack the harvest. At the *toga virilis* the boy took his toys and offered them to the gods as a symbol of putting childhood behind him (John MacArthur. GALATIANS. 1987. p104). Paul said, "When I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11). What is it that we need to offer up, what toys do we need to put away, what childish things do we need to put behind us so that Christ can be fully formed in us, so that we can inherit the harvest?

Colonel Dennis Phillips is the Territorial Commander in the Caribbean. He has been living outside the box for years now. For details, read the following interview.

## **INTERVIEW - Dennis Phillips**

*JAC: Please tell us a little about your conversion.*

DP: I think I qualify for the Guinness Book of World Records for the number of times I went to the mercy seat. The first time, I was only 8, maybe 9 and it was at the Mel Trotter Mission in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I didn't know for sure what I was doing except I got to go to camp the next week. When I was 11 or 12 and attending the Burton Heights Corps (Grand Rapids, Michigan), Lieutenant Doris Atwood conducted an evangelistic campaign, and I had never heard such preaching. During that week, I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ, and after about another 1000 visits to the penitent form, I began to grasp the wonder of His grace and began to experience the security God promises to those who believe.

*JAC: Please tell us a little about your sanctification.*

DP: It is ironic that I preached holiness years before I actually experienced it. I knew what our Doctrine Book said, and I read most of Brengle's great titles on Holiness, but I just could not seem to get my own arms around the experience. Finally, at age 37 and serving as corps officer in Kansas City, Missouri "the light went on." It did not occur in a public meeting; rather it was in the quietness of my own humble study at the corps when the plain yet profound truth became clear to me and "His spirit bore witness with my spirit" that we were one. I remembered the simple question on a corps cadet lesson from many years earlier: "What is sanctification?" And the answer, equally simple, "Separation from the world and dedication to God." That was it. And my soul was at rest.

*JAC: Your current 'reinforcement' appointment is your first such assignment and yet was foreshadowed by God long ago. Please explain.*

DP: I'm quite sure my answer will be too long to be included, yet I'm not sure how to shorten it. Let me take you to the morning of September 24, 1997 when General Rader called me at our quarters in California to appoint us to the Caribbean. The conversation really took my breath away. Once I hung up the phone, Noella and I just looked at each other, and I blurted out, "Honey, NOTHING in my prayer life or devotions has prepared me for this." I said that in the context that in every other move, God had somehow paved the way. No previous move was such a surprise. But as soon as I spoke those words, an experience of 45 years earlier came back to me with the impact of a tumultuous clap of thunder. I was then 14 years old attending the Territorial Leadership Institute of the USA Central Territory, and one of the evening programs was conducted by a visiting missionary (and I am so sorry I don't remember who it was). During that program, God spoke to my heart about serving on the mission field. Come on, I was only 14, and I thought I had done well to have already committed myself to officership. I was not ready to sail off to some

unknown land. My answer was "No....not me, not here and not now." But God's spirit worked overtime on my young soul, and by the week's end, I was at the mercy seat again, this time saying, "Okay, it IS me, and it IS here and it IS now." The next morning, it was as if I had never been called. I left that camp feeling as though I had had an "Abraham/Isaac" experience. God was just testing my willingness. Well, it happened all over again when I was a cadet. "No problem", thought I. "I'll just say yes, and the next morning, after having passed another test, everything will be back to normal." Uh uh. It wasn't to happen that way this time. I was in spiritual agony for weeks. Noella and I were engaged (secretly, as it had to be in those days), and I remember sharing the agony of my soul with her in my letters. She wrote back claiming no such calling herself, but saying if it was God's will for me, she was willing to go. After the worst spiritual turmoil of my life, I genuinely gave in to the demands of God's spirit, and He responded with this message to my heart: "Not now, Denny, but some day." All through my officership, I have wondered when such an opportunity would occur, but I have to admit that by age 59, I didn't think of it as much as I did in my earlier officer-years. And so it was, that within seconds of claiming "no advance notice", God reminded me that on this appointment, He had in fact given me 45 years to get ready. Ya gotta love Him!

JAC: You have served in three territories. How has this affected your officership?

DP: Let there be no doubt that every territory is different. Two of those territories were in the U.S.A., but they might as well be on different planets. I will always be grateful for "growing up" in the conservative USA Central Territory where my officership received a solid base and an anchor stronger than Gibraltar. But going to the USA Western Territory, I found my vision being challenged and expanded. I liked their "derring-do" pioneer spirit that was not afraid to "color outside the lines" ... at least a little. There is no doubt I am a better person and a better officer for having served in the West. These past three years in the Caribbean have been a spiritual adventure beyond description as we have traveled the 15 countries of the Caribbean tropics. In the USA, we knew what it was to abound. In the Caribbean, we have learned what it is to be without resources, and we were amazed from the very beginning as we observed how much our Caribbean people could do with so little, and, frankly, it made us a little ashamed how little we, in North America, do with so much. I'm also disappointed in myself in my previous roles as Divisional Commander and Chief Secretary for sometimes being stingy and too conservative when it came to helping our poorer neighbors around the world. In North America, we think we are doing a lot, and in a sense we are, but we must do more, for some day we will each be held accountable for our management of the resources God makes available to us.

JAC: How has your extensive youth work experience affected your outlook on the future of The Salvation Army?

DP: Much of the time I feel like I'm still a T.Y.S. It was one of my favorite appointments, and I will always have a special affection for the youth of the Army. The youth of today's Army have a profound sense of mission and purpose. They are quite turned off by any indication of the Army squandering or mismanaging its resources. Nor are they impressed with our tendency to be overly 'spendorous' at

times of welcomes and farewells. Too much attention on the individual, not enough attention to our mission. The youth and young adults of today can lead us forward to more faithfully fulfilling our mission (Will any of us ever forget General Gowans's message utilizing the three legged stool? ... "saving souls, making saints, serving suffering humanity") if we will listen to them and heed their leadership.

*JAC: What are the greatest challenges of your current appointment?*

DP: Having served in two USA territories where there were always resources available, it was a dramatic change of culture for us to have to find solutions to problems without any reserves or funds to do so. Funding this territory where we have 13 different currencies, some of them fluctuating greatly has been a significant challenge.

*JAC: What books have had the greatest impact on you over the years? Why?*

DP: Richard Foster's "Celebration of Discipline" was a major life-changer for me because he seemed to touch every area of my life that needed changing. Later, Foster's "Freedom of Simplicity" really challenged my tendency toward being materialistic and to put the whole matter of possessions in a spiritual and holy context. Most recently, I have read Phil Yancey's "What's So Amazing About Grace", and no book other than the Bible has so revolutionized my life and challenged my spiritual priorities. I am now in the process of reading it again, and I highly recommend it to every person who is prepared to make some "quantum-leap" changes in their spiritual lives. The whole thing about forgiveness is so needed in the Christian fellowship today. Read it - everyone who is reading this - read "What's So Amazing About Grace."

*JAC: Who are your heroes? Why?*

DP: I have too many heroes to mention here. Bramwell Tripp (Commissioner, recently PTG) would be one. He exemplified the life of holiness better than anyone I've ever met, and he inspired others to pursue the sanctified life. Andrew Miller (Retired Commissioner) is an important hero in my life because he taught me the importance of passion in preaching, leading, and relating. Even though Bill Himes is younger than me, he is still one of my heroes because, despite having every reason for being uppity and stuffy, he is the most down-to-earth and VERY REAL person I know, and I am always a better person when in his presence. I want to include George Nelting (Retired Commissioner) in this Heroes Hall of Fame, for in him I saw the model of leadership that encourages others, something I have tried to emulate, yet I am far from achieving his level of success in this regard.

*JAC: What is the most significant part of your ministry today?*

DP: This is a most interesting question because in addition to being the Territorial Commander, I have taken on a personal ministry with the homeless children of Kingston. There are hundreds of little children on the streets, mostly boys, some as young as 7 and 8. Most of them are "throw-aways"; others are orphans. It didn't take them long to learn they had a friend in the "white man" at The Salvation Army, and they appear daily at my window. Thanks to a great DJ in Chicago (John Williams of

WGN - a 50,000 watt am station), the story of our efforts to help these boys has been broadcast across several states, and we have received nearly US\$25,000 to take care of these kids. As a result, we now have a small shelter with 10 beds, all full. I've also placed 6 children at "The Nest" (one of three SA orphanages here in Jamaica). It has been the biggest blessing of my three years in Jamaica to see these once-homeless boys become respectable, attending church, looking good, smelling good, acting good, carrying their Bibles, kneeling at the mercy seat and some of them saying to me, "Colonel, do you think I could be a Salvation Army Captain and help other street kids in Kingston?"

