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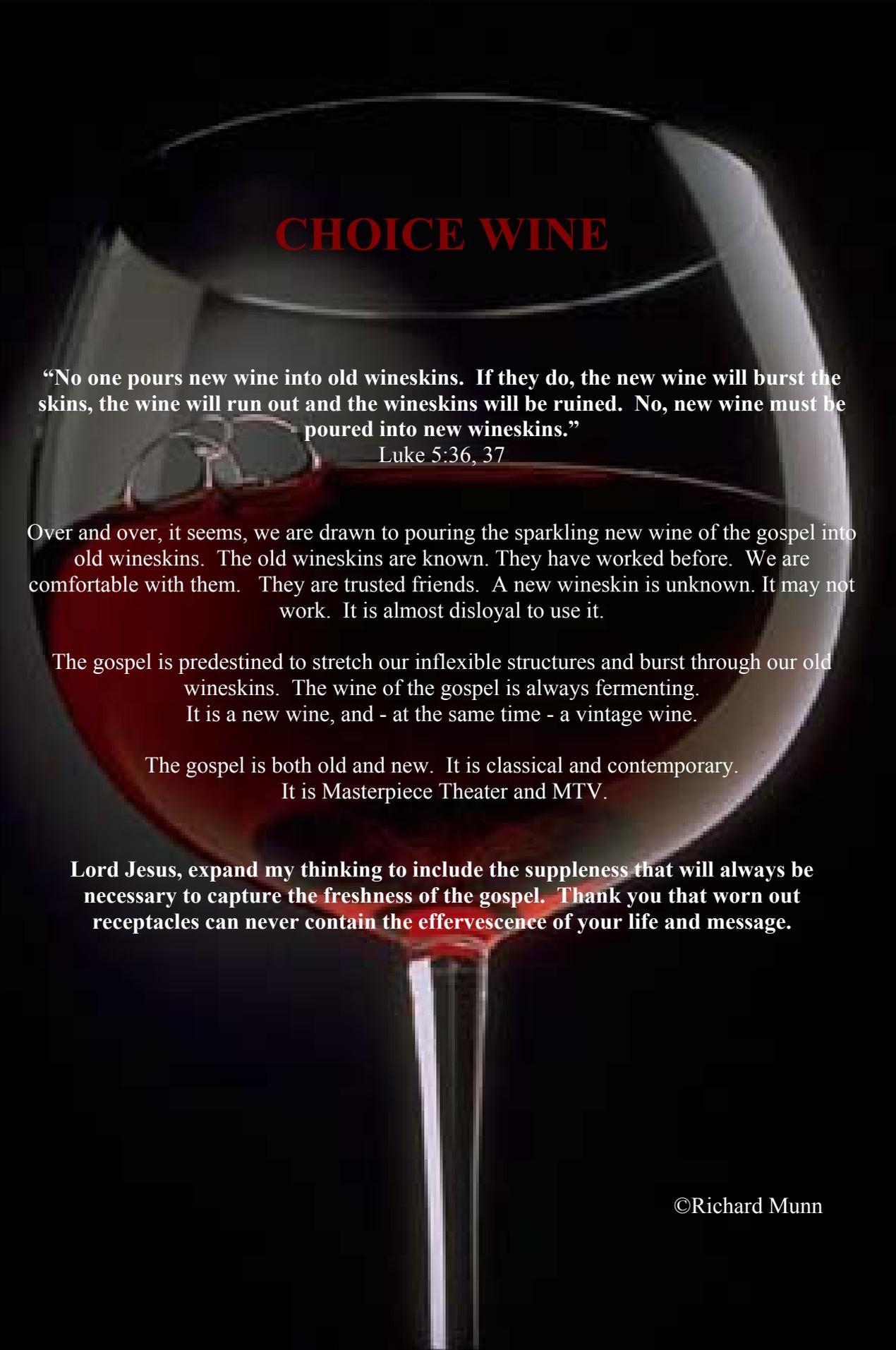
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CHOICE WINE

“No one pours new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.”

Luke 5:36, 37

Over and over, it seems, we are drawn to pouring the sparkling new wine of the gospel into old wineskins. The old wineskins are known. They have worked before. We are comfortable with them. They are trusted friends. A new wineskin is unknown. It may not work. It is almost disloyal to use it.

The gospel is predestined to stretch our inflexible structures and burst through our old wineskins. The wine of the gospel is always fermenting. It is a new wine, and - at the same time - a vintage wine.

The gospel is both old and new. It is classical and contemporary.
It is Masterpiece Theater and MTV.

Lord Jesus, expand my thinking to include the suppleness that will always be necessary to capture the freshness of the gospel. Thank you that worn out receptacles can never contain the effervescence of your life and message.

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Linda Bond is the Chief Secretary for The Salvation Army, Canada & Bermuda Territory. She has been a Divisional Commander in the United Kingdom and Canada. She has also served at I.H.Q. in London.

INTERVIEW WITH COLONEL LINDA BOND

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

LB: I don't recall having a dramatic conversion. I was raised in the Army and my earliest memories are of hearing the gospel. It took no "leap of faith" for me to confess my sins and accept Jesus as my Saviour. Those who shared the Good News with me were Sunday school teachers and officers who were credible witnesses.

JAC: Please tell us a little about your experience of holiness.

LB: If I look to a dramatic experience, it would be while I was a cadet in College. This is not the time or place to go into detail, but the Lord came to me in a very clear way and assured me of a deep cleansing. I do have to confess that I have failed Him miserably, but I am convinced that His call to holiness is insistent and every provision through His Son and Holy Spirit has made it possible for me to claim by faith this holy life.

He has all there is of Linda Bond and whether He chooses to grant dramatic encounters in my spiritual journey or requires me to walk by faith alone, then that is His choice. I seek to be like Jesus and be open and responsive to the Holy Spirit.

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

LB: The greatest challenge is to see every part of my work as His. It is to recognise that He is in charge. It is to take tough decisions when they are not popular. It is to recognise truth even when it comes from sources least expected and respected.

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

LB: The Bible (It is still my favourite textbook for living and leadership), The General Next to God, Knowing God, The Cross of Christ, The Disciplines of Grace, Songs of Heaven. There are many more but these have either been significant because of a spiritual need or to stretch my mind to take in something of the magnitude of God's grace.

JAC: Who are your heroes? Why?

LB: Commissioners Ed Read & Roy Calvert. These men have modelled a believable holy life and leadership. Our leadership styles are different but I am convinced that one can have their approach to life and leadership sanctified.

JAC: General Catherine Booth went on record, stating, "The great fundamental principle of The Salvation Army is the law of adaptation." This comment has been used by many salvos at many times toward diverse ends. What is the proper understanding of this fundamental principle for us today, in light of tensions between priestly vs. prophetic roles?

LB: In my earlier years, I thought it was necessary to protect and preserve the Army that I had grown up knowing. John Larsson's article in the April 1998 Officer Magazine entitled "Back to the Future" has provided me with the best understanding of what we need to hold on to. It is not the snapshot of the 19th Century Army but rather this flexibility at the essential core to carry out our mission. General Gowans has also been helpful with "save souls, grow saints and serve suffering humanity".