*JAC: What are your dreams for The Salvation Army?*

DP: My dream for The Salvation Army is that we will fully embrace our mission. Again, I refer to the General's message in Atlanta using the 3-legged stool. Our mission is to "save sinners, grow saints and serve suffering humanity." He made the important point that all three legs of the stool had to be equal in order for the stool to stand. There is no doubt we do a great job with the first leg, saving sinners. Nearly every survey and study reveals our weakness in "growing saints" or making disciples. But most of all, I am concerned as I see us abandoning our mission to the poor. Yes, The Salvation Army is still America's Favourite Charity (so acclaimed for 8 years by The Chronicle of Philanthropy), but it seems more and more we are segregating our social services from our corps. The Army was raised up to fulfill the mandate of the Old and New Testaments (to care for the poor, something the Church had ignored for centuries), and whenever and wherever we are faithful to that mandate, we grow. Just look at how God has blessed our sacrament of service to those who cannot provide for themselves and those who cannot care for themselves (so clearly identified by God Himself as "the widows, the orphans, the fatherless, the sojourners" (homeless)). It greatly disturbs my spirit when I see the pendulum swinging so far the other way from that time when William Booth, young and naive took his converts to the church in London only to be met with disdain and rebuff. And today, in many Salvation Army corps, that same scene is repeated. I have seen many officers recover from boredom and purposelessness as they rediscover the essence of their calling while serving on a soup line in the inner-city or helping families in time of disaster. As Salvation Army soldiers, we should read Matthew 25:31-46 every day, take it literally and then seek ways to fulfill our mission to the poor on this earth.

*JAC: What are your impressions of The Salvation Army, based on your experiences at the most recent High Council?*

DP: The High Council is an awesome experience, and it leaves one with a strong sense that the Army is in good hands. Our leaders from around the world are wise, well experienced and consecrated. Many have served in difficult circumstances their entire lives, and they bring a "St. Francis of Assisi" spirit to the Council Chamber. I was particularly impressed with their manner of exchanging different ideas, some of which clashed with the ideas of others, and yet doing so in an environment of holiness and respect.

*JAC: What is God teaching you these days?*

DP: These days, God is teaching me some hard lessons regarding forgiveness. Forgiveness is something we all want to receive, yet we find it hard to give. Again, Phil Yancey's book, "What's So Amazing About Grace" has been God's way of opening my heart and mind to this needed discipline in my life.

JAC: You are one of the Army's great preachers. What are your keys for faithful, bold, and compelling preaching?

DP: Steve, you have to get out more often. The Army's list of great preachers stretches very long before any hint of my name appears. Yet, I thank you for a beautiful compliment. I return to my Heroes Hall of Fame and recall the impact of Commissioner Andy Miller on my life. He had such respect for the drama of God's Word, and his passionate heart produced stirring images of the wonder and glory of God. When he preached, he expected something to happen - first of all in his own heart, and secondly in the hearts of his audience. I'll never understand how some can take the most exciting Story ever written and somehow make it boring (although, having said that, I have to admit, I've done it myself at times. In fact, I recall one particular sermon I was preaching that was so boring even I couldn't wait until it was over.) No, the Word of God is drama, it is excitement, it provides the answers we need to the questions hovering over us and our neighbors every day. I love to preach, and like my hero, Andy, I pray and expect (with a holy expectancy) that His Word will not return unto Him void.

JAC: Can you tell us of any memorable preaching you have heard, and what made it outstanding?

DP: I've already mentioned Commissioner Miller. I'd travel many miles to hear Tony Campolo preach. He's another one who pours his heart into his preaching, and I like the fact that he peppers his sermons with illustrations of ministering to the poor. You cannot make a list of great preachers without including our present General. He was magnificent in his preaching in Atlanta. He has a gift of saying a volume of thought with an economy of words (definitely not one of my gifts as seen by these answers).

*JAC: What is your most memorable spiritual experience?*

DP: It was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee in 1990 when Noella and I visited the Holy Land. There was a mist on the sea, and local fisherman wearing robes and turbans were casting their nets in hopes of a good morning catch. We were told this was most likely the very spot where Jesus built a little fire and prepared some fish and bread for his naughty disciples (they were out fishing all night - naked). Once ashore with their 153 fish ("holy mackerel"), Jesus popped the question three times, "Peter do you love me". Steve, as I sat on the concrete bench that morning, I sensed the presence of the Lord so strongly I actually expected to see the prints of his sandals upon the wet morning grass and to hear His voice, "Denny, do you love me". I WANTED to hear Him ... I wanted to see Him, for I would have given Him an elongated bear hug that would have left no doubt in His mind that with every ounce of energy in my being, I loved Him more than all. There would have been no, "You know I love you, Lord" (the worst thing one can say when someone asks, "Do you

love me?") In that moment, my throat was so tight I couldn't speak the rest of the morning. I knew then, "If ever I loved Thee, I know it is now."

*JAC: Please comment on the state of aggressive Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How relevant is primitive salvationism?*

DP: I think I've already answered this. Primitive salvationism is what can move our Army forward in this new millennium. The word "primitive" may cause some to think we are regressing to "the good old days", but my spin is that it restores the original mission while we embrace new methods and opportunities to accomplish that mission. (Remember the 3-legged stool).

Paul is a husband of fourteen years, a father of twelve years, and a Salvation Army officer of eight years. He and his wife Kathryn have been educating their five children at home for seven years. As officers, the Van Burens have served in Nova Scotia, Belgium and Quebec. They operate a website that supports home educating Salvationists, at [www.HisKids.homestead.com](http://www.HisKids.homestead.com)

## HOME SCHOOLING AND THE SALVATION ARMY

### *part 1*

***Paul Van Buren***

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I want to start this article off by being frank and upfront with how I feel about home education. I believe that every Christian family in our society today should be teaching their children at home. I believe this is critical for our children, our families, and our Army. I believe that all parents are capable of teaching their children. I believe that teaching your children is the definition of parenting. I believe that it is vital to understand that teaching at home is actually considered training your children. And I believe that this comes directly from the Word of God. Now that we are clear on where I stand on this subject let us consider what home education or home schooling is and why it is vital for the Army.

First, home schooling is not a matter of schooling at home. It is not creating a classroom in your home similar to that of a school and teaching in the same manner as a school. Home schooling is not removing your child from school and shutting them away in your home, behind a door that closes out the world. Home schooling is not a separation from life. This is what the vast majority of people understand home schooling to be and that is why their first question is always about socialization.

What home education is, is an attitude. It is seeing life as the classroom. Home education involves training your child in the ways of the Lord using the everyday experience of life. Home education also involves disciplined training in the basic academic subjects each day but it is also a practical demonstration of how these subjects are applied in life every day. Home education includes involvement in the community through volunteering and a demonstration of how important Christian influence is in our community's life. Home education includes an understanding of how our political system works by being involved in the process. Home education is about training our children to love learning under the protective and watchful eye of the family, where Christian values and standards are held above everything else. It includes helping our children understand that learning is a lifelong process. It includes greater involvement in our church, society, and family. So, home education includes academics, practical living, sports, friends, and a living out of our faith. A big part of it is about training Christian leadership within the Army and community.



There is a very important reason why every Christian family should be taking their children out of a secular school system and teaching them at home. I will let someone a little wiser than me explain it:

**“I cannot close these remarks without lifting up my voice against the practice now so prevalent amongst respectable families, of sending their children to boarding schools before their principles are formed or their characters developed. Parents are led away by the professedly religious character of schools, forgetting that, even supposing the master or governess may be all that can be desired, a School is a little world where all the elements of unrenewed human nature are at work with as great variety, subtlety, and power as in the great world outside. You would shrink from exposing your child to the temptation and danger of association with unconverted worldly men and women, why should you expose them to the influence of children of the same character, who are not unfrequently sent to these schools because they have become utterly vitiated and unmanageable at home?”**  
(Catherine Booth, Papers on Practical Religion, p. 24)

I do not believe that I need to go into the condition of our public schools today. I think most of us are convinced that there is a great deal of danger with drugs and violence. But have you even considered the dangers of the influence of non-Christian teachers and friends on your children? This influence begins with kindergarten. Catherine Booth was concerned about this influence at Christian boarding schools an hundred years ago and yet we willingly abandon our children to the influence of the public school system today.

Why should we even consider this subject to be important? The answer is both and straightforward; because God expects parents to be the ones training their children. When I have raised the subject of home schooling with people of both low and high rank, their response has always been predictable. “Jesus said we had to live in the world.” This is very true. But children need to be trained how to live a Christian life in the world. They need to be nurtured and mentored in the ways of the Lord, in their growing faith, and in how to influence the unsaved for Christ. We can’t just abandon our untrained children in an anti-Christian environment and expect everything to turn out okay. Consider Proverbs 22:6, **“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”** Some parents have the mistaken belief that this means that a teenager can be rebellious but because he went to Sunday School God has promised that He will bring the child back in their adulthood. This verse says nothing of the sort. What it says is that if we train a child, even in his old age we will find him following that training. We need to understand that every day is a training day. Life itself is the opportunity for training.

Besides, how can a rebellious teenager be an influence for the Lord? We Christian home educators believe that a well trained child, under the watchful care of his parents, can be an influence for Christ in all stages of life. A well trained child will not rebel as a teenager, regardless of what people tell you. Besides, how many parents of our parents’ generation can honestly say that they “trained” their children?

Consider Deuteronomy 6. The law has just been given to God's people. They have just been told to love God with all of their being. And then they receive this instruction:

“Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Instruct your children in the throes of life itself. Can a non-Christian teacher in a classroom of forty children manage to do this? No. Home educators get accused of shutting children away from the world. But how much more does a public system do this when it insists on packing our children into a building for 13 years, separated from the life of the community. Consider again the words of Catherine Booth:

***“God has laid on you, parents, the responsibility of training your children, and you cannot possibly delegate that responsibility to another without endangering their highest interests for time and for eternity.”*** (ibid)

So what impact does this have on our beloved Army? At one point our Army had a great training program for youth. It started with Sunday School where a relationship with Jesus was proclaimed necessary and the invitation was extended to the children. From there they went into Junior Soldiers where the children were instructed in the Word of God and encouraged to demonstrate this in practical living and service. From there the children, now adolescents, were encouraged to go on to Corps Cadets. Here they were given a deeper understanding of God's Word and were trained to become leaders in our Corps. Many went on to take up leadership as officers.

And today? Our Sunday Schools have become nothing more than play groups, a great babysitting service to the community. The Junior Soldier program has all but disappeared and the Corps Cadets has become a general youth program open to anyone. Where has the training gone? What is worse is that the Army has trained parents over the years to believe that the training of youth should be left up to the church, that only the officer and local officers are equipped to do this. So now we have no training taking place at home or in the Army and the Army gets weaker with each generation.

I believe that if our Army is to be renewed it needs to take place at the knees of the parents. Families should be seen as the training ground for future Christian leadership and foot soldiers. One of the greatest opportunities for evangelism is in our own homes. Why would parents forsake their own children while they pray and battle for the souls of strangers? I believe the Army has a great opportunity here. Instead of spending precious resources in the entertaining of children, spend it on equipping parents to be the teachers and trainers of their children.

Imagine if every family you knew connected with your Corps were occupied with the training up of their four or five children in the ways of the Lord. Imagine the impact this would have on our Army in one generation, in two generations and then in three generations. More importantly, think what impact there would be on the Church

and the world if we had three generations of well trained adults involved in leadership in our communities. This is not possible as long as we are abandoning our children to the influence of the school systems.

I have not said all I want to say on this subject but I wanted to start off with how home schooling could impact our Army. In part two of Home Schooling In The Army, I want to explore how it is possible for every family to home school, irrespective of their station in life.

Kathie and her husband Ed are the Corps Officers of The Salvation Army Mountain View Community Church in Maple Ridge, British Columbia. Captain Kathie is a mother of four.

## THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

Kathie Chiu

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I have always desired the transparency of Jesus. Or, at least I thought I did. It sounded so spiritual. So...well, it sounded like something I should want. But transparency demands truth, so, I have endeavored to live in truth. However, I have failed more than I have succeeded in this area. That is because, sometimes, I am afraid of the truth. It was all right for Jesus to be so honest; after all, he was the Son of God. He had everything going for him. But me, I'm too scared to live in the complete truth.

What does it mean to live in truth? I had to find out. 3 John 4 says, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." Walking implies a day by day, moment by moment, step by step choice to live in truth. But is it so important to be truthful about everything in life? Or is it just the big things that I have to worry about? Do I have to be truthful to everyone, or just to God? Ephesians 4:15 (Amplified) gave me the answer I was looking for. "...let our lives lovingly express truth in all things - speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly." Well, that just about summed it up.

But still I struggled. What does a person look like who walks in the truth? It is a person who is consistent in all that he says and does. It is a person who is not afraid to let you into their lives, because you won't find a difference between their personal lives and their public lives. A person who says, "I love God" but then goes home and is verbally abusive to their spouse or children does not really love God. That is not truth. What is on the outside must match what is on the inside.

Several years ago our family went to Hawaii. We were shopping at the International Market and they were selling these lovely jade rings. They were gold dipped, guaranteed to last a life-time, and so I bought two for five dollars. They were so pretty and when I wore them, someone always commented on how beautiful they were. People actually thought they were real. And you know what? They did last for a very long time because I took very good care of them. But one day the gold started to chip off. I had actually forgot I was wearing one of them and was scrubbing out the sink, when I realized what I'd done. But it was too late. The gold had worn off and the bare metal inside was showing.

Some Christians are like this too. We want to be transparent. We want to be truthful. But when troubles come our way and we get a little "roughed up" so to speak, we show, whether we want to or not, what is really on the inside. Arthur Katz, in his book *The Spirit of Truth* says, "...our actual condition, the true state of our inner

man, is revealed not by how biblically correct we are, but by the sound we make when we hit the ground.”

We all hit the ground eventually. One day King David hit the ground. You know the story, how he arranged Uriah's death so that he could take his wife Bathsheba for himself? Well, the prophet Nathan came to him to tell him about an outrageous thing that happened. He tells him the story of a wealthy man who needs a lamb because he has company. So he goes out and takes one from a poor neighbor. Of course, David “burned with anger” the Bible says, and demanded to know who would do such a thing for he would make him pay four times over for his lack of pity and greed. Nathan, of course, says, “You are the man.” This was the moment of truth for David. He had become transparent.

The world is watching us. Whether we like it or not, eventually the truth of who and what we are shows through. So it is our innermost being that needs to be transformed - all of it. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to pervade our entire being. We need a constant in-filling of the Spirit. And then, the bluffing has to stop. The false modesty has to stop. The white lies must stop. The false flattery must stop. We must begin to speak the truth in love without fear of recrimination. When we respond to a prayer request with sincerity, but we're really not sincere or when we pretend that we love someone we do not, what effect does that have on our bodies? Are ulcers and anxiety and depression totally unrelated to not living in truth? Arthur Katz says that, “Every lie dulls the mind, confuses the emotions, and blunts the spirit of the one expressing it - and of the one receiving it - while adding to the unreality and untruth of the atmosphere we all breathe and depend upon for our lives together.”

The choice between the truth and a lie is a daily one. And it is only when we each, as individuals, choose to live and walk in the truth, that the Church will be that vital force in the world. If every officer and soldier made the commitment to walk daily in the truth, the Salvation Army would completely awaken and realize its full potential. Many have prayed for change in our organization. And change is coming. But it will only happen when we change - because “we” are the Army.

Hypocrisy or truth - that is our choice. Whether we don't speak the truth because of our fear of rejection, of recrimination through the appointment system, or because we are afraid of what people will think of us - it doesn't matter. When we let fear reign in our lives, hypocrisy reigns with it. We must choose between integrity and convenience.

I wrote this because I was challenged by something I read in a writer's magazine. It was an article on creativity. The author tells why people who want to write but don't, are afraid. They are afraid basically of what people will think of their writing, their opinion, but most of all, they are afraid of what people will think of them. That is because good writing reveals the inner turmoil of the writer - that tension that makes writing exciting. Are you not drawn more to writing that challenges you, that contradicts what you think and feel to be true, that is somewhat controversial in nature? I am. But, to do it myself? So I have decided to go ahead, despite my fears. And I will be honest and say that I, too, am terribly afraid of the truth. I am afraid the Army is afraid of the truth. I am afraid of what God thinks of us because of

our fear. I am afraid that we will not be who God wants us to be unless we face the truth. And when we face the truth - we are set free. Free from our fears. What about you? John says that the truth abides in us - so let's speak it. Let's live it. Let's be truth in everything we do.

# POSTMODERNITY AND FAITH EDUCATION IN THE SALVATION ARMY

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“At least five times the faith has to all appearances gone to the dogs. In each of the five cases it was the dog that died.” (*G.K.Chesterton*)

One of the more exotic 'dogs' to enter the arena in the last 50 years is the phenomenon of postmodernity. For better or for worse the term 'postmodern' has entered our language and is used liberally in a variety of contexts and, I suspect, with an equal variety of meanings. Should the Christian Church be in the least concerned about such a mongrel, yapping at our heels? Is not Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today and forever and the message of the Church the same in every age? In this paper I will discuss the emergence of the postmodern and then examine the current debate raising issues relating particularly to postmodernity and faith education in the Salvation Army.

## ***The premodern, modern and postmodern***

There is much current debate in all relevant disciplines as to what is happening in our increasingly global, but particularly Western society. There are many social commentators who observe trends and report changes in the complex value systems of which we are all a part. Amongst academics who closely observe social trends there are those who suggest that a new epoch is emerging which is most commonly being labelled as 'postmodern'. Their hypothesis is that the 'modern' era, so influenced by Enlightenment philosophy, is being replaced by a less ambitious, more humble and fluid view of reality which more accurately fits the picture of the place of homo sapiens in the universe as many now perceive it. There is however much confusion as to what 'modern' means in the context of the postmodern. The simple answer is that the 'modern era' is that which was ushered in by the rise of Enlightenment philosophy, which has so influenced Western society in the last 200 years. This begs the question, what is Enlightenment philosophy? We will let one of its leading exponents, Immanuel Kant speak to the question.