I have personally adopted the UK Vision 2002 Statement and added one line on holiness, "We will be a Spirit-filled, radical growing movement, with a burning desire to lead people to Jesus Christ, lead believers into an experience and expression of holiness, actively serve the community and fight for social justice."

If the above clearly describes our identity and mission, then we must hear the Army Mother out on "adaptation", and in my mind that is the willingness to change in order to get the mission done, not change our essence but change our methods, if in fact they are kept only for preservation and not for advancement.

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

LB: The proclamation of the Gospel. I take my covenant very seriously on this matter. I have never allowed my office to interfere with my platform ministry but have trusted the Lord to give me strength to attend to the "business" entrusted to me and keep a rigorous schedule for preaching/teaching. However, I use more than the platform. Personal relationships, correspondence, and even board meetings are also avenues for Kingdom news and values.

JAC: What are your dreams for The Salvation Army?

LB: Perhaps the vision statement above best describes it. I do have "watchman/warrior mentality and therefore I dream of an Army moving forward to claim people for Christ, moving in purity and courageously. I still believe we must be a soul-saving movement. I have great hopes for the reclamation of our Wesleyan doctrine. I also believe the Army will once again find its "voice" and speak with conviction and intelligence on issues that matter to our Lord.

JAC: What is God teaching you these days?

LB: The Lord has been teaching me that He is absolutely trustworthy when it comes to guiding us in the right direction, if only we listen, obey and act with courage. I have been helped by the words of Jehoshaphat, "We don't know what to do but our eyes are on You", and on Alan Kreider's (Towards Holiness) interpretation of "Be still and know that I am God -Stop fighting and know". He is right I believe that our God has promised to provide for and protect His children. My leadership these days is characterized by my conviction that this is true.

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

LB: I don't think of myself as a great preacher. I am unpolished and not a great adherent to the disciplines of sermon-making and presentation. The keys for me are a healthy devotional life, allowing the Scripture to speak and then seeking to understand the principle and translate it for today.

If the Word excites me then I can preach with passion and if the Holy Spirit anoints me, I can speak with power. I generally pray that I will be "fuel for His burning". I don't try to be anyone else; I don't even try to conform to any set standard. If I am faithful in preaching, it is because I tell people what the Bible says, what it means, and what it can mean for us. It first of all meant something to me in order for it to be considered for others. Boldness- This could be a personality trait but it is more than this. I do believe in the Word and if the Spirit has used it to speak to my heart, I don't, find it difficult to speak clearly, with conviction. If I have been a compelling speaker, it is because I maintain eye contact. I preach from outlines. But beyond that, it is because, once again, I have personally been "fired up" and have given myself to the Holy Spirit for His anointing.

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

LB: My favourite preacher is John Eric Akexanader, a Scottish preacher that I heard many years ago at Urbana. He was outstanding in my mind because he preached the Word clearly and cleverly (not in a negative sense). His deep convictions come through in his passion. You never felt he was trying to sell himself or make an impression. He was totally sold out to the Lord and committed to faithful proclamation.

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

LB: In 32 years of officership, I have never known such a sense of the Church desiring to move forward. Prayer is more intense than I have ever known. Our young people are mission-minded in a way that my age group never was. The Church is linking arms, not to submerge their own personalities but to proclaim the gospel in word and deed. This is primitive salvationsim. This is primitive Christianity. The world may appear to be bleak but greatest extremities provide greatest opportunities. I used to say that the Army's greatest days are ahead but I think it was more "wish" than truly belief. I now have hope as I have never had before. There is much cause for optimism. There are still many salvationists in the "barracks or on the parade square". We need to encourage them to "move out". We are on the march. Its an old chorus but it has profound truths: "The world is need us, Christ is heeding us, comrades let us be true".

‘De-armifying’ the Army

Commissioner Wesley Harris

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MUST we ‘de-armify’ the Army in order to fulfill the Army’s mission? The question - spoken or unspoken - is being raised in many places. A report from India would provide an extreme example as the following extract from an article in *Salvationist* illustrates:

‘The Evangelical Fellowship of India has issued a statement urging Christians leaders to tone down ‘spiritual battle’ language in a bid to prevent Hindu fundamental groups taking advantage of inflammatory words to paint Christians in India as anti-national. EFI cautions against using military metaphors from the Bible because to do so is ‘unloving, inappropriate and counterproductive’. It says that ‘warfare vocabulary’ such as army, attack, battle, campaign, conquer, enemy, foes, forces, soldier, victory and weapons have been used wrongly as motivational tools for mission.’

Now I am not qualified to provide detailed comment on the situation in India although I would hope that our movement may be helped by the fact that in that country we have been translating the military metaphor into the language of love for nearly 120 years. Furthermore, it may be wondered whether the prejudices of some extremist groups will ever be accommodated whatever terms are employed. It is also regrettable if the representatives of some other faiths do not show to Christians the tolerance and understanding which their devotees expect to find when they migrate to western countries.

But is the military metaphor which has served us well since 1878 now past its use-by date? Is that the reason why in some corps – and even some territories – there is a tendency to change traditional Army terms and substitute others, sometimes ones borrowed from the churches?

Adaptation is a law of nature and certainly the Army has been able to adapt to many cultures and conditions around the world. We need the courage to change but prudence may require it to be cautious courage. Sometimes we have been too ready to exchange the dynamic terms of Salvationism for the tired terms of other groups with little evidence that this has made us more comprehensible or acceptable to secular men and women.

Commissioner Bill Luttrell has written, ‘We are a church like no other church and an army like no other army’. I agree. The Church Universal is not to be characterized by dull sameness. We can dare to be different. We don’t have to ape other bodies; we can be ourselves. With unity there can be diversity. The Army may not suit everybody but, for all its faults, many of us feel that it is the best thing we know.

A few among us are like someone joining a rugby football club and then complaining about the shape of the ball. They should have joined a soccer club in the first place!

Our name – and the quasi-military forms that go with it – brings *instant recognition* in many parts of the world. The devoted service of those who have gone before us makes our name a passport to acceptance with many. That is certainly true where I live in Australia. Our name stands so high that I can only pray that we may be as good as people think we are!

Multi-national companies are often ready to guard their name with expensive law suits, if necessary. I am confident that if the holder of a McDonald's franchise decided to change the name to McTaggart there would be a swift response. A good name is something to be prized!

It may be said that our quasi-military forms are no more than a metaphor but metaphors matter. The name The Salvation Army *defines what we are* as a movement, or at least what, under God, we were meant to be. It points to our uniqueness, our message and our mode. History would indicate that the change of name from the Christian Mission to The Salvation Army helped to bring cohesion and effectiveness to the work without changing what we were essentially, namely a Christian mission.

Our ethos is closely related to our quasi military form as is our *solidarity* as a far flung movement and yet a close knit community around the world. I do not believe that we need sacrifice our identity in order to fulfill our destiny as a lively limb of the Body of Christ. History would testify to the contrary and there is plenty of current experience to verify that we can 'do the Army thing' and still be sensitive to the feelings of modern men and women.