“Tutelage is the inability to make use of one's own understanding without being guided by another. Have the courage to make use of your own understanding! Dare to know! That is the slogan of the Enlightenment.”

In summary here are the most basic Enlightenment principles that led to the 'Modern' era: Reason over Revelation (the human mind is the source of all knowing); Progress over Providence (all problems are in principle solvable); Facts over Faith (all true knowledge is factual and value free).

On this hope was founded the 'Western dream', the possibility of ever increasing economic progress, fuelled by technological progress and education. Until recently, this dream had so captured the Western industrialised nations' imagination that it was hardly questioned by most inside or outside of the Church.

“As a result of this idolatrous elevation of the Western dream to primacy in our lives, homes and churches, we have seriously undermined our capability to address the escalating challenges of the 21st Century.” (Sine, 1991:213)

### ***The fall of Modernity***

Modernity as a worldview has ruled the West for 200 years: For convenience sake (although it is an oversimplification) from 1789, the French Revolution, until 1989, the demolition of the Berlin wall and the fall of Communism. In this century there has been an increasing scepticism with regards the 'certainties' of Modernity. Acid rain, global warming, polluted rivers and seas are all seen to be products of a system in decay. Humanism's hope of 'progress' was shattered by Hiroshima and the Holocaust, and thus the Utopian quest for certainty continues to prove illusive. Postmodernity then is simply that which remains following the deconstruction of 'modernity': A rootless, relativised, consumer driven society with no absolutes, no coherence and no direction. If the premodern worldview can be epitomised by faith, the modern era by facts, then the postmodern is predominately led by feelings. If it feels right for you, do it! Postmodern people do not ask "is it true" or "is it right", but "how does it feel". Postmodern people do not let facts get in the way of their feelings! Although much of the modern era lingers and is inextricably interwoven with postmodernity I would argue that we are entering a new postmodern paradigm, which has ramifications for all of us.

### ***The rise of postmodernity***

*“The Enlightenment itself shattered some of its own basic assumptions. There was progress in scientific research in all areas, but where was the contemporaneous moral progress which would have prevented the misuse of science?”* (Hans Kung)

“The very scaffolding on which people are standing is collapsing.” *(David Bosch)*

“Now we shiver in the nakedness of a nihilism in which near omnipotence is paired with near emptiness, greatest capacity with knowing least for what ends to use it.” *(Hans Jonas)*

“Capital T truth is dead.” *(Don Cupitt)*

“Simplifying to the extreme I define 'postmodern' as incredulity towards metanarratives.” *(Jean-Francois Lyotard)*

“There is no lighthouse keeper. There is no lighthouse. There is no dry land. There are only people living on rafts made from their own imaginations. And there



is the sea. The modern era began with Columbus setting out to sea. He seemed to have had at least some idea as to where he was going. As that epoch ends and a postmodern era begins we find ourselves again at sea. But this time we have no navigational assistance and no direction. We are alone, adrift in a postmodern world." (*Dominic Crossan*)

"Relativism cannot make statements about what is true (even true-for-me) or claim that it is a true or right epistemological theory without emptying the concepts of truth and rightness of meaning. To put it another way, the very concept of relativism is parasitic on the concept of objective truth, the thing whose existence it is denying." (*Peter Hicks*)

"The post-modern condition is one in which the present is the only fact; the future is beyond the knowing and the past simply becomes a reservoir for sanitised certainties or profit-making opportunities." (*Keith Tester*)

"The large experienced reality faced daily by those with whom we minister is the collapse of the white, male, Western world of colonialism. While that world will continue to make its claim for a very long time, its unchallenged authority and credibility are over and done with. This new reality touches each of us in threatening and frightening ways. It touches the economy and reaches right into our patterns of employment and retirement ... Thus the end of modernity, I propose, is not some remote, intellectual fantasy, but reaches down into the lives of folks like us." (*Walter Brueggemann*)

### **Some common 'symptoms' of postmodernity:**

Nihilism (Teenage male suicide in U.K. up 72% in last 10 years)

Gender confusion

Post-secular credulity (New Age religions and the rise of the occult)

Relativism (every worldview is of equal value and equally 'true' )

The crumbling of all moral boundaries

Deconstruction of all 'metanarratives' (universally oppressive master stories )

Semiotic consumerism (you are what you buy! !)

The postmodern condition then is one in which there is no historical perspective, no ultimate 'Truth' and therefore no universal claims or metanarratives. No large story into which everyone in society is made to fit, only local and particular stories that resonate locally and claim to do no more. Initially the metanarratives of modernity such as Marxism were deconstructed because they were seen as false edifices established to be instruments of coercion, control and power. The Enlightenment project with its vision of progress towards a rational, global, society, has by many, been seen to be misleading and self-seeking, the Western dream is shattered.

In a postmodern world where the Church is seen as just another instrument of power, control and oppression, there is a great need to demonstrate that the character of the Church at both leadership and congregational levels is that of compassionate servanthood. If Salvation Army leadership at all levels take this model as a serious alternative to the autocratic, hierarchical control model, whether

we are engaged in pastoral, managerial, mundane or public ministry, then we would represent a genuinely alternative value system, that at the same time would be shocking and attractive to a postmodern generation. Not only is a servant lifestyle profoundly Christian and also true to the Salvation Army tradition of practical, loving service, it is also the way to explode the postmodern myth that all metanarratives are about oppression, exploitation and control. The canonical metanarrative when read in Christians' lives is superbly subversive to the postmodern philosophers doctrine of the metanarrative.

If the Salvation Army is to engage in mission which is sensitive to this age, then it will also need to critique its training methodology and ethos, so that appropriate steps may be taken to secure culturally sensitive leaders who in turn will encourage the growth of culturally sensitive congregations and centres. To achieve this we need to encourage faith education that is, in the words of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, "consciousness raising rather than domestication". We need to question ourselves as to whether our faith education is unconsciously geared towards denominational domestication. How much of our teaching has been simply receiving and reacting to information? I would contend that this is the way to produce reactive, domesticated soldiers and officers. Freire proposes alternative models of education as discussed in "Freedom, Justice and Christian counter-culture" by Michael Elliott.

He designates the one form of education as the 'banking' model in which the teacher is seen as possessing all the information, and pupils regarded as 'empty vessels' waiting to be filled. The teacher has an active role; the learners receive passively. Moreover, the teacher decides which selections of knowledge should be divulged. In contrast there is the 'problem posing' model of education in which all function as both teachers and learners and a framework created for creative thinking and action in relation to commonly experienced problems.

Application of the proactive 'problem posing' model would encourage the development of consciousness raising, which I suggest is essential if Salvationists are going to be educated to meet the challenge of contemporary society. College education for potential Salvation Army officers needs to be based on problem posing principles so that they will in their service become proactive, creative officers who will be able to reflect effectively on their practice of ministry and mission and not simply react to the circumstances. A more apprenticeship style methodology needs to be adopted, without losing the elements of classroom teaching deemed to be essential. It is not the case that academic rigor has to be sacrificed in order to achieve relevance as some might argue.

In conclusion I would suggest that the key element in our faith education, if it is to meet the challenge of postmodernity is radical discipleship. Nominal Salvationism will not bear the blast of postmodernity. We must teach, preach, train and particularly model discipleship in the way we live our lives. The values of the Kingdom must be more influential than the values of our various cultures. The Salvation Army has a tradition of adaptability, although forgotten at times. I therefore consider that we can learn to become a radical, creative community of faith in the 21st Century living and working beyond the boundaries of modernity, offering a Christian alternative to an increasingly confused, rootless and disillusioned world.

## LETTER FROM A READER

In response to the article by Max Ryan in the last issue, "[Signs and Wonders and The Salvation Army](#)", we received this letter from David Barker, [bowi@access.net.au](mailto:bowi@access.net.au), of Australia. David kindly agreed for us to publish his letter. Names have been changed to protect identities.

Even though this is lengthy, we think it is worth your time.

We would like to publish more letters from readers, so keep them coming... perhaps a bit shorter next time! 😊

Lt Col Maxwell Ryan,

You have articulated and illuminated issues going through my mind recently, and I want to share my story.

Some background first; I come from traditional Army stock. I am a soldier at Camberwell Salvation Army in Melbourne, Australia. I am 32, happily married with 3 young kids. My parents are retired officers. I am a fourth generation Salvationist. I became a Christian at age eight. On the mission field in Indonesia at age 13 we met with some Dutch missionaries, and I was baptised in the Spirit. I became a soldier at age 14, and since age 16 I have been at Camberwell corps. I have always been active in the Corps; previously I have led small groups, and for the last four years I have been leading the worship band. Professionally, with business degree credentials I work as a Human Resources Manager in a manufacturing company.

Despite active and sincere involvement in the church, I had been plodding along in my relationship with God for some 8 to 10 years without really having an effective personal relationship with Him. It was a desert experience. Then in February 2000, I attended a Corps weekend get-away camp called "Berocca" with others in the 20 to 40-age range. It was led by "Eric", a Salvationist, also the son of retired officers. On the Sunday morning, I had a terrific encounter with God, and while God was touching others in a beautiful way, I have written this primarily to emphasise my experience.

There were about 40 in the church hall as Eric taught. I listened intently and took notes. The day before, we had all been given the opportunity to confess our sins, which I did. A nagging sin, which had plagued me for 10 years, was instantaneously removed from me – Praise God! By the grace of God I have not revisited it since. The leader talked through old and New Testament references on being filled in the Spirit, and how Jesus was filled in the Spirit just after he was baptised. He spoke about reasons why people don't become filled with the Spirit, and as he listed through those things, I checked them off: 'no, I don't want this to keep me apart from God, yes, I can stop doing that,' etc. The last thing I wrote in my notebook was: "Don't get drunk, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled continuously in the Spirit." (Eph 5:18). About five minutes before he finished talking, I felt an urging to pray in the Spirit. I sensed that something was about to occur, and I opened up to God and prayed in the Spirit (with a prayer language God gave me at

age 13) under my breath. I do this because it helps me to focus absolutely on God, and to commit what was going on to him; my heart started beating more strongly.

Then Eric gave the call for people wanting to be filled with the Spirit. I stayed in my seat, still praying in support. The next time I looked up, around 14 people were standing at the front of the church hall, waiting for the leader and his wife to pray with them. (I later spoke to Eric about what had occurred. I was wondering if this happened all the time in his ministry! He said he had not seen such a rush of people seeking to be filled; there was a huge hunger for God.)

The leaders separated and started praying with people, moving down the line. Eric was praying with Nathan, and I noticed Joe standing behind him. I felt urged by the Spirit to stand beside Joe, which I did. I kept praying for Nathan in my conscience, and praying in spirit in my sub-conscience, with my hands by my side. I felt a warm tingling in my body. It made me feel peaceful, because I recognised it from 10 years ago as the Spirit of God. A tear of joy trickled down from my eyes like a mark of God's ownership over me. It had been a long while since I had felt that. God was just starting to touch me in what was to be an incredible encounter with Him.

Eric had his hand on Nathan's forehead, inviting the Spirit to come into him. I then felt a strong urge to put my right hand on his shoulder, which I did. At that moment, Nathan fell to the ground. I knew then that the Spirit of God was on me.

We then moved along the row, next praying with Mick. I put my hand on his shoulder, I think Joe did likewise, and Eric prayed for him. Soon Mick was on his knees. We then continued on down the line, praying for others. I don't recall anyone else being overcome in the Spirit for the time being, but the ministry was continuing. I recall we prayed for Craig, and he remained standing. The further down the line we went, the tingling subsided; I was thinking at the time that it was really Nigel and Mick that needed the Spirit's power punch, and the others were getting a blessing in other less dramatic ways.

When we had finished going down the line, I went back to sit down, still praying in the Spirit for a few minutes, thinking that would be the end of it.

Then, to my surprise, Eric came to Joe and I, and asked us to pray for others who were standing at the other end of the line, over to the left. I felt doubt about this; I had never been involved in anything like that before. I was also conscious that the tingling had subsided. Nevertheless, Eric said it, I knew God was working a powerful ministry through him, so I knew it was God saying it, so I did it.

I went and stood before Roger. I felt a little regret for Roger because he is one of our leaders, and I thought he deserved to get the master, not the apprentice! But I also had confidence; this was God's moment. I prayed in the spirit quietly under my breath, facing Roger, with my right hand on his right shoulder, waiting on God. Then the tingling started, this time it was more intense than before. The beautiful peace of God enveloped my whole body. I felt exultant joy, because I knew God was going to do a work in Roger, and I was so happy for him. Tears were streaming down my face. I stood close to Roger, and spoke quietly in his ear when God gave

me the words to say. In between speaking to Roger I continued praying quietly in the spirit. It was a beautiful, intimate, God-soaked experience. Then I felt urged to place my hand on his forehead. I continued praying, and soon the Spirit laid Roger flat (Joe later told me that he fell backwards and banged his head on a chair, but both Roger and I were oblivious to that.)

I was physically overcome with what had just occurred, and I collapsed on my knees with my face on the ground, prostrate before God. I began sobbing - deep, heart wrenching sobs. I felt so unworthy that he was using me as his instrument. Why me? I had strayed so far from God. Yet I was still happy, and so humbled by what had occurred. Even within the sobs I felt the warm peace of God and the beauty of his presence. It was an amazing act of God's grace that he would use someone who had allowed himself to become relatively distant from him (e.g. a sinner like me) to be his physical voice at that time, and for God's spirit to flow through me to Roger then and there. But there I was, a completely empty vessel, free of any of my obstructions that I usually put between God and me, ready to do whatever God said had to be done.

I then felt the Spirit urging me to get up. I would do whatever God asked me, and I could sense his urging with absolute certainty that He was guiding me. I cannot recall a time when God has led me with such clarity, nor when I have been that completely obedient to his direction.

I stood up quickly, looked around and saw Carla standing, praying, and waiting. I went over to her, and put my hand on her shoulder and waited for God's voice. Carla's moment was different to Roger. God had different things to say to her, and as God prompted me, I told Carla. I was crying tears of joy. I found it hard to move my mouth because my whole body was tingling. I kept praying in the spirit under my breath, and kept telling her the things God was saying. She had a wonderful time with God, and we stood for some time together. I knew that she would not be overcome, but that the Holy Spirit was working in her. My tingling started to subside, and I left her there standing. I sat down and prayed. She stayed standing for a long time. I looked up at her at one stage and she had a beautiful peaceful smile on her as she soaked up the presence of God. I put my head down again and kept praying.

The tingling was subsiding, and then Eric came over and said Craig needed more prayer. Again, I felt some doubt, because I felt like that was the end of it (again). Nonetheless, Eric said it; God was clearly leading him, so I did it.

I went over to Craig and stood in front of him, though slightly to his right. I think Eric was to my right and slightly behind me, although I wasn't really conscious of where he or anyone else was. There were other mates of Craig also around him. Eric said Craig wanted to be assured of his salvation, and to deal with his sin. I was ready to support Eric as he took the lead. I put my right hand on Craig's right shoulder and began to pray in the spirit under my breath. Eric continued praying for him. Then the Spirit came upon me with such power, and we prayed with such urgency and intensity that I had not yet experienced! I was totally absorbed in God. God was sharing His beautiful love with Craig. The Spirit told me there was evil lurking, and had to be sent out in Jesus name. Craig is the child of God, and the

devil had no place and was expelled. Craig confessed his love for God between sobs. By now I was praying out loud at the Spirit's prompting with what I understand in hindsight to be words of knowledge. I put my hand on his forehead at the Spirit's prompting, and for some time we continued praying. Craig was soon resting in the spirit on his back (this time he was caught!) and I collapsed to one knee. I put my hand on his leg and kept praying, but soon I felt compelled to put my hand over his heart and persist with an active ministry of prayer over him. God wanted to tell Craig that His love was the greatest, most wonderful love and better than any other love. I passed on God's words to Craig with a burning sense of compassion between my sobs and tears. God wanted to give Craig an absolute full measure of His love; it was a powerful and beautiful time. We kept praying with intensity for quite some time. The tingling was now like a raging fire of pins and needles over my entire body; it was *all consuming*. My body was becoming absolutely exhausted and I felt physically drained. I think I almost started groaning at one point from the physical intensity of it all. I'm reasonably fit and healthy, but it was as much as I could physically do to stay in position praying. But God still had work to do with Craig, and he kept me going for as long as Craig needed it.

When Craig's ministry was complete, I was overcome by the power of God and I collapsed on the ground on my back. I recalled feeling that this was the power of God, and that it was just a tiny amount of what God was capable of pouring out. I was still in raptures with the peace and joy of God over what was going on. Then I started giggling, and soon laughing. I tried to stand up but I couldn't. I knew that it was God's Spirit ministering to me; it was my turn for my time with God. It felt a bit like a thank you from God. I was delirious with joy, and absolutely drunk in the Spirit (just as I had written on the last line in my notes from Eph 5:18 when listening to Eric preach). I was aware of others around me, and I could hear some of them laughing in nervous sympathy with me, but I guessed they didn't really know what was occurring. I was aware that at any time I could get up, however I was also conscious that God wanted me to himself for a while, and I was very happy to be with Him. My eyes were closed and I was having a great time with God. I could not have been happier in His presence. I kept laughing a while longer. It struck me as wildly hilarious that God would use a sinner like me in a ministry like that. It also struck me as funny that I was drunk. I couldn't find my glasses, and that was making me laugh. I have sometimes wondered what it would be like to get drunk with alcohol before, and here I was drunk in the Spirit. Yet through this jocularity, I felt totally humble, like an empty vessel with absolutely nothing to offer God. Within this feeling, I was also so grateful and happy that He was with me so intimately; it was just so beautiful. And I think God had fun too. I might have been on the ground for 4 or 5 minutes. Then my laughter subsided, and I stood up and looked around.

For the first time I was fully aware of what was going on around me, and I felt again as if the job God had for me was finished. I noticed that there were only about 8 people left in the church.