Our 'goodly heritage' is one of aggressive Christianity which has always been offensive to some but nevertheless effective with many. Our call is not merely to passive membership but active soldiery. I remind myself that at the center of the title bestowed on me by the Army is the word 'mission'. A commissioner without a mission would be a contradiction in terms and an offence to Almighty God. But then, so would any 'Salvationist' without salvation and a desire to share it! As one of our songs puts it, 'We are an army *mobilized by God*' and we had better believe it!

Democracy and The Salvation Army

John Norton
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Democracy's the worst form of government except for all the others.
Winston Churchill

Soldiers and officers vote. They may not vote with their hands, but they vote with their feet.

The appointment system is older than bonnets and brass bands. It has served the Army well and fits neatly into The Salvation Army's culture and military metaphor. It may be difficult to imagine the Army any other way.

A democratic Army is something William Booth said he would not have, but Booth never contended with a postmodern society. The shift out of modernity is forcing the Army to move slowly towards more diffused leadership and power. Democracy may not appear tomorrow in The Salvation Army but I believe if we are to survive the 21st century we will need to embrace it, with its warts and all.

DEMOCRATIC THEODICY

The Salvation Army should be more like a democratic monarchy than a people's republic!

A republic would make us an Army "by the People, for the People," to borrow a phrase. However, my Officer's Commission reminds me we are,

for the glory of God, the salvation of the people,
the progress of The Salvation Army,
and the advancement of the
KINGDOM OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Christ is both King and Commander-in-Chief of The Salvation Army. We exist for Him, not for the People. There is no doubt about who is ultimately In-Command.

But how do we know our Lord's will? What happens when we disagree on what God's will is in any given situation?

The right type of leadership or government for the Church has always been a matter of debate and is historically a major source of disagreement among Christians. Roman Catholics suggest that the Holy Spirit guides His local church through a bishop, and further guides His wider Church through the one Bishop of Rome. Presbyterians historically have argued that the Spirit guides through the consensus of a group of mature leaders. Congregationalists will argue that final authority rests with the church body.

Common sense would suggest that a combination of the above works best. Not every decision can be taken to a vote and a pure democracy exists nowhere. On the other hand, no one person can be expected to make every decision and get it right every time. Power corrupts and secrecy breeds contempt. A middle way seems best. We all want to be involved.

*We adore titles and heredities in our hearts and ridicule
them with our mouths. This is our democratic privilege.*

Mark Twain

EVOLVING DEMOCRACY

Internationally, The Salvation Army has seen the need to democratize its leadership, as have most successful nation states and large organizations.

1929 saw the first High Council elect the third General. Albert Orsborn later instituted the Advisory Council to the General in 1947, a group which continues to operate and has significant influence in the appointment of Territorial Commanders, Chief Secretaries, and promotions to the rank of Commissioner. The Army has also seen in more recent years contributions from the Spiritual Life Commission and Officership Review Commission to bring about greater input from the whole of the Army.

At corps level the development of a Corps Council to advise officers and help make decisions has been a step toward democracy.

At this point, an argument might be made that no military could ever allow its soldiers to vote, and thus we as an army should not either. However, our military metaphor is tired and breaks down here. It is ludicrous to argue that the metaphor is valid in every situation, i.e. just because an armed military imprisons or shoots deserters is no reason for us to get violent with backsliders!

We already use democratic elements in The Salvation Army. The tendency is toward more involvement from everyone, not less, and I am just taking it to a proactive conclusion.

I suggest a combination of all three historic forms of church government – one-person leadership (bishop), group leadership (presbyter), as well as member leadership (congregationalism).

Somewhere between Corps Council and High Council, our evolving democracy needs to be encouraged. It appears to me that democratic principles are most in place at our two ends: IHQ and Corps.

In thinking ‘out loud’ here, my suggestion is for something like the following to help kick start the process:

1. ELECTION OF TERRITORIAL COMMANDERS

I believe strongly that God anoints his chosen Territorial Commander.

But how do we agree on whom God has anointed?

Admittedly, we could do this in a variety of ways, such as drawing straws or waiting for the writing on the wall. In some biblical times God's will was made known through a prophet. But what happens when the prophets disagree?

Instead, our system is such that we ask the General to pray about it and then name the person he/she feels God has chosen for Territorial Commander. As an alternative, I suggest we allow all Officers and LOs to pray about it and then vote for the person they feel God has chosen. As in all votes, a majority should rule. It is called democracy, certainly also fallible and prone to not hearing God's will, but nevertheless best among alternatives.

An elected Territorial Commander would give a Territory a feeling of ownership and participation that would translate into greater morale and mission effectiveness.

Who says that the Salvationists of a Territory would be any less effective in hearing the will of God than the General? Without wanting to be disrespectful, I am not sure that a General can be expected to always fully know a Territory or its needs, nor know the best candidates for leadership around the world. On the other hand, the General should still be involved in the process somehow because only he/she has the best view of the ‘bigger picture’.

The following is one of many ways an election of a Territorial Commander could be conceived,

- All DCs/Dept. Heads to confidentially nominate one name for T.C. to IHQ.
- The General to choose three suitable candidates of his/her choice from among the names provided.
- The General, or his representative, to contact the chosen nominees to see if they are willing to let their names stand as official candidates.
- An official announcement to be made by the General with the list of the three official candidates.
- The three candidates for T.C. are given the opportunity to publish papers on their plans for the future of the Territory.
- All Officers and Local Officers have one vote to send in by mail.
- TCs could serve a set term of five years, although the General would retain the right to call for an election of a new T.C. at any time, and to appoint an interim replacement. This would protect the internationalism of the Army and the General's authority. An elected T.C. would be expected to submit to the General's leadership.
- After a term, TCs who have not yet reached retirement age could return to a frontline appointment, such as a corps or division, or if the General wishes they could take an international appointment.
- For international integration and a check on power, let Chief Secretaries come from a different territory, appointed by the General.
- Commands (smaller than Territories) would have their leader appointed, as these are territories-in-the-making and not yet fully developed.

2. ANNUAL GENERAL APPOINTMENT CHANGES

The three interested parties needing to be involved in the appointments process at the corps and institutional level are: the Officer, the Corps or Unit, and Headquarters. Each of the groups has interrelated and important needs that should be considered in making any appointment.

Self-supporting corps should have a voice in choosing their officers. These corps are mature in that they are not financially dependent on the Army; they pay their own way. They will have responsible Local Officers interested in the outcome of an Officer change. A new or immature corps is dependent and is more of a mission outreach than a mature body of believers. Although it is a generalization, self-supporting corps are much more likely to be healthy than one unable to meet its own expenses. At any rate, in economic terms, self-supporting corps have in my opinion 'paid' for their right to have a voice.

It is insulting to mature soldiers to make significant changes to their corps without consultation, and for this reason most corps officers find it helpful to listen to their Corps Councils! However, for some reason this principle does not translate into having an impact on the appointment of officers. Obviously officer appointments have the single greatest impact on a corps compared to any other change, yet corps themselves have little or no input. This omission may be a contributing factor to our inability to develop many model self-supporting corps.

The ideal situation will be to have a corps officer request a specific corps, have that corps request that officer, and have headquarters think it is a great idea! I am sure Personnel Secretaries everywhere would cringe to think of the impossibility! But just because the goal will be difficult to hit doesn't mean we shouldn't try for it as our ideal.

The only way to approach bringing democracy to the appointments process is to remove the veil of confidentiality. There is no way this can take place if we are unwilling to face any kind of application process for appointments.

Many officers are going to apply for a position and not get it, and many corps will make known their desire to get an officer but end up with someone else. As difficult as this sounds, let us remember that it

happens all the time in other denominations and seems to work out somehow. Officers and corps will just have to deal with reality.

Some officers may end up unwanted! Some corps may find themselves unwanted too! Perhaps this says something about the unwanted officer and unwanted corps. If no leadership at all can be found for a corps, then let it go leaderless. If no appointment at all can be found for an officer, then maybe it is time for them to find engagement outside the Army.

These issues cannot be avoided if we step through this door of opening up the appointments system. I think the benefit potential outweighs the risk and fear, and the Holy Spirit will guide.

Here is one approach for how this problem could be approached,

1. Headquarters publishes a list of all Corps/Unit appointments that will be opening, including the qualifications required to apply to each position. At the same time, they also publish a list of all Officers coming available to receive new appointments.
2. Officers submit five confidential appointment choices to Headquarters, out of the list given. Corps/Units submit five confidential choices to Headquarters of whom they would prefer fill their appointment.
3. Headquarters then narrows down these choices and makes appointments.
4. Officer appointments given for a five-year term (renewable).

What happens when an Officer or a Corps ask for a move before the end of term? Headquarters would have to adjudicate and fulfil its function as the final arbiter. However, usually Headquarters should require the set term (whether that is set at five years, or longer or shorter) to be fulfilled, barring extenuating circumstances.

Since Headquarters would make the final decisions and all appointments would be binding for both the Officer and the Corps/Unit, this may not be as radical as first thought. This could be implemented gradually without bringing unworkable change to the existing situation.

I believe more input into the appointments process for both officers and for corps will raise morale significantly, which is so desperately needed in many territories.

NOT JUST ONE MORE ADVISORY BODY

The problem with most recent attempts to bring Salvationists into the decision making process lies in the word 'advisory'. Most groups, be they permanent or formed for a temporary task, have no real power. They can only advise. This applies to task forces running in corps right up through our divisional, territorial, and international leadership systems.

Democracy is about trusting each other. We know democracy is the best government system for our nations, then how much more for our beloved Army?

The Salvation Army Canada and Bermuda has recently published Geoff Ryan's [Sowing Dragons: Essays in Neo-Salvationism](#). This chapter is reprinted by permission of the author. To order the book, write to The Salvation Army orderdesk@sallynet.org

The Siren Call of a Dangerous God

Looking for love in all the wrong places?

Geoff Ryan

“Sadly impractical, never conforming,
Never your spirit to prudence would bend;
Love’s sweet fanatic, untiringly storming
Ramparts impregnable, young to the end.”

From the poem To George Scott Railton by David Guy

More than anything else, prophets are gamblers. They risk all on the chance that it really is God that is speaking to them and through them. A priest is someone different altogether. They hear God as scheduled in the temple on the Sabbath or during early morning prayer time. A prophet, on the other hand, will pause to cock an ear to a low whisper snaking out to him from the depths of a darkened alley late at night, betting his life that it is God issuing the strange invitation. He knows that God is capable of this. A priest has God boxed in by predictable and unyielding systems of religious thought and practice. (Is not the very concept of “systematic theology” an oxymoron?) A prophet knows that God is dangerous.

For example, the Bible tells us about God ordering Hosea to marry a whore; Ezekiel to lie on his side for 390 days and cook bread using human waste; Jeremiah to invest in real estate in a city on the verge of being captured and destroyed. Then there was John eating locusts (forbidden food for a Jew); Jesus healing, eating and reinterpreting Sabbath injunctions, not to mention the people He hung out with. You know the rest.

A true prophet is God’s extremist, a maximalist, with a willingness to go anywhere and do anything regardless of convention or personal concerns, all for the sake of the mission. A prophet is driven by an inner burning message.

What does this mean for The Salvation Army, whose Founder was acknowledged by many to be a prophet? Why did he call the Army’s first training institutions “schools of the prophets?” Why did our early ecclesiology define us as a prophetic Movement?

A couple of years ago I first visited Saratov, a city of roughly one million people on the banks of the Volga, about an hour-and-a-half drive from the border of the largest Central Asian Republic, Kazakhstan. Someone in Saratov had been writing for months to the headquarters in Moscow asking for The Salvation Army to come to the city. This in itself is not unusual. We get many requests like that. Because it was in my region, headquarters asked me to go and check it out. So I flew there, with just the name of the person who was supposed to meet me.

It was 10:30 on a cold February night when I stepped off the plane and there were two well-dressed men waiting for me. They carried mobile phones and they led me to a new, fully loaded Toyota jeep. If you have a cell phone and a brand new jeep in Russia that usually means you are Mafiya. Things were getting interesting.

I soon realized that my hosts were pagans in every sense of the word, materialists with seemingly no sense of the transcendent at all. As the jeep started up, our first conversation went like this:

“Geoff,” said Evgeny, “do you want a cigarette?”

“No thanks, I don’t smoke,” I replied.

“Don’t smoke, eh?”

“Nope.”

(Pause) “Do you drink?”

“Nope.”

“Women?”

“Only my wife.”

(Pause) “Yeah, I’ve been thinking about giving up smoking too.”

I spent four days being shown around the city by these men, and meeting various people. They took me to a sort of children’s home run by the police, but which in reality was a children’s prison. Opened in 1837, it was still being used. In this huge, cavernous building the youngest child was six years old and the oldest 16. There were 12-year-old girls who sold themselves on the highways to long-distance truckers, 10-year-old drug addicts, eight-year old thieves – and policemen were trying to look after them! I was shown into a room and told, “There used to be a church in this room in the last century, but we can’t find anyone to come and do something. We need something for the kids that’s lively, that’s interesting.” He was describing a Sunday school program, without having seen one. “If you would like to come you can do this. You can do what you want,” he said as we left.

Throughout those four days I was baffled as to why these two hoods were interested in hosting The Salvation Army. I tried subtly to let them know that even though I was a foreigner, I was not rich and if the Army came to town they were not going to get any money. I must have said a hundred times, “We are not a business.” But I sensed that they listened to me without really understanding.

The evening before I left, as I sat in an apartment on a white leather couch surrounded by expensive European appliances, I bluntly put it to them: “Evgeny, why have you invited The Salvation Army here? What interests do you have? What’s in it for you?”

Something special happened at that moment. Jesus spoke to me through the mouth of a bandit. Evgeny, who I was sure had never seen a Bible let alone read one, looked up into my eyes and said: “You know, I was in Moscow for a couple of years in the early 90s (pause). I was in prison and you visited me (pause), yeah, some little old lady from The Salvation Army visited me. So I said to myself, ‘The Salvation Army is a good organization. When I get out I am going to do what I can to get The Salvation Army into my city.’ That’s why.”

The question: Should we open The Salvation Army in this city at the request of the Mafiya? Would we be prophetic or priestly?