Nigel was praying with Joe, and I went and stood with them to give support. Joe rested in the Spirit through Nigel's praying, and Joe started praying in the spirit lying on the ground. I stayed there a while and prayed with them.

There were some people still praying in couples around the hall. I had a quiet chat to Craig, and asked him about whether he was in a good small group (he was), and to watch out for attacks from the evil one.

Eric had spoken earlier on how we tend to put God in a box and did not allow him to do big things; well that sure was turned upside down! It was a humbling experience to be used in His service. As I wrote my journal one and two days later, I still could not wipe the smile off my face. It was not just a spiritual mountain top experience, but also an intense emotional and physical encounter that consumed my whole being.

In reflecting on it, it was so real. It could not have been fabricated, because I had no idea of what was going to happen. Both Joe and I had words of knowledge to say to the people we ministered to that we could not know about without the Spirit's prompting. Nigel had never been involved in that kind of ministry before, and was completely prompted by God as to what to do. I had not talked to Joe or anyone beforehand of what was to occur in that session, although I did know that Eric's theme was inviting the Holy Spirit. I have never been overcome in the Spirit, let alone been used by God in praying with people who were then overcome by the Spirit through me! I have witnessed it once or twice before, maybe three years ago. I consider Joe, Nigel and myself to be reasonably conservative in nature when compared to most people.

I believe God did not use me for any reason other than that I was there and available. God would have used a broomstick or a donkey if that were what it took to get the job done. I know absolutely that I did not deserve the experience of God working through me in that way. However, I also recall very strongly the sense of gratitude I felt to God over what had occurred. It was the highest privilege and honour I have ever been afforded. That sense of privilege was further heightened by my sense of unworthiness in that I have been far closer to God before than where I was at on Sunday 20 February 2000 at 9:00 am, yet He still chose to use me. That makes me smile. It is by grace that I am saved, and in this instance it was by grace that He worked through me, not by the works that I had done, or by me trying to be a good Christian.

At the time of this encounter, I had no knowledge of "the Father's blessing" or holy laughter, or even of what prayer ministry and resting in the spirit was all about. As you can imagine, I have since studied up on this whole phenomena, as I tried to figure out what on earth (or heaven) had happened to me and why it happened.

I occasionally hear negative comments about the benefits of resting in the spirit. I suppose I was dubious about it prior to my experience, as I did not understand it. While everyone has a different experience with God, I can only comment on my experience; what God did sovereignly with me on those few minutes that day has had a life-changing impact. My whole world had been turned upside down by this encounter. From that day on to thirteen months later as I write, I have been conscious almost hourly of the presence of God with me, compared to thinking about Him maybe once or twice a week. These days, I usually have a song of praise or worship in my mind in the background as I go about my day. I have a peace that I never had before. More on the "fruit" later.

Keen to 'go through the front door' and keep everything in full view of the leadership of the church, I sought the counsel of our Corps officers. Their wise counsel included recommending S.L. Brengle's teaching on the subject, and emphasised the key to such experiences is the fruit it generates. I consumed all Brengle's books, and then went on to Wigglesworth, Joe Arnott (TACF), and other Pentecostal writers. I have read much on the history of revivals, and on the Army's history.

So with a heart to God and a mind on being fruitful, I eagerly embraced what God was doing; it was great fun! Since that day, by His grace, my relationship with God has grown and grown and grown. (And did it need to grow!) For days afterward, I felt a physical gnawing in my stomach like a hunger pang as the presence of God was with me. For days, I could not wipe the smile off my face. People at work were asking me what I was grinning about, and it opened up opportunities for witnessing that previously I would have shirked away from! On the odd occasion where business commitments took me into the city, I would steal away for an hour or so to pray in some of the beautiful Catholic cathedrals; I just had to be with God. With a young family, devotion times were sometimes in the middle of the night.

With the C.O.'s blessing, I started a Wednesday morning prayer group in the Church where 3 to 6 people regularly pray for the revival of our Corps. In this prayer meeting there has been effective intercession for the Corps, there have been some occasions where we have seen visions, and other occasions where we have ministered to each other under the power of the Spirit, similar to what you wrote about Brigadier Howe in UK. Also, I have been given the opportunity on two occasions to do some 'lay preaching,' one at Camberwell Corps, and one at Northcote Corps.

Then, in October 2000, together with other leaders of worship, youth, and C.O.'s, I led the organisation of a special Saturday night worship/teaching service where 3 Corps from our division combined (Box Hill, Ringwood and Camberwell). I was motivated to put this event together because the wonderful love of God which I had only heard of but never experienced before had been poured out on me at the weekend camp in February, and I just had to share it with others and give it away! The contacts I had within these other corps were similarly ignited. Again, this was organised in full view of, and with the permission, of the Corps Officers and Divisional Commanders. We searched all over Melbourne for a speaker inspired by the Holy Spirit. Unable to identify an appropriate local Army candidate, and unable to afford airfares, we invited Perry, a Pentecostal preacher of a successful local church. The event was publicised through local Christian radio and through various Army Corps. We had an inspired time of praise and worship in which 150 people participated. Perry taught on 1 Cor. 12-14, emphasising the 'still more excellent way'.

Another extract from my journal: Perry taught for about 30 minutes on prophecy and words of knowledge; again how it should and should not be used. Then he gave a very practical demonstration about prophecy, which, as it turned out, did not finish until 11:00 pm!



Perry began by selecting people from the congregation, going up to them, and explaining what God had revealed about them to him. It was usually in the form of a picture or image, and then he would interpret that image (for example, chop sticks, a ship with loose sails, a spear from heaven, a man of many colours, the Titanic, etc.) He received many of these prophecies/images when he had first entered the building that night, however he had not necessarily been shown by God to whom these prophecies belonged. It was not until some of these people were standing before him in the ministry/prayer line that he made the connection. From what I observed of the people I knew receiving the prophecies, there was a high degree of accuracy in interpreting the person's present status.

Perry's delivery of these prophecies was as he had taught; he was loving, and he delivered them in such a way as to build up and encourage the church. Even when the message was one of warning, he packaged it in such a way as to be encouraging. When he had delivered the prophecy or word of knowledge, he would lay hands on and pray for the person and they would rest in the spirit. His style was relaxed, informal, and fun, and the congregation for the most part seemed at ease.

After he had spoken with six people around the hall in this way, he then went back to the front of the hall, and gave an invitation for anyone seeking to receive from God to come forward. He then turned his back and walked up to the platform. There was no music, no emotion; just a matter of a fact invitation. The moment of truth had arrived. Nobody moved; my knuckles went white as I gripped the seat. 'Uh-oh' I thought, perhaps this teaching did not go down well after-all. However, after only about 10 seconds one brave young lady stood to go to the front, and soon about 15 people were lined up across the platform. Probably 90% were under 25 years of age. More came forward later.

Then he did something completely unexpected. He asked anyone who felt a desire to be involved in ministering prayer to these people to come forward. About seven people responded to this, with a broad cross section of ages, the oldest being in their late 40's.

Perry matched people up (males to males, females to females). He then began coaching the prayers. One new pray-er was coached through the beginnings of a prophecy about a white-capped mountain concerning another who had come forward. The young man saw a beautiful white peaked mountain with the bright sun of God shining down on it. The person receiving this prophecy is to enter into a new ministry next year beyond anything he had imagined. Perry then prayed for the pray-er, and down he went.

Perry moved on to the next person. He coached the pray-ers not to "pray" the blessing on them with lots of words, but rather to wait on God until the pray-er felt full of God in their Spirit and felt it welling up from within them from their stomach. And then as the urge came, to move with God and allow the power of God to transfer onto the person you were ministering to. He had his hand on the back of the pray-er, and on some occasions he also put his hand around the back of the head of the person being prayed for. I guess this was to sense the move of the power of God. He occasionally prayed in the spirit.

Fellow organisers Joe, Dan, Chris (our worship leader for the evening), Perry's colleague Doug, and myself were involved in "catching", so we could see first hand what was happening. As led, occasionally Chris would pray over some people also. However, for the most part we happily took a back seat as more people were released into this new ministry. At one stage, there were so many people lying on the ground, and as more people came to the front it was hard to find room to lay them on the ground as they fell under the power of God. What a great problem to have!

For the most part, those falling under the power of God would rest on the ground for 10 minutes or so. Some people lay on the ground weeping, as God did a cleansing and restoring work through them. Tissues and hugs were the flavour of the moment for those on the floor. (There were no unusual manifestations.) Perry said he loves this type of ministry because often what God does for people while they are on the ground for 10 minutes is more than what any preacher can achieve in preaching 50 sermons. Certainly from my personal experience earlier in February, I know how this time spent 'on the ground' is used so productively by God.

Feedback from one person who went down the front as a "pray-er" demonstrates God's beautiful touch: "The preaching shed a gentle light on the part of prophecy in the church... I went forward to learn to be able to pray for people because I knew that what you had experienced was real and that it had changed your life and your relationships. You were more loving. I wanted some. When Perry prayed for the girl I was touching, it was a very gentle feeling like a soft breeze blowing through my fingers. When he prayed for me I felt my knees buckle but I was still conscious as I went down. As I lay on the floor, I felt – just peaceful and totally accepted by God."