There is a fascinating episode from the life of Elijah in 1 Kings 17 in which the prophet heals the son of the widow of Zarephath by raising him from the dead. God sent Elijah to this woman in a foreign land that was in the midst of a famine – a strange invitation from a dangerous God. In a humbling act of submission, Elijah moved in with the woman.

For Elijah, one of God's chosen people, to put himself at the mercy of a foreigner, a non-believer, was difficult enough. Compound this by the foreigner being a woman and a widow to boot. This was a real pride-breaker for the devout prophet. The gossip of the neighbours, the whiff of possible scandal, could not have sat well with the man of God.

I imagine that Elijah spoke much to the woman about his God, tried to evangelize her, as we would say. There were several months of this with no apparent result. "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" was the question she flung at him on the death of her only child. She figured that her son's death was a punishment from God for her sins and that Elijah, as God's representative, was the harbinger of this punishment. She was trapped. He was obviously to blame but he was also the only hope she had.

Passionate person that he was, Elijah flung himself into the fray and onto the body of this young boy, raging against his death and against the hopelessness of the situation. No passive determinism here, no fatalistic, hand-wringing "if God wills." It is never God's will that pain and suffering, injustice and sin have the last word. A.W. Tozer wrote: "Many of us spoil our prayers by being too 'dainty' with the Lord.... We ask with the tacit understanding that the cost must be reasonable. After all, there is a limit to everything, and we do not want to be fanatical! We want the answer to be something added, not something taken away. We want nothing radical, and we want God to accommodate us at our convenience. Thus we attach a rider to every prayer, making it impossible for God to answer it. In a world like ours, courage is an indispensable virtue. The coward may snivel in his corner, but the brave man takes the prize. And in the Kingdom of God, courage is as necessary as it is in the world. The timid soul is as pitiable on his knees as he is in society."

I imagine Elijah yelling, shouting at God, shaking his fist even in holy anger. How does a grown man cover a small boy? Hands on his hands, chest on his chest, feet on his feet, mouth on his mouth, as if to say, "Take my body, take my health, take my breath, take my life. Take it if you need it, but heal him, save him." Three times he did it as in the cumulative holy, holy, holy – fashioning a prayer out of pain, an act of worship, "kicking at the darkness until the daylight bled through" (in the words of a song by Bruce Cockburn).

The Scriptures say that if a Jew touches a dead person he is contaminated, made unclean. The boy was not only dead, he was a dead foreigner, doubly unclean one could say. A hot eastern country and a body dead for a few days – the sight, the smell! How Elijah embraced this dead boy to his chest and breathed his breath into his fetid mouth without passing out, or worse, is something I will never know.

But none of that mattered. The instinct to save was too strong in Elijah, the different reality that blazed in his mind's eye rejected the evidence of his physical eyes. Charging through the religious, cultural and racial taboos, he would not let his religion, his race, culture, or his personal comfort, stand in the way. He was, after all, a prophet. After God brought the boy back to life, his mother said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth." "Now" is the operative word here. What Elijah had been saying for months made sense, came into focus. Now his reputation as a man of God had credibility, his God had been given credibility. Now the words he spoke were made truth, given weight and substance by his actions.

He had accepted the strange invitation of God and when the time came, was prepared to do what was needed, no matter how difficult and dangerous. The message needed to be given, the mission was all that mattered.

For the record, we did open up the work in Saratov. There is now a Salvation Army corps there and each week our team runs a Sunday school program for the kids in that children's home.

Family vs. Mission

Stephen Court

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Sarah had been relegated to second class citizen by her barrenness. She'd been passed around to Pharaohs and Kings (Genesis 12:6;20:2), lied about by a selfish and embarrassed husband, dragged from town to town, and then had humiliated herself by arranging for Abraham to sleep with her maid. That rejection shouted at her every day for 13 years as the father-son bond was forged between Ishmael and Abraham. Finally, Sarah was miraculously blessed with her own son, Isaac, whom she adored. All of her self-worth, all of her love, was bound up in Isaac. In fact, she idolized him. One day God tested Abraham by commanding him to kill Isaac. Don't think Isaac wasn't traumatized by what amounted to child abuse. His father, with whom he wasn't close, took him away from his doting mother early one morning, travelled three days from home, and then tied him up and stuck a knife to his throat. That family was ruined by the idolization, as the eldest son was banished and the younger one was emotionally scarred.

Isaac fell for the same sin as his mother, idolizing his rough and tumble son, Esau. Isaac's younger son, Jacob, was jealous and schemed with his mother to defraud Esau. That fractured the family unit and postponed the blessing of God.

Finally, Jacob idolized his son, Joseph. Joseph's brothers were furious with this and did away with him, again, ruining the family unity.

The parents' overemphasis of their child hindered the fulfillment of God's promises. Our Movement has experienced the opposite extreme as leaders sacrificed their children for the sake of 'the work' and have been cursed with a lost generation of embittered children and frustrated, disillusioned parents.

However, today, we may have rebounded to the ungodly situation through which Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob thwarted God's plans. We may have almost idolized our children and families and hindered God in His fulfillment of His promises.

The ubiquitous priority of our leaders and evangelicals in general is 'God, the family, and the mission.' This is almost evangelical gospel.

One of the difficulties is distinguishing between God as a priority and mission as a priority. If Jesus is right and love of God is manifest by obedience of God, then the priorities of God and mission will often be the same. That relegates family to a lower position.

Before anyone starts heresy hearings, check Jesus' harsh words in Mark 3:31-35. When told that His family was waiting for Him outside, He asked, 'Where are My mother and brothers?' Looking at those sitting around Him in a circle, he said, 'See! My mother and brothers. Whoever does the will of God, that one is My mother and sister and brother.' One who wanted to put mission after family was excluded by Jesus from the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:61,62). When another wanted to bury his father, Jesus just dismissed him from service (Luke 9:59,60).

The people of God are more important than human family. For Jesus, Blood is thicker than blood.

Wesley, Railton, and Brengle all carried on extended campaigns away from family that practically no one in our territory would even consider, because we don't want to neglect our families. And if mission mixes with God as priority, then even the question, 'But what happened to their families?' is irrelevant.

Were Wesley, Railton, and Brengle wrong? Thousands of people were saved as a result of their campaigns and the worst potential negative is that a few people had a larger chance of going to hell. Billy Graham had a son, Franklin, who for years was bound for hell. Yet during that time Billy Graham saw multitudes saved as he maintained a schedule unequalled in history.

Obviously we love our families. I'm not suggesting we ignore them. Let's be careful not to idolize them like Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob did, and in so doing hinder God's plan. Individually we need to listen to the Holy Spirit who will prod us when to do what. Obedience to Him, for some, will look like Brengle's long tours away from home. For others, obedience will look like a protected free night at home every week with a needy child. One is not better than the other. Both are obedience to God. The key though, is that they are not just following a trend or rebounding away from an extreme. They are sensitively listening to the Spirit of God. May God help each of us listen better.

Paul and his wife Kathryn have been educating their children at home for seven years. They are the founders of ASHE (Association of Salvationist Home Educators) and their website is www.HisKids.homestead.com

The first part of this series on home schooling evoked responses of concern from some readers and support and affirmation from others. Click [here](#) to read Part 1.

HOME SCHOOLING AND THE SALVATION ARMY

Part 2

Paul Van Buren

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Home schooling (home education) is a movement that is sweeping through the Christian Church. The motivation to home school is sometimes a matter of academic achievement but in most cases it is because parents desire to raise their children for Christ. For most parents it is a difficult decision to make but the longer they are at it the more confident they are that it was the right decision.

I stated in my first article that I believe Christian parents should home school their children. However, I should clarify that I also believe that parents are led by the Spirit to make this decision, not by the arguments of man. I also believe that in order to be prompted you need to know that the possibility exists. This second article is for those of you who are interested in home schooling but cannot see how you can with both parents being so busy and with not having a degree in education. I want to explain how it is possible.

First of all you need to understand that home schooling is not something you do, instead it becomes who you are as a family. Home schooling is a life style. With home schooling the attitude is that education is an ongoing process. We consider that education does not take place in books alone because education is an integral part of our life. As long as we are breathing we are learning so learning takes place as we live life. The idea is that your children accompany you on your daily journey and you teach them along the way. There are no holidays, no school hours, and no point of graduation because we do not graduate from life.

A simple example: my son Ian was reading a book the other night that was set in Oregon. Out of curiosity he asked me where Oregon was situated in the United States. I was tempted to give him the simple answer because I was busy with something. However, instead of giving him the simple answer I handed him the atlas and told him to find it. He was also asked to find the population of the State, its capital city, and its main industry. An hour later his mom, just by chance (wink), asked Ian where Oregon was, what its capital city was, what the population of the State was, and what was its main industry. Ian knew the answers. This also happens a lot with questions about plants, companies, the planets, weather, and any other question a 12 year old may ask. He often learns far more with this method than he does with his structured studies. He certainly knows how to use an encyclopaedia now.

So knowing that home schooling is a life style you need to expect that there will be changes, big changes. One of the biggest changes will be your priority. If Christ is not the centre of your family he will need to be. If your family does not take a priority over work it will need to. If raising your children in the ways of the Lord and dedicating them to his work is not your motivation then you will need to examine this closely and make it a matter of prayer.

If you have all of this in place then you will be able to make the tough decision to be a one-income family. You will adjust your financial expectations. Your priority will move from material things (nice house, nice car, nice vacation, expensive conveniences) to a priority of Spiritual possessions in preparation for eternity. If I may quote a well know passage from our Lord, *“Don’t worry and say, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ The people who don’t know God keep trying to get these things, and your Father in heaven knows you need them. The thing you should want most is God’s kingdom and doing what God wants. Then all these other things you need will be given to you.”* (Matthew 6:31-32)

It is also believed by many that the two-income family is a myth. The second income goes to pay for the daycare, school, transportation, lunches, work clothing, etc. If one parent was at home most of these expenses would be eliminated. In fact, some families have discovered they actually have more money by one parent staying home. If you would like to see if working for that second income is worth it, just visit our web site (www.HISkids.homestead.com) and you will see a link to a site that will give you a tool to see if you are gaining anything with that second income. But in saying this, if the motivation for the second income is not financial but instead it is so that mom or dad can have his or her own life, that is something that will need to be prayed about. What is your priority as parents? How do you see your children, as a blessing or as a burden? Where do you see your responsibility? What is your purpose for living?

Financially home schooling is possible for everyone. It is not easy but when you allow this decision to be Christ motivated you would be amazed at the resources and blessings that are poured out upon you. We have a heavenly Father who is richer than we could ever possibly imagine. However, what about the academics? Even if it is financially possible to home school what about the issue of the parents’ ability?

Believe it or not, the question about academics and the abilities of parents to teach is more of a stumbling block for most families than the financial question. To answer this question I would like to draw your attention to a book by Christopher Klicka, [The Right Choice; Home Schooling](#). This book is filled with information and statistics on the current state of the public education system in the United States. The author also includes information on preparedness of teachers coming out of College. Please do not take this as teacher bashing as I have a great respect for this honoured profession but facts are facts:

Kramer discovered teacher colleges do not teach knowledge but rather four years of methods. As a result, they are ‘producing for the classroom of America, experts in methods of teaching with nothing to apply those methods to.’ She says teachers are no longer being taught to teach reading, writing, history, science, math, or literature – rather they are being trained as counsellors, psycho-therapists, social workers, babysitters, and policemen. The ‘educators’ are not educated in knowledge, nor do they love learning, and, as a result, they cannot instil a desire to learn in their students.

The author goes on to give the average exam marks of people training as teachers, which is rather shocking. This book goes a long way to show that parents are just as competent as anyone else to teach their children academics. By the time children are ready for formal lessons the parents have already taught them some of the toughest things in life such as walking, talking, and how to go potty (this achievement is highly under-rated <g>). The entire idea of home schooling is to help the child develop a love of learning and to give them the skills early in life so that when they are 11 years old and older they are directing much of their own education. Our son Ian knows how to use the library better than I do and loves to spend hours there researching and studying. This should be considered normal.

However, all of this is looking at academics from a purely humanistic point of view. What concerns Christian home schoolers above everything else is the knowledge that our children have about God, his word, and his desire for us in this world. Not only are we equipping our children for life, we are also equipping them for eternity. Sunday School once a week for an hour (in those Corps that still have it) just does not cut it. In home schooling this training is ongoing, on a daily basis. Not only do we teach it as parents but we model it as well. There is no one better equipped to do this than parents. It is our God given responsibility.

We are also teaching our children leadership skills. If they are to have an impact on this world for Christ they need to know how to be leaders. Not all of them will be called to take up positions of leadership but those that are called by God to be leaders in the community will have gained the skills to serve their Lord with their all. Childhood is the time for gaining the skills that will be needed for life. How much more so the skills for their life in Christ.

The Christian Home Schooling movement honestly believes that God is calling us to train up a generation dedicated to him for his purposes. I personally believe (and there are others who are like-minded) that The Salvation Army is in a unique position to have a significant impact on the leadership of this movement. If the Army was to take a pro-active role, promoting, equipping, and supporting families who make this decision to home school, it would radically change the Army as we know it.

As good as the Army is in some areas, it has lacked impact on family ministry. Most of the things we do segregate family members which does little to strengthen family. There is no promotion of family and family activities. We do little to educate parents on how to train their children in the ways of the Lord. In fact, we do the opposite and often try to take the place of the parents with our different youth programs. If the Army could promote the authority and responsibility of parents, it would go a long way to strengthen the families in our communities. If the Army was to promote home education and the spiritual education of children at home it would go a long way to strengthen and increase the Church and our Army.

In my next and last article I will address this further, as well as the issue of officer home educators. If you have any questions at all about home schooling please do not hesitate to contact me directly or visit the HISkids web site. Any of the members of our international association of salvation home educators (ASHE) would be happy to answer your questions. May the Lord continue to bless you and your family on this great journey.

THE RENEWING OF POWER

1920

Samuel Logan Brengle

The need for frequent renewings and anointings.

Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

Paul.

To do God's work we must have God's power. Therefore Jesus said: "Tarry ye in Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:49.) And again He said: "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you." (Acts 1:8.)