Many sitting in their seats were participating in intercessory prayer in support of what was occurring. One man in his mid-20's received some of the identical 'images' to that which Perry prophesied before Perry had spoken of them, and this young man has since had some further prophetic experiences. I thought at the time that there could also be others who are being released into a new form of ministry, and consequently we would need proper guidance from our leaders on how to nurture these gifts appropriately.

Other people in the congregation were content observing, and certainly some felt uncomfortable with what they were seeing. However, the majority were eagerly supporting what God was doing.

Perry's approach to it all was tender and loving and generous through the whole evening. There was no hype or emotionalism; he was just going about what God was telling him to do. He had to preach the next morning at his own church, and here he was still ministering at 11 pm until he was virtually the last one standing!

Even as the worship band was 'firing up' for the final praise songs, a young man came to Perry in the aisle as he was leaving, and asked for prayer; there was that much hunger in the room. The music was loud, so Perry had to practically shout into this guy's ear to be heard, but sure enough down he went in the aisle and a

catcher ran to save him just in time! And the praise singing just kept on rising up! The congregation was jubilant about what they had witnessed, and so the night was rounded off with 15 minutes of praise singing, including about 5 minutes of a heartfelt "I exalt thee". The night ended at 11:15 pm. However, many people stayed and chatted afterwards; the place was buzzing!

So, as it happened, I would guess around thirty people were prayed for and rested in the Spirit; and 150 people witnessed a display of God's signs and wonders. There was even a report 10 days later, delayed as the person wanted to be sure, of a sovereign healing of a 20 year long illness. Illnesses were not specifically prayed for during the evening. I am sure we have seen the birth of a hunger for more of the spiritual gifts among this group and those they come in contact with. Also, it was great to see so many people released into this ministry in this way, and this was one of the high lights of the evening. It was incredibly encouraging for those involved in this type of ministry for the first time.

Later, that night I prayed a prayer of thanks as I tried somewhat unsuccessfully to sleep. This was something of an Elijah experience for me (Elijah vs the prophets of Baal - would God send the fire?) We had publicised and promoted the event that people would have an "Encounter" with God by faith. We had around 100 intercessors praying that this would be so. God greatly exceeded my expectations as to how he would touch people's lives during the evening. I could not have hoped for so many people to have such an 'encounter' with God. He truly provides, and shows how much He longs to give so much to His children. What a wonderful God!

I sent a report of this event to the Divisional Commanders and Corps Officers, again to be sure everything went through the front door. I was a little concerned by the response to what I considered to be a highly significant spiritual event in the life of the Division: there effectively was none! (Except for my C.O. who said thanks for organising it, and the C.O. at Box Hill did some brief teaching on signs and wonders the next day.) Please don't misinterpret this, I am not after the praises of man. Hopefully, my motivation is transparent enough. God has touched myself and others, and we just wanted to share it. Paraphrasing Catherine Booth's from your article, 'my soul was inflamed, my lips were touched, my mind was illuminated, and my heart had been purified with the hallowed flame,' and we just wanted others to feel it. It seemed here was a golden opportunity to gain leverage out of a move of God on which we could build, but there seemed to be no active encouragement of this from the leadership. Sounds similar to what you write about, Lt Col Ryan. Now, I am not upset about this, and I continue to pray regularly in support of the leaders of our Army. It just seemed like a wasted opportunity...

Having read your article, I think I understand more the reasons for the silence from the leadership. You can see from my background that I know and love the Army. Having been in leadership positions in both the church and a professional capacity for some 8 years, I understand some of the dilemmas faced by leaders when change starts to occur. The moves of the Spirit are somewhat unpredictable, can be manipulated by the flesh un-intentionally, it can lead to distractions on manifestations rather than to focus on the Giver, and it puts people out of their comfort zone. Occasionally it splits and divides churches unnecessarily, and at other

times necessarily! The people say things like “Oh, it’s not for me, I don’t understand it, it’s a bit weird (so explain our Uniforms?!), it’s outside my comfort zone, it’s not ‘Army’, what will other people think...”

But surely the upsides far outweigh the downsides when the Spirit moves, eh?! How good and great and mighty and wonderful and kind and compassionate and tender is our God! That He should deposit His Spirit in our lives is ABSOLUTELY AMAZING! His word is true, and His love is so real. That He can so motivate otherwise apathetic sloths like me to the acts of love as He demonstrates His loving-kindness to us! That he can heal the hurts of past sins. It’s like starting to live heaven on earth as he transforms you into the Kingdom values. The church bursts new life, serving the community with compassion and worshiping God with passion. God is excellent! Makes you want to tell the world! In business parlance, the benefits far, far, far outweigh the risks.

I am not saying everyone necessarily should seek this *type of encounter* of God because God loves us individually and has a plan for us each. God touched me and met me where I was at, and we all have different journeys. It is, however, my *personal experience* that it was not until I had this incredible encounter with God that my life was changed by Him, and now I really do *love* Him. No doubt, there are many others who would similarly be impacted if we were more forthright as an Army in leading people towards God in this way. God occasionally demonstrates his love through signs and wonders and prayer ministry reaps results when we are open to the move of his Spirit on us. His love and power is real!

Somehow, I suspect our leaders will respond by stating that small groups and prayer groups are the appropriate venue within the Army where signs and wonders can demonstrate the love and power of God, and I agree with this to a large extent. However, if God is in favour of us, there will continue to be more public displays of His love, signs and wonders in larger gatherings, and I believe the leadership of the Army, along with its soldiers, should become more open to this. It is compelling, attractive soul-winning stuff to a disillusioned and lost generation. The God of Elijah hears our cry and He does send the fire!

So, Lt.Col Ryan, while I see the concern of your concluding paragraph (“they have had to pay the price of keeping their activities and sympathies private, or of leaving the Army”), I actually expect the Army *will* change to become more accommodating of the move of His Spirit. As for me, I will not leave the Army, God willing. I will obey God first, and I will submit to the leadership of our Army. I suppose by going public in this article, I am asking for the Army to become more accommodating of the moving of His Spirit. I have already seen a brooding in the Spirit over us, and more and more people are catching the flame. I pray to see lives transformed by His love, the power of God flowing, to see His glory in MY church rather than read about it in past revivals, and to be a sower or harvester for the fruit which will inevitably flow.

Meanwhile, I am not waiting for someone else to do ‘the stuff.’ Along with my friends, I will continue to pursue, love and worship God in my personal devotions and Scripture studying, in building into others, in leading the worship band, and in open air contacting and other outreach activities. I am eagerly seeking more of the gifts of

the Spirit for the sake of the kingdom. I am trying to live out a life where I am prompted by the Spirit to do things that Jesus would do, but I feel like such a beginner and have made more mistakes than right moves.

Steve Court's article (JAC Feb-Mar 2001) on Hide & Seek is right on the mark, it is a fun life! I understand the path to revival is determined completely by God's timing, and is usually preceded by keen, humble, contrite, repentant, intercessory seekers of Him, and I hope I am prepared to pay this life-consuming (yet considering God's grace, minor) price.

In writing this response, I hope I have not come across as being less than humble where I have devoted some paragraphs on the 'fruit' of the experience to demonstrate the worth of the experience. I trust this has provided something of a case study on what can actually happen when the spirit moves, which can help to ease the minds of those who may be sceptical, as I once was. To some travellers who are much further along the Way than I, it may not seem like much of a story, however it really has been a life changing experience for 'this little black duck.' I really am blown away by God's sovereign move as I absolutely did not deserve it; God is so good. If I miss out on a 'reward' in heaven for this boast about my God on earth, well, so be it. The bottom line for me is this; I am just a sinner saved by grace, and I only want God to be glorified.

God chose to demonstrate his signs and wonders among us. (Please God, let this be the start of more things to come!) I have recorded what actually has occurred here recently, it is an undeniable fact, and again remind readers that I am from a reasonably conservative background and did not even really seek the first encounter back in February 2000. This is real. So why does God do this? Because He loves us, he wants us to love him, and because he needs to get our attention. Why does our leadership not actively embrace this? Oh, they will find a way, because deep down God is stirring up something... Praise the Lord!

Still grinning!

David

## ON TEA DRINKING AND ONE LATIN WORD

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History is filled with “what if” statements.

What if the Nazis had won the battle for Stalingrad? What if Stalin had completed his seminary training and become a priest? What if a young Catherine Mumford had never met and married William Booth?

As we look back over history we can see that smaller single events, often insignificant and unnoticed, have proved in hindsight to have made a tremendous impact on history.

What if Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Christianity had never separated? What if one, small word had not been added by the Western Church to the Nicene Creed?

### ONE WORD

The addition of the word “filioque” triggered an avalanche out of all proportion to its importance. Quite simply its addition gives the meaning to the ancient creed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. The original statement said that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father only.