The soul-winner receives this power when he is sanctified wholly and filled with the Spirit, and he need never lose it. But while the Holy Spirit abides with the believer, there yet seems to be need for frequent renewals of the power He bestows. And, thank God, He he made ample provision to meet this need. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength," said Isaiah. "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord," cries David.

Years ago President Asa Mahan wrote as follows of his old friend: "The extraordinary power which attended the preaching of President Finney during the early years of his ministry was chiefly owing to a special baptism of the Spirit which he received not long after his conversion; hence it was that when through him the 'violated law spake out its thunders,' it did seem as if we had in truth 'come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and unto blackness and darkness and tempest and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words.' But when he spoke of Christ, then indeed did his 'doctrine drop as the rain, and his speech distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb and as the showers upon the mown grass.' The reason also why he is bringing forth such wondrous fruit in his old age is that while his whole ministry has been under the power of the Spirit, his former baptisms have been renewed with increasing power and frequency during a few years past."

The need for these frequent renewings and anointings does not necessarily arise from backsliding. Sometimes the soul feels the need of a renewal of its power when confronted by great opposition, danger and powerful foes. The apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost, and had not only won their great Pentecostal victory, but many others as well, when suddenly a stubborn wall of opposition arose before them. They were arrested by the rulers, thrust into prison, brought before the high priest, sharply questioned by what power and name they were working their miracles, and then when no ground for punishment could be found, they were threatened and commanded to preach no more in the name of Jesus.

When they were let go they went to their own people, told them what had happened, and began a sweet, childlike, heaven storming prayer meeting, told the Lord the story, too, and cried to Him to show forth His power, and then a wonderful thing happened; Pentecost was repeated; "the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness, and with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great peace was upon them all."

They waited before the Lord and their strength was renewed, their power reinforced from heaven. their past victories put into the shade and "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."

Sometimes the need for this renewal of strength arises after great victories. For victory is usually secured as the result of great spiritual and mental activity, and often physical activity as well, and it is but natural that there should be a reaction; the pendulum, if left alone, swings to the other extreme. Depression may follow, the powers of soul and mind relax, joyful emotions subside, and the inexperienced soul-winner may at this point get into great perplexity, and suffer from fierce temptation; and strain himself to keep up his accustomed spiritual activity, crying out with David, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?" And again. "My flesh and my heart faileth," and imagine himself to be backsliding. But what is needed now is not so much anxious wrestling with God as quiet waiting upon God for a renewal of power, saying to his soul, "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance, and my God," and though heart and flesh do fail, "yet God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." At such times the strength of the soul is to sit still in quietness and confidence. (Isaiah 30:7, 15.)

I once heard a wise old evangelist, one of the mightiest this country has produced, say that while at home after a season of rest, the Spirit of God would come upon him, leading him to earnest prayer and travail for the salvation of men. This was God's way of preparing him for a campaign, and for victory, and away he would go for battle and siege, to rescue the souls of men, and never did he fail to win. But after a while there seemed to be an abatement of power, when he would return home for another season of rest and quiet, waiting upon God for the renewal of his strength. And thus he continued till he was past eighty, still bringing forth fruit in old age.

Again, there is sometimes need of a renewal of power owing to weakness and infirmity of the flesh. Paul must have received a great addition of power when, instead of removing his "thorn," Jesus said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And such was the uplift that Paul got at that time that ever afterward he took "pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake," glorying in them, since through them the power of Christ rested upon him, and in weakness he was made strong. Spiritual power is not necessarily dependent upon physical energy, and however much he may be afflicted with infirmities there are mighty enduements of power for the soul-winner if he intelligently and with quiet and persistent faith seeks them from on high.

There will be times of loneliness and spiritual agony such as Jesus suffered in the Garden, or Elijah when he felt that all the prophets were slain, and there was none true to God in Israel but himself. Or again, when there is widespread barrenness and desolation, when revivals have ceased, and worldliness sweeps in like a flood, and there is apparently no vision, and God seems silent, and the devil mocks and taunts, then the soul-winner will need to have his spiritual strength renewed. And he may fully expect such a renewal. The angels are all round about him, and the heavens are bending over him, and Jesus has lost none of His tender interest and sympathy for him. An angel came and strengthened Jesus in His agony (Luke 22:43), and an angel strengthened Elijah for his long and lonely journey, and an angel came to Daniel and said, "O man, greatly beloved, fear not; peace be unto thee; be strong, yea, be strong." And not only an angel, but the Lord Himself will surely empower His trusting workers. It was Jesus that cheered Paul in the chief captain's castle (Acts 23:11), and John on the lonely Isle of Patmos (Revelation 1:17), and so He still cheers and strengthens His servants and warriors. Bless His name!

These renewals of power are not always necessarily of an extraordinary character. There are sometimes great uplifts of physical strength without any apparent cause, but ordinarily a man's physical strength is renewed by rest and the timely eating of proper food. And so there may be times when the Spirit of God falls upon the soul-winner, giving him great uplifts and visions and courage. But ordinarily power comes by the use of the simple means of much regular prayer and patient, diligent searching of God's Word and a daily listening to God's voice. It is renewed

like fire, not by the fall of lightning from Heaven, but by the addition of new fuel; like physical strength, not by some hypodermic injection of fresh blood, but by proper food. David calls upon his soul to bless God “who satisfieth thy mouth with good things so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (Psalm 103:5.)

This will require time and attention on our part, but it will be time well spent. It is by appropriate food, then, that the soul is strengthened. Jesus told us what that food was when He said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matt 4:4.) And does not this correspond to Paul’s statement that though the outward man was perishing, yet “the inward man is renewed day by day”? and with that passage that says, “The Lord revealed Himself unto Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord”? It is the Lord that renews our strength, but He does it not in some mysterious way, but by means of His Word, which we read and meditate upon and appropriate by faith. Through it we see Jesus and come to know our Lord. Bless His name!

My own strength is usually renewed by the opening up of some new truth, or the powerful application of some promises, or portion of the Word of God to my soul, which I am enabled to make my own by a definite and bold, affectionate and daredevil act of faith in secret prayer.

A 'BORN AGAIN' CHRISTIAN?

(Is there any other kind?)

Major Graham Harris

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Jesus talked to Nicodemus (The Gospel of John, Chapter 3) about being 'born again', but the basic idea that Jesus wanted to communicate to Nicodemus missed him by about six feet. When Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be, 'born again', Nicodemus thought that Jesus was talking in terms of obstetrics! Nicodemus understood Jesus to be saying that a person must be born (physically) again.

Nicodemus was, arguably, one of the world's most intelligent, and most religious, persons living at that time. He is even called by Jesus, "A teacher of Israel" – a title reserved for very few persons. Yet he misunderstood Jesus' meaning about something, that in the twentieth century we expect people, and even children, to have some grasp of. We read the term, 'born again', not only in religious books, but also in newspapers, and it is heard on television.

The world around us seems to have little trouble finding metaphors that explain, 'born again'. A person may be a 'born again' liberal or conservative, politically. Another may be a 'born again' devotee of pleasure after being addicted to hard work. By such definitions it is indicated that there has been a definite change – possibly in conduct or in allegiances.

But, we ask, is the term, 'born again' really any better understood now than it was in the time that Jesus said the experience was necessary for Nicodemus?

When Jesus is recorded in John's Gospel as having said that Nicodemus must be 'born again', He also gave a good idea of what He meant by it. Jesus meant that a person needed to be radically changed

The Christian idea that we have of being 'born again', is that it means a person who claims this experience is one who is really sincere about their being a Christian. Some might even conclude that a person who is 'born again' is one who has had some very special type of experience and has been changed.

One way that Jesus had of describing this change was by comparing 'light' and 'darkness'. John (The Gospel writer who records the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus that includes the insistence of Jesus to Nicodemus on being 'born again') constantly theorised about the difference between the two opposites. He says:

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:5 RSV)

After Jesus gave a man back his sight (It is recorded in Ch 9 of John's Gospel) a dispute broke out between Him and a group of religious leaders. This dispute is set in terms of the presence and absence of light:

Some of the Pharisees ... said to him, "Are we also blind?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains." (John 9:40,41 RSV)

The people that Jesus was speaking to had not been changed from a life of darkness to one that was flooded with light; they had not been born again. They might have been the most religious people in the world, but they were still in the dark.

There is an important pointer to what it means to be 'born again'. It is possible to be very religious, even 'Christianly-religious', and yet not be born again.

Religious people commonly make that mistake. Their membership of a religious denomination is not, automatically, the same as being part of the Kingdom of God. For membership of that Kingdom a person must change, or at least, be in the process of being changed – they must be born again.

The change which is described as being 'born again' is enormous. The individual becomes involved in a crisis/process of moving from being self-centred, to giving the first place in their life to God, and also to considering other people's interests to be of equal importance to their own. So, the change is very great, and it is radical. To change from being ego-centric to being Christo-centric is an alteration that few are willing to make. It requires total application.

Near the end of his autobiography titled Born Again, Charles Colson records that Jay Robinson, who had previously played the part of Caligula the mad emperor in the movie classic The Robe, and who, like Colson, had spent time in prison, asked Christ into his life. Jay Robinson also starred in the film about Colson's life called Born Again. Colson gives this comment about the change that had happened in Robinson's life:

But stardom is now only second in Jay's life. He has discovered that Born Again is more than a movie title – it is the new life that ended his restless search for meaning.¹

The title of the book and film had become a fact in Robinson's life, as it had become in Colson's life. He was changed. Previously restless, he had found peace and direction. That is what it means to be 'born again'.

¹ Charles Colson, *Born Again*. P. 384

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TEMPTATION LINKED TO SUFFERING

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There is no doubt that temptation accompanies suffering. That is, at least, my own personal experience. Not temptation as we usually recognise it, in its more blatant forms (i.e. the temptation to covet a neighbour's wife, or to steal some money), but temptation that is every bit as quietly seductive as its less bashful counterparts.

The form of temptation that accompanies suffering, I have found, creeps in under the dangerously deceptive guise of reason and logic. That is to say, if a person is suffering, and if that person has cried out to God for help, to no (apparent) avail, then that person is highly susceptible to the temptation to lose or question faith in God, or, even worse, to "curse God and die" (Job 2:9).

In this context, the writer of Ecclesiastes is proved correct when he states that "there is no new thing under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9), because the modern sufferer is prone to exactly the same style of temptation as that which befell Adam and Eve in Eden.

Our first parents were tempted to think that they knew better than God (Genesis 3), and so it is with today's sufferer, who can easily begin to wonder if God has lost control. Thoughts which veer towards losing faith, or cursing God (under extreme duress, it should be noted) are bedfellows of thoughts which doubt God's authority. In other words, such thoughts wear the mask of the aforementioned reason and logic, but are actually engineered to bring about loss of faith. By the same token, they are engineered to persuade the sufferer to replace faith in God with faith in man. Echoes of Genesis 3 ring loud and clear! The temptation towards disobedience (for which read rebellion) might be ancient, but is definitely active, nonetheless!

One small crumb of comfort to be drawn from this is that Satan's tactics are as old as he is, thus indicating a lack of creative imagination on his part! How important it is, though, that we are alert to them, old as they are. Not for nothing does Paul urge us to be aware of Satan's devices, and not ignorant (2 Corinthians 2:11).

The temptation to question God's ways, God's goodness and authority, or even His presence or existence, is understandable, and one with which I have very great personal sympathy. Having said that, it is still wrong to allow that temptation to hold sway, however great the suffering. Ultimately, it constitutes the sin of unbelief, which in Hebrews 3:12, we are warned to avoid. If Satan can start to persuade us that God isn't good after all, then he is doing his job well. William Backus writes in his book, 'The Hidden Rift with God', "Once you look at the cross, you can't look at anything else, no matter how horrid it appears, and infer that God's intention is to do us harm. The truth is that God is good".

That is not to say that we are never to question God. To impose such an impossible discipline would be ridiculous, and would make no allowance for ordinary humanity. The act of questioning God is not the issue; it is the way in which we question Him that counts. Do we question Him as part of an honest search, or does our questioning constitute challenge and rebellion?

However great the suffering, we still retain a choice regarding temptation. Victor Frankl, who spent three years in different Nazi concentration camps and whose own suffering was appalling, writes in his book, 'Man's search for meaning', "...in the final analysis, it became clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp influences alone. Fundamentally therefore, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him...spiritual freedom cannot be taken away".

Martin Luther puts it rather more comically, and yet makes the same important point. When he was questioned by a young man who was beset by various temptations as to how he might resist them, Luther replied, "You can't stop the birds flying to and fro in the air, but you can certainly stop them nesting in your hair"!

It would appear then, that part of the secret in resisting temptation when suffering is to recognise both its source (the father of lies – John 8:44) and his evil intention. Doing so makes temptation somewhat less attractive than it can appear otherwise.

Jesus is our prime example in this. When He was sorely tempted in the wilderness, during a period of extreme vulnerability (see Matthew 4), He did not reason with seductive thoughts, nor indeed with the tempter, but continued to place all His trust in His Heavenly Father by addressing the tempter with authority and clarity of thought. Jesus' remarkable strength under pressure lay in a) knowing whom to address in temptation's hour, and b) knowing what to refer to (i.e. the Scriptures, as opposed to his own wearied intelligence). How cleverly the devil tried to appeal to Jesus' reason and logic (there we go again) - and how impressively and victoriously our Saviour refused to be sidetracked. Would that Adam and Eve had demonstrated similar spiritual awareness!

Victor Frankl also writes, "The way a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity - even under the most difficult circumstances - to add a deeper meaning to his life".

It would appear then, that temptation is inevitable, but that our succumbing to it is most definitely not. We have a cruel foe, who takes delight in kicking people when they are down and whose nature it is to strike when we are weak and vulnerable. However, we can take heart from Corrie ten Boom's comment; "The devil is strong, but Jesus is stronger".

To paraphrase Charles Wesley (SASB 737), we must remain alert enough to fly directly to Jesus' bosom when temptation lurks. In our own strength, we are without hope. In realising and admitting that reality, we take the first step towards overcoming a determined but limited enemy. In flinging ourselves onto the grace and mercy of God, we avail ourselves of His resources - God, whom in the words of the old Singing Company song "never did a battle lose".