This difference laid the theological foundation for the separation of Christianity between East (Orthodoxy) and West (Catholic/Protestant).

It may not seem like a big difference to us today but it was important enough to those that went before us. In 1054 a representative of the Western Church excommunicated the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church in Constantinople, which is modern day Istanbul. (In those days Constantinople’s Patriarch was chief among the patriarchs in the Eastern half of Christendom.)

Excommunication means basically damning someone to hell. The Patriarch was rightly infuriated and responded by excommunicating the Roman Catholic Pope. And that was the end of good relations between these two groups.

### EASTERN ORTHODOX REMEMBERS, WESTERN CHRISTIANS DO NOT

Many believers in Russia or other Eastern Orthodox lands have joined Western Catholic or Protestant branches of the Church. This has forced a modern confrontation between Orthodoxy and Catholic/Protestants. In the news daily are concerns of religious freedom and Orthodox inflexibility with Protestants in these Eastern Orthodox lands.

What many Catholic/Protestants do not realize is that sincere and knowledgeable Orthodox priests are being taught to remember this historical rift

between East and West. They learn about the ancient "filioque" clause and still see this as a point of separation between themselves and Western-based believers. Mainly for this reason, Orthodoxy officially has not recognized the faith of Western-based believers, even those in their own lands. (Especially those in their own lands!)

In order to dialogue with Orthodox priests, Catholic/Protestants need to learn about the significance of "filioque" and its historical impact.

## CONFRONTING OUR HISTORY

In 1995 I was fresh out of Officer Training College and appointed to a corps plant in the Republic of Georgia. (If you think that is near Atlanta, think again.) I invited the Orthodox priests of our city to come to our home for tea! I thought we could work together!

In the discussion that followed in our living room, the priests suggested that I did not believe in the true Trinity and that I do not believe in the Nicene Creed. (They also wanted to do an exorcism on me, but that is for another story.) They asked to see my copy of the Nicene Creed. How strange, I thought, as I reached for my Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine (English, version 1969).

The priest who spoke a bit of English underlined the three words and the Son in the Creed and shoved the book back at me. "There!" they said, as if pointing to hell itself, "there is why you are not a true believer!"

I wanted to talk about how we could work together to win our city for Jesus. They wanted me to repent of believing that the Holy Spirit "proceeded from the Son" and to proclaim that he "only" comes from the Father. Our version of the Creed, in complete agreement with all Catholic and Protestant confessions, contains the "filioque" clause that was added by Catholic/Protestant Christians centuries ago.

Suddenly a light went off dimly in the back recesses of my memory. What had I studied in seminary? Lectures on church history, that seemed entirely irrelevant at the time, suddenly seemed VERY important! They had hit me broadside, and I was stumbling. By the time I gathered my memory together and prepared to answer their accusations, the three priests were sitting across from me preparing incense in some kind of long tube. For a moment I thought they might start to smoke it. Then I realized they were preparing for the exorcism.

And people say Church History classes are not important! I will never forget the wagging finger of accusation pointing at me from my black robed tea guest!

## HISTORY OF A CLAUSE

Without understanding the historical and theological background to this issue we will never be able to enter into meaningful dialogue with our brothers and sisters of Orthodoxy.

So what is this "filioque" stuff all about? And why are the Orthodox so upset about it?

The Nicene Creed is a written confession that was formulated by a council of the church in the year 325. That is pretty ancient! It was written to unite Christian belief around the truth that Jesus, as the Son of God and second person in the Trinity, is himself divine and fully God along with the Father. Jesus was not created by God, but is himself truly God uncreated. As John 3:16 reminds us, Jesus is the “only begotten Son”, which is a complicated way of saying that he was not created.

The Creed was originally written in Greek. When the Western church translated it into Latin, they added that the Holy Spirit proceeds "from the Father and the Son". Augustine, the greatest teacher in early Western church thought, suggested that the Holy Spirit is the fruit of the love that exists between the Father and the Son. This led to the obvious conclusion that the love between them is a two-way love going from one to another. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. Therefore, Augustine concluded, the Holy Spirit comes from both the Father and the Son. Eventually this became so widely accepted in the Western church that the change was made to the Nicene Creed when it was officially translated in Latin.

This change to the creed was greatly criticized by believers in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. First, Orthodox teachers suggested that the creed should not have been changed without the Western church consulting with them first. Secondly, they argued that just as the Son is sent from the Father alone, so the Spirit is also sent from the Father alone. To support this argument, Orthodox teachers developed an impressive array of biblical and historical support.

We can conclude that neither the Bible nor any other evidence clearly demonstrates that the Holy Spirit does or does not proceed from the Father alone.

## ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD

Today some Catholic and Protestant theologians suggest that when we work in Orthodox countries we should use the Orthodox version of the creed in our worship and practice. This is possible because the issue is not one of central belief and does not change the truth of the gospel.

In 1998 I wrote suggesting that the version of the Nicene Creed without the “filioque” should become the official version of the Creed of The Salvation Army in Russia and Orthodox lands.

Today the Russian translation of “Salvation Story”, the official Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine, contains the Eastern Orthodox version of Nicene Creed. The English version contains the Western version of the Creed.

Insignificant you say? Who cares?

Well... What if there was no animosity between the Orthodoxy in Russia and The Salvation Army in Russia? What could we accomplish if we were united?

And when the Orthodox are sitting across from you in your living room drinking tea, the “filioque” makes all the difference in the world!





Commissioner Wesley Harris served as Territorial Commander on three continents. Now living in retirement Australia, Harris has authored seven popular books, six of which reach out to unbelievers.

## CHANGE AND CHALLENGE

**Wesley Harris**

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AS a corps officer I once had a songster leader who was a dentist by profession. With a wry smile he used to quote a line of a hymn: "Change and decay in all around I see". He could say that again! A humorist has remarked that the moment Adam and Eve were turned out of the Garden of Eden, Eve may have remarked, "My dear, we live in changing times!" In fact, of course, all times are changing. Where there is life there is change; that has always been the case and always will be so. What is new is the rate of change which has been accelerated by many factors including scientific and technological advances.

During my lifetime the world has been affected by the introduction of television, computers, space travel and many other developments which have had far-reaching effects. H. C. N. Williams, a former provost of Coventry Cathedral, England, has said that history may be seen to flow like a great river carrying the commerce and communication of human society and providing the means for cleansing and refreshing humanity as it flows on its course. Then from time to time the river changes its level and flows in confusion and at a greater speed down the rapids from one level to another. Its course is broken by jagged rocks and there are whirl pools and a great deal of froth.

The period through which we are living is like the river flowing down the rapids. Whereas in the past there may have been times when change was gradual and predictable now it is speedy and unpredictable. Some find change intimidating and, so to speak, are liable to clutch the bank and try to avoid the rapids. Others face the challenge of change and determine to ride the rough water, keep their balance and avoid the rocks that would wreck their best intentions. Not every change may be for the best but the trick is to find the best in every change.

In the midst of change, in some parts of the Army a lot of people seem to have an identity crisis and are unsure about the mission of our movement. But in our history we may discover 'His story' and abundant evidence of God working through his people. It appears that God has not made us just another religious denomination but something else as well. Our social and evangelical work are two sides of the same coin of caring. Our mission is not only to the soul of a person but the whole of a person - and indeed the whole of society. Church growth need not be 'churchy growth'. It may incorporate our 'distinctives' and can and should embrace our social as well as our corps work.

Loren B. Mead in, *The once and future Church*, describes the polarity in the Church's understanding of its mission. Is it the conversion of the world or the serving of the world? Part of the glory of the Army is that it has embodied both of these concepts as contained in the teaching of Jesus. We are out to save *and* serve the

world and whatever happens we must maintain that critical balance through all the changes taking place in and around our movement.

Some changes will come whatever we may or may not do and we must be ready to adapt and adopt accordingly. In other cases we should have the courage to be agents of change, moving ahead with cautious courage and prayerfully seeking for insight and foresight - knowing that one day people will judge our actions with the advantage of hindsight! But in all this we should not become addicted to change for the sake of change. There is wisdom in the old adage, "If it ain't broke don't fix it" and it may help to sober some who have become high on change and can't resist altering anything which has been even when it is perfectly all right!

As we face new situations our attitude will make all the difference. The founder of the Bata shoe company spoke of sending two representatives to different parts of Africa to check out possibilities for business development. After a couple of weeks one wired back to say that there were no prospects because no one wore shoes anyway. The other representative said that the market was wide open. Nobody had shoes therefore they all need what the firm had to offer!

Turning out an old trunk I came across a plaque bearing some words I wrote years ago: "Think positively, act decisively, live creatively". As I 'ate my own words' I found that they didn't taste too bad and were not unrelated to what may be required in these days.

It is natural that we will sometimes fear change because it leads into the unknown. But there is no need to think that the bend of the road is the end of the road or that God who has helped us in the past will fail to undertake for us in the future. We have his promise that he will not let us down, so why worry? We might well make our own the prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr, "Give us the serenity to accept what cannot be changed, the courage to change what should be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference".