

**JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE  
CHRISTIANITY**

**JAC Online**

**Issue 19, June - July 2002**

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## **JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY**

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### **CHANGING THE FACE OF THE EARTH**

*(2 Chronicles 34,35)*

Steve Court

The needs of the world scream out to the comfortable through television screens and computer monitors. Home postboxes seem receptacles for unsolicited appeals for funds to feed orphans, to buy medicines for the sick, to clothe the naked. And many people are doing commendable things to answer these incessant calls. We praise God for the various organisations committed to meeting needs.

I wonder, though, if we might solve the problems by focusing our energies and passions on the causes of the problems. I'm convinced that holiness is the solution to every problem. It is not a new idea. A young king, long ago, felt the same way.

Josiah was the grandson of the Abomination of Judah, the Doctor of Divination, the Ultimate Evil, the Original Master of Disaster, the perpetrator of the Massacre of Manasseh. No, he was not part of the WWF Family. His grandfather filled all of Jerusalem with innocent blood (2 Kings 21:16). After Manasseh's death, Josiah's father Amon took over and "multiplied guilt" (2 Chronicles 33:23) for two years, until his own servants killed him.

For 57 years, with a brief repentant blip, Judah had abased herself in all kinds of wickedness. Chaotic cries vied for ascendancy with the crackling sizzle escaping Molech's gaping mouth upon ingesting sacrificed babies. But even this debauchery was exceeded, by the setting up an idol in the temple itself to worship and to which to sacrifice (2 Chronicles 33:7).

It was one of the lowest points in Jewish history. And in the aftermath of Amon's death, the eight year-old boy named Josiah was crowned king. What an overwhelming situation! One might accurately describe it as hopeless.

Josiah's is a blessed account of how one person can make an enormous difference for God, how one person can tackle the causes of problems by addressing the issues of holiness. After his 16th birthday Josiah began to seek the Lord. By his 20th birthday he was going whole hog after God (that's four years of pressing in). The Chronicler of Scripture needed chapters to outline the aspects of his repentance that set the stage for revival and built on that platform.

Suffice to say, Josiah was ruthless in dealing with wickedness. He pulverized idols. He trashed abominations. He chopped down incense altars. Josiah basically expunged sin from the country. But he exercised even more enthusiasm, if that were possible, in chasing God. When he re-discovered the lost book of the law, he repented and humbled himself before God. Then he covenanted with God to be obedient. He was instrumental in re-establishing the Jewish religion. He celebrated the best Passover since the days of Samuel. No king could match him. Because Josiah stepped into the gap, God refrained, during Josiah's lifetime, from bringing judgment on His people. Terrifying curses were postponed for nearly two decades. The people of God experienced mercy and peace for 19 years because of their repentance.

God ultimately, within three months of Josiah's death, brought about judgment on the Jews. The geo-political, social, and spiritual aspects of this judgment literally changed the face of the earth. But Yahweh acknowledged their repentance and the covenant made by their leader. And the face of the earth was changed as the hearts of its people were transformed.

How can we change the face of the earth today? Yes, let's keep giving and investing in meeting the obvious needs in hurting parts of the world. But let's

invest more effort and energy, more time and more money, in spreading the holiness that is the solution to every problem. Let's send people on mission trips. Let's send tons of money to The Salvation Army in the third world, and not primarily for buildings. Let's pray our heads off for our comrades selling out for the Gospel. Let's disseminate resources that will aid them in their warfare. Let's pay for excellent preachers to go and bless them. Let's go there ourselves and raise up the banner of holiness so that sinners and carnal saints, far and wide, will be drawn to holiness. Let's keep the example of Josiah first and foremost in our minds, just as we keep Calvary close to our hearts, and so stave off judgment and invite mercy into the breach.

## JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

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### Nighbor-Space

Robert Watson

*Captain Robert Watson is the Mission & Culture Secretary in USE.*

I am a cradle-roll Salvationist who never started thinking or hearing about "social justice" until I was 22. Twenty-one years later, I think I may have "progressed" to the self-justifying questions of the law expert with whom Jesus shared the parable of the good Samaritan (which I believe is a story about justice). But, by the grace of God, I have met some Samaritan sages who are helping me to hear Jesus' question (Luke 10:36), to hear the Word of the Lord, and to hear early Salvationists who pioneered for justice.

These contemporary Samaritans are officers and soldiers in other hemispheres, serving courageously in some of the most desperate circumstances on earth. In Rio de Janeiro, Bombay, Colombo, Nairobi, Dacca and many other places, they endanger themselves to be with those who fall into the hands of danger. They not only see but they come to those who are stripped and beaten and half-dead. They bandage wounds, pour on oil and wine, give and ensure care, share beyond their ability to give.

Brothers and sisters engaged in "community counseling" and a movement of "integrated mission" which began in African villages beleaguered by the HIV/AIDS catastrophe share a wisdom that rings true intuitively for us in the USAmerican context but which is lost to the amnesia of the organization. They show that the grace and justice of the gospel begins with CARE and presence with people. This being with others makes us receptive to the gift of COMMUNITY in and through Jesus Christ, out of which emerge serendipities and partnerships of CHANGE that awaken HOPE. This, at least, is my

understanding of a model of integrated mission that can help us in the West connect with our Salvationist roots of social justice.

In my experience with "America's favorite charity," we often do not take the time to be with people whom we think we are helping. We want to jump right into providing for people without knowing their names, listening to their stories and longings or visiting their families so that we can prove to funders that we are making a vital difference in a community to which we commute every morning. And in many cases, we cannot even say that "we" are doing the providing. Others are hired to do a fraction of what soldiers and officers used to do. I am worried that we are behaving much more like the priest and Levite in the parable Jesus told (Luke 10:31-32), who saw the man and passed by on the other side. I am concerned that we are not acting like Jesus, the Word who "became flesh-and-blood and moved into the neighborhood" (John 1:14) and who called the twelve apostles "that they might be with him" (Mark 3:14). I am alarmed that we are alienating ourselves and others from our full humanity since, as John Stott wrote, a human being according to biblical anthropology is a "body-soul-in-community." We often pride ourselves in keeping both body and soul in view in our mission, but our provider mentality ignores that groaning for community which is in all of us in God's good creation.

Nor are we truly Salvationist when we fail to walk in these steps of Jesus, the Samaritan, Booth and others. I am interested to see that Richard Foster, in his great synthesis of church history (*Streams of Living Water*), places The Salvation Army in the social justice tradition, not in the holiness, evangelical or other streams he identifies. His definition of social justice according to the grand Old Testament themes of *mishpat*, *hesed*, and *shalom* which are embodied in the ministry of Jesus is worth careful study and application. We would be enriched in more comprehensively rooting our middle name ("Salvation") in the biblical imagery of *shalom*, which envisions wholeness, loyal love and unity abounding between God, humans and all of nature. William Booth was moving into that

land: "Burning love will make the officer the true friend of mankind?.He will love the poor, the suffering, the weak, the hungry, the sick. He will go after them, and touch them, and take them by the hand." Brengle was with him: "The religion of Jesus is social. It is inclusive, not exclusive. We can have the glory only as we are united." And they were walking behind John Wesley who wrote, "The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness."

Rhetoric, writing and some decision-making in recent decades about "balancing" evangelism and social service or even about bolder participation in social action and in attacking oppressive structures over the big issues may still miss the point of the just Samaritan and keep us divorced from our own story. I find even greater potential for becoming a just Army in the recovery of the ward system, in cultivation of personal relationships between Army corps in the West and in other zones, in sacrificial relocation of officers to neighborhoods where they work, and even in Alpha courses. Can we get past our guilty gulping, smash the idols of comfort and success, and get back to the mess and hazards and wealth of being with others, and find the skills not only of exegesis but of what Eugene Peterson calls hodogesis (walking with others in relationships of spiritual direction as Philip did with the Ethiopian in Acts 8:26f.)?

Our worship is central to this movement. Like the rhythm of our hearts, both before and after we experience care, community, change and hope with others, we must have a tangible sense of God being with us and caring, of community with the Jesus of the Emmaus Road, of the transformation of the Spirit and the hope of the kingdom. The prophets saw that fervent worship always overflows in a raging river of just relationships (Amos 5:21-24, Zechariah 7:4f., etc.). Righteousness, biblically speaking, is responsibility to and for community. It is what the Samaritan did, not what the priest and Levite pretended to be. We will know that signs and wonders in our worship have been authentic when a red-hot spirituality revolutionizes our relationships. And we will be more desperate to

inhabit the story of Jesus when we have been suffering in love and presence with others.

As I confessed in the beginning, I am still struggling to break free of the traps of self-justification. Jesus changes my questions just as He did that of the law expert. He asks, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor?" Jesus changed "neighbor" from a "cultural equivalent" and exclusive category to a covenant action. Foster prefers the closerroot form of "nigh-bor" - the person nearby. I have known God's nearness in recent times through brothers and sisters who have drawn near to me in personal, powerful demonstrations of the justice of the Lord. I am peeling off the vestments of the Levite and praying for guts, for me and for the Army in this land, to nigh-bor those nearby, to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.

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### **ON THE CORNER**

Dr. Robert Docter

I wonder about the strength of our advocacy on behalf of those feeling the pain of social injustice. We seem quite timid--un-Booth-like--slow--unfocused--reactive. I wonder what inhibits our willingness to use the media more forcefully in a proactive manner to communicate a moral position. I wonder why we don't have more involvement with state legislatures, helping shape positive legislation prior to passage and resist legislative action designed only to advance a special interest.

I know we're probably doing more than I realize - but somehow, it doesn't come to public attention. Major George Hood, national public affairs director, has written a thoughtful paper on Advocacy in the Public Square. He raises some important questions and makes a number of good recommendations, one of which is crucial. He notes that "nowhere can you find an articulated set of core values for The Salvation Army - either globally or nationally." We need this or we will continue to shoot ourselves in the foot.

I add to this - that nowhere do we have an established pro-active process for determining in a timely manner the content of our corporate comment. We need a process. If we can't develop these factors, we're going to fail in our ministry to some very important people.

Who speaks for the poor

Who denounces social policies that maintain economic deprivation among significant portions of our population?

Who confronts the immorality of homelessness? Who seeks to care for and remedy the problems of the mentally ill among them -- to address their needs, bind their mental, emotional, social and physical wounds -- feed their bodies and souls -- and address forcefully the conditions that keep people in that status?

Who stands to condemn racial injustice?

Who advocates for the disenfranchised and marginalized of society?

What voice sings out to confront oppression anywhere in the world?

Is it immoral to slowly erode life-giving aspects of the environment?

Is there such a thing as social sin -- sins committed by an entire social structure against particular segments of that society?

I believe such sin exists.

Is there an organization poised more perfectly to confront social sin than The Salvation Army? Is there a logo known to mankind more trusted and more readily associated with right action based on the teaching of Jesus than the Army's red shield?

Perhaps only one -- the cross of Jesus Christ. Too often, however, it seems this vital symbol is used simply as a piece of jewelry.

Christ told the story of the Good Samaritan in response to a lawyer's question on how to attain eternal life. The story reveals certain personality characteristics of the Good Samaritan common to those willing to leap from a bystander role and act with immediacy, skill and completeness in delivering aid to someone set upon by thieves. He reveals a strong sense of social responsibility; a spirit of

courageous adventurousness; a willingness to be unique, different, and unconventional; a high degree of empathy for the destitute regardless of their racial or cultural orientation; and a strong commitment to social action. It is, however, not simply a story of one man helping another. It is a message requiring the same level of involvement on a broader scale where social injustice exists. Sometimes those "thieves" are found in community ordinances, state and federal law books, accepted customs of a population.

The Army's intervention model to alleviate social ills tends to focus on one life at a time. It is a good model, but it does not preclude broader societal intervention. While it recognizes the essential requirement of holistic involvement, many of its intervention strategies fail to engage those burdened with social ills in a holistic manner.

This is not to say that every delivery of service should be accompanied with a Bible message -- or even a Bible verse. Where an emergency exists -- stop the blood -- even if it's hunger, or exhaustion, or ignorance, or psychological or physical pain. I believe, however, we fail in our mission if we perceive ourselves only as a social service delivery system managing individual cases. When the intervention links dedicated Christians with those who come to us for assistance it's even better.

But I believe we are also required to speak with a loud voice to elevate societal awareness of social injustice in our midst.

This is the model of William Booth.

Booth's soldiers implemented his social service programs. This is how they built their corps. Moreover, Booth confronted social injustice on both individual and social levels. Where necessary, he marched on Parliament itself - even organized sit-ins -- working within the political arena to alleviate conditions

imposed on his nation's poor. He changed policies concerning the age of consent for teen-age prostitutes. He confronted unfair labor practices. He took on alcohol and illicit drugs. He never seemed to shy away from media attention when confronting a serious social problem -- and he really got going when the going got difficult. He spoke out. He was quoted in national media. His voice was heard. He demonstrated on a broad social level all of the personality characteristics of the Good Samaritan.

What should be the content of our message? I believe we can answer that by simply examining the basic principles and values articulated by Jesus.

Everyone is my neighbor. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

We must not be morally mute. We must not be timid in speaking out. We must not inhibit communication of our message in the face of social injustice.

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### Proverbial leadership

by Commissioner Wesley Harris

This is an excerpt from the forthcoming book, PROVERBIAL LEADERSHIP: Ancient Wisdom for Tomorrow's Endeavours by Wesley Harris and Stephen Court

*With (wisdom) leaders rule and lawmakers legislate fairly.  
(Proverbs 8.15 THE MESSAGE)*

EVERYBODY is a leader - potentially and to some extent actually. Leadership is about influence which is something we all exert to a degree, often without realising it. But some people stand out because of their particularly effective leadership and widespread appeal. This may be because of their innate qualities or even more because of acquired skills.

Leadership may prove a boon or a bane. To mention the names of Mother Teresa and ben Laden is to illustrate how leaders can inspire heroic efforts to help others on the one hand or dastardly deeds of destruction on the other. To lead in worthy ways will call for a 'plus factor' called wisdom. But what is that?

It is more than cleverness for there are plenty of people who may be clever but who are also incredibly foolish. Winston Churchill said that nine tenths of wisdom is being wise in time. He may have overstated the case but he certainly had a point. With hindsight we can all be wise, but effective leadership involves being wise with foresight - before not after the event.

Wisdom may include shrewdness but what else? Faith? Hope? Charity? Some would also include integrity and sensitivity. Sometimes it may be easier to recognise than to define what it is that lifts some people above the run of the mill

of functionaries and marks them out as special leaders. I think of some I have known and they include a banker, a builder, a politician and a minister of religion. They were people whose words were weighty because they were backed by their character and experience.

How come?

So how come? We may not have any grandiose ideas about what we can do. We may not have counted ourselves among the 'tall poppies' but for all that we would like to have the satisfaction of giving a good lead because that is something sadly lacking in so many walks of life. Our natural preference may be to take the back seat and find the quiet corner but the need is the call. Someone must speak up. Someone must give a lead. When we point a finger at others who might give a lead three fingers point back at us! So where do we begin?

We may have to start by getting wise to ourselves. As the ancient Greeks put it, 'Know thyself'

Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote, 'Self reverence, self knowledge, self control, These three alone lead life to sovereign power'.

Because confession is good for the soul I will admit that at one time I had a problem with procrastination - especially if a task was not to my liking. My line was, 'Never do today what can be done tomorrow - or the day after!' Then I had a kind of Damascus Road experience and resolved to tackle tasks as they arose, especially those I didn't fancy! That made a tremendous difference.

Secondly, to be wise I think we will have to study the society in which we live. We will need to read the signs of the times and the changes which come thick and fast. Not all the changes will be for the best but we will need to seek for the best in all the changes. We are called to 'serve the present age' not the age

of crinolines and old lace. We have to get with it if we are to do anything about it. The Old Testament refers to 'the men of Issachar who understood the times and knew what Israel should do (1 Chron.12.32). People like that are needed today.

But in addition to tuning in to the contemporary world we should also draw on the experience of people in the past. One of the silly ideas around is that if something is old it can't be any good - as if wisdom was born with our generation! A reading of recent history should shatter any such illusion for it seems that some modern leaders have only learnt from the mistakes of the past how to make them all over again!

While being open to new insights we should not neglect the accumulated wisdom which may still be timely, simply because it is timeless. Among available resources is the book of Proverbs - included in the sacred writings of both Jews and Christians - and much neglected, I'm afraid. The modern paraphrase known as The Message may help us to take in some of the distilled wisdom of the ancients and discover 'proverbial wisdom' for today. We certainly need it!

As we cross what may seem to be the desert of our days we should take our direction from the stars above us rather than from the faint footsteps in the shifting sand beneath our feet. The paraphrase of the book of Proverbs indicates that the seeker after wisdom should 'start with God'. In other words what we say is not the last word; there is a 'higher power' to be taken into account - and we had better believe it!

Examples can help

Are we wise, witty or other wise? Most of us might fairly claim to have been wise sometimes, witty occasionally and something else very often. We may need to admit that being human we have lost the plot at times. Only God is all-wise and, as Christians affirm, Christ who is the wisdom of God. For the rest, human beings

are liable to make mistakes and that includes political leaders who are often the 'aunt Sallies' on whom people like to take out their frustrations, expecting from them so much more than they expect from themselves.

I would cite two political leaders who, while being fallible - like those who elected them - were, I believe, lawmakers who generally sought to 'legislate fairly' as the book of Proverbs puts it, and show wisdom in their actions .

First, Nelson Mandela. His book, Long walk to freedom, included a moving account of his many years in prison and the indignities he suffered. It is amazing that he came out of captivity without his mind being twisted and his soul soured by bitterness. If his attitude had been different the effect would have been incalculable. For many decades there had been prophecies that South Africa would be turned into a blood bath. Mercifully, the worst horrors were averted. Mandela went from being a prisoner to being the president, recognised as one of the greatest leaders to come out of Africa. After his release from prison he wrote,

*It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking someone else's freedom just as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.*

On the day of his inauguration as president in Pretoria, Mandela concluded his speech to the assembled guests and a watching world with the words, 'The sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement. Let freedom reign. God bless Africa!'

The other leader I would cite is America's Abraham Lincoln. Famously, he was born in a rough backwoods cabin and raised in poverty. He was a gangly youth who was teased by the girls; he was disappointed in love and failed more than once in attempts to secure public office. Yet he taught himself to read, then qualified as a lawyer in his spare time and became one of the leading legal figures of his state. When he came to the presidency he possessed very little military experience. The confederate states had seceded. He had been elected by a minority of the popular vote and even some of his own advisors thought he was second rate. In fact, he proved to be a 'big man' - not only physically but in other ways as well. He was big enough to appoint as Secretary of State one of his sternest critics because of the conviction that he was the right man for the job. Lincoln believed in what is now called, 'management by walking around' spending time with private soldiers as well as military leaders - a 'people person' who gave administration a very human face. Lincoln was not only a good speaker but a good listener as well - a combination which is not too common! 'Honest Abe' was a man of integrity and possessed of a keen sense of humour which often helped him in difficult situations. In his book, *Lincoln on leadership* Donald D. T. Phillips wrote,

*Lincoln preached his vision throughout the four years of his administration. His message was simple and clear, emphasising equality and freedom (including for slaves), a "fair chance for all", and the elevation of the "condition of men". This was the people's birthright, he maintained, and it should be protected and preserved for future generations.*

The best policy

Expediency has often ruled in politics. Abba Eban, a former Israeli politician wrote, 'History teaches us that men and nations behave wisely once they have exhausted all other alternatives'. Sad, if wisdom is a last instead of a first resort! It may have been similar in business and some professions. People have been quick to sell their birthright of trust for some easy, short-term advantage. Cynics

have said that 'nice guys don't win' and 'good guys come in last'. But there is a growing recognition in many quarters that that isn't true; ethics are all-important. A reputation for integrity is an asset too valuable to squander.

The culture of honesty and fair dealing is something to foster if an organization is to succeed. If word gets around that a firm doesn't give customers a square deal then it may take a lot of expensive advertising to correct a bad corporate image, whereas positive word of mouth recommendations may greatly enhance sales. Honesty is the best policy. Apart from not being right, which is the first consideration, selling people short is not very smart.

The cynical statement that you must 'do people before they do you' is not as clever as it sounds. The principle of doing to others as you want them to do to you is really the way of wisdom. The New Testament puts it like this, 'The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere (James 3.17).

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### SO COSTLY AND YET SO FREE

by John Norton

*There is no religion but social religion, no holiness but social holiness.  
John Wesley 1703-1791 - "Greatest of the English evangelists"*

John Wesley was not trying to suggest, as some taught after him, that the Christian faith is only about social relationships. Rather, he was trying to counter the prevalent imbalance that Christianity is purely private and individual. We humans may feel better psychologically when religion is limited to the personal and self-reflective but, if we are to be true to Christianity, then we must admit it defies this limitation. Christianity is much bigger than private religion, compelling those who have an individual encounter with God to look outward with responsibility toward others. Christianity is a very public and social religion. We could paraphrase John Wesley's words to say that there is no true Christianity except a Christianity that includes the social and public dimensions of salvation.

The Bible is primarily about the history of God's salvation-work on earth. Seeing injustice up close, coupled with a fresh reading of Scripture, has expanded my understanding of this salvation-work. Public, social redemption has moved from option to necessity. Salvation is about this life, not just the afterlife. I cannot help but think that in recent history Evangelical Christians have largely missed this boat, so to speak, and sacrificed effectiveness during decades of disengagement from the political and social world.

A few years ago I visited a broken-down hospital in Eastern Europe, which has a nursery full of unwanted HIV-positive babies. The birth parents are either unwilling or unable to care for the children and so they are left to the care of the government. On the days I visited, the nurses were doing all they could but, being understaffed and under-funded, the hospital is a terribly sad place for the

children to live. One missionary couple decided to adopt one of these unloved children. After many months of waiting for the completion of legal procedures, they finally went to get the adoption papers from the local government offices.

The bureaucrat told them he would need to issue a passport for the girl. "What would you like her name to be?"

They were ready for this question. "Mary\*," they replied.

"And what would you like me to put down as her Date of Birth?" he asked as he typed out her name on the passport.

The couple was unready for this one. They discovered that the little girl had no identity, no records, and that they had the power at that moment to determine her life story. Officially, she did not exist and, until that moment, no one cared. Her new parents chose an approximate birthday, decided on a nice place of birth, and even determined her racial background. Today Mary is four years old, lives with her adopted parents and sister, and enjoys good health. Through that missionary couple, God found Mary and saved her. It was as if she was born again.

The theological meaning of Mary's story could be analyzed at a number of levels but I want to use it first to illustrate salvation from a practical perspective:

1. Mary's story is the story of one.

There is truth in the old preacher's illustration of a man who comes across a boy putting back starfish into the sea, creatures which have been left dying on the hot sand by the lowering of the tide. "There are thousands of them on the shore," exclaims the man, "what difference can you make?" "I can make all the difference in the world to this one," says the boy, as he picks up another starfish and throws

it back into the water. I cannot identify with or comprehend the magnitude of suffering in the world but I can look into a little girl's eyes and see her fear and pain. Joseph Stalin said that the death of a million is a statistic, but the death of one a tragedy. I can be complacent about genocide because it is too big for me to identify with, it is just a statistic, but I can be moved to tears by a Hollywood film's telling of a sad story. Stalin was able to use this psychological phenomenon to turn 30 million tragedies into a mere statistic. I need to guard my mind against being numbed by statistics. I need to focus on making a difference one person at a time.

## 2. Mary's story is an international story.

The often-heard argument that "we first need to focus our attention on our neighbour before we help out those overseas" is illogical. Does it not make more sense to focus our attention first on those in the greatest need? Such a philosophy is employed by hospital emergency rooms in the handling of patients. It would make no sense for an emergency room to receive patients on simply a first-come first-served basis. The guy having a heart attack has to be given priority care over the guy with the in-grown toenail, no matter how long the guy with the swollen toe has been waiting. My point is that the issues facing my fellow humans in many places overseas compared to the issues facing many of my neighbours here in Canada are the equivalent of a heart attack to a stubbed toe. Those who know the truth about the reality of suffering and injustice in developing countries cannot deny that. So unless I am a nationalist or racist and simply want to write off the suffering of those who happen to live in a different country or have different colour skin, I am pretty much obligated to give priority to those suffering the most.

## 3. Mary's story is the story of a missionary couple that was effective.

This point is obvious but difficult to put into practice. My real problem as a Canadian is that even if I want to make a difference in far off lands or with global issues, I often do not know how and am afraid of wasting my resources on problems that are extremely complicated and difficult to change. Sometimes my efforts can be wasted or even make things worse for those I am trying to help. Money poured into relief agencies can sometimes also be wasted, usually out of incompetence and ignorance rather than intentional misuse. Aid work is big business, and professionals involved are open to the same temptations as in any business, yet accountability for objective results in the charity sector is minimal. I need to take responsibility as an individual to ensure, as best I can, that the use of my time and money produces the best possible results. This makes international work even more difficult because it is so much harder to verify and confirm effectiveness. For this reason, it may be prudent for a time to help my neighbour closer to home simply because I can be more certain I will be effective. Using the hospital analogy again, doctors may make a practical decision if short-staffed or without needed medical equipment to save one life and allow a more serious case to go unattended. This may happen during war or other times of crisis. However, the hospital needs to work quickly to get more staff and better equipment! I need to figure out effective ways of helping even in difficult situations.

Being an instrument of God's salvation on the earth is difficult. Yet before I become discouraged and quit, I return to the Bible and find its stories of salvation similar to the story of little Mary. When I read Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, I think of the need to restore dignity and value to those who have been robbed of what is rightfully theirs. When I read in Exodus of the salvation of Israel from Egyptian bondage, I think of the countless young women enslaved in the sex trade waiting for a Moses to come and free them. I can no longer see the issues in today's newspaper as somehow outside my mission as a Christian and I long for the day when topics like world peace, the environment, ethics, and human rights will be given their appropriate place in Evangelical preaching and

Church spending. Just as the Kingdom of God is both present and yet to come, so salvation is being realized today on earth and yet waiting for ultimate fulfillment.

I conclude with one more story of salvation: Joyti was kidnapped and sold into an Indian brothel at the age of 14. She was beaten, forced to take drugs and alcohol, and cannot remember her first customer. She sometimes had twenty to thirty customers a day. She speaks about how some men refused to use condoms, and if she complained, they would speak to the Madame who would force Joyti to allow the men to have sex with her without a condom. One day she met a woman who told her that Jesus could free her from her bondage. Joyti decided to pray to be saved from the brothel. Soon after, Joyti's Christian friend notified the International Justice Mission\*\*, who documented her case and confronted local authorities, securing her release. Joyti left the brothel on January 17, 1999. She was placed in a Christian refuge and soon after came to faith in Christ. Joyti is now married and has celebrated the birth of a daughter Esther, so named to represent Joyti's eternal thankfulness. She says, "The old Joyti is dead, I came to know Jesus and now I am like a newborn baby." Joyti recently led a group of Christian workers back into the old brothel where she lived and worked, to help identify others still trapped there. This is boundless, full salvation, so costly and yet so free!

The Christian workers in the International Justice Mission were the instruments of God's salvation for Joyti, just as the missionary couple in Eastern Europe was God's tool for saving Mary. To speak of salvation in only private terms, and to ignore the plight of Mary and Joyti, is to miss out on the fullness of God's salvation plan for the world. Let us count the cost of helping just one and then count the cost of helping no one. Salvation is costly and yet so free.

*\* Name changed to protect her identity.*

*\*\* The International Justice Mission is a Christian ministry, led by human rights professionals, that helps people suffering injustice and oppression who cannot rely on local authorities for relief. The ministry documents and monitors conditions of abuse and oppression, educates the church and public about the abuses, and mobilizes intervention on behalf of the victims. [www.ijm.org](http://www.ijm.org) or [www.ijm.ca](http://www.ijm.ca)*

## **JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY**

Issue 19, June - July 2002

### **Social Justice in My Heart**

Amy Reardon

*Captain Amy Reardon, a popular columnist in New Frontier, leads Denver Citadel with her husband Rob.*

As an American schoolgirl, I spent many hours reading about the Civil War. Though numerous factors led to the war, for the most part, those varied contributors were downplayed and we were fixated on the most abhorrent motive for the attempted secession of the South and the ensuing war: the “right” to own a slave.

Naturally, I had, and always will have, a healthy hatred for the institution of slavery. But there was something further that I learned in my 11th grade American History class. Something that has haunted me these twenty years.

Apparently, while Southerners did not view black-skinned people as completely human, they did often develop a fondness for individual slaves. The race was substandard, something between human and animal, which justified (in their minds) its suppression. And yet, occasionally, slave owners would come to know a certain slave well, have feelings of friendship for that slave, and sometimes even loosely consider him a member of the family.

Conversely, while the Northerners had decent regard for the race, they had little time for the individuals. It was not uncommon for a slave who had escaped an oppressive master in the South to find that, once he had reached the “promised land”, he was treated with disdain. It was respectable and right to preach the worth of the black man, but not exactly desirable to invite him to tea.

I cannot forget that notion, because it reappears as a measuring stick in my life. As a Salvationist (both as a soldier and as an officer), I have had many dealings with the downtrodden. It is imperative that I regularly check my attitude against that of my American ancestors. I want the better of both: I want to fight for the welfare of all races and social classes, and also regard each human being – individually – as having been created in God’s very image, worthy of dignity and honor.

I think that the greater danger for Salvationists is the loss of compassion for the individual. We believe firmly in equality amongst all. Yet there is a temptation for the person in position to help to view himself as superior to the person in need of help. While it may be noble to wish to serve, it is certainly ignoble to feel one must condescend to do it. Many times in the New Testament, Christians are reminded to be humble. Romans 12 is an example: “do not think of yourself more highly than you ought (verse 3)...Honor one another above yourselves (verse 10).” Jesus himself, a part of the eternal Godhead, “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” (Phil. 2: 6,7) If I have any interest in social justice, both for the individual and humanity, I must begin where Jesus did - with humility. In light of Jesus’ example, for any Salvationist (or any Christian) to consider himself better than another human being is nothing short of laughable.

Once Jesus humbled himself and became a man, he was in position to fight for justice for the individual (think: woman at the well) and for the group (think: women). Referring to one of the greatest injustices of Jesus’ time, religious prejudice against anyone who was not a male Jew, Gerhard Lohfink writes:

“It was characteristic of Jesus that he constantly established community – precisely for those who were denied community at that time, or who were judged

inferior in respect to religion. Jesus made clear through his word and even more through his concrete conduct that he did not recognize religious-social exclusion and discrimination.” (Jesus and Community, p. 88)

But Jesus’ insistence upon equality was not limited to religious or even male/female issues. Chapter after chapter of the gospels exposes his concern for the marginalized. By talking to, healing, or eating with outcasts, Jesus included them in the Kingdom of God. This inclusion has not ceased. Any modern follower of Christ, like any ancient follower, is bucking against the structure of God’s Kingdom if he attempts to exclude another human being from it. And the Christian who realizes that there is no ranking system in God’s Kingdom realizes there should be no ranking system in the earthly realm.

Perhaps there is some disadvantage to the fact that the Army accomplished its original purpose so adeptly. The Booths and company sought to save street bums and make decent citizens of them. Hallelujah – they did just that! In time, the newly-decent citizens both begat and attracted other decent citizens, until, as an organization, we have no collective memory of what it means to be that bum on the street. Certainly there are still those who come to the Lord, via the Army, in tatters. The Army continues to attract the poor, the unlovely, the minority. But possibly they are more the exception than the rule these days, at least within our churches. Could it be that, as a corporate body, we sparkle so brightly in our uniforms and receive such laud from the community for our good deeds that we forget we were once a rag-tag group of misfits?

As an organization, we must see to it that we do not lose perspective. But I must say, I am even more concerned about the heart of each distinct soldier. No matter how acceptable I may have appeared within society, I know the truth: I was once a desperate, pathetic sinner panting for the grace of God. I drank of the living water. Anything I am that can be deemed of value is because Him.

And that is why I believe that social justice begins in my heart. It begins with an understanding of the fact that I am cut from the same cloth as every man, woman, and child God has ever made. We are all made in His image. We have all “become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.” (Doctrine 5) And we are all invited to receive grace. Revelation 22:17 says: “Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.” And this is because “there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.” (Colossians 3:11)

## **JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY**

Issue 19, June - July 2002

### **Social Justice**

Captain Stephen Poxon

By a strange quirk of coincidence (Godincidence?), I was writing to the Chinese Embassy in London, with copies of my letter going to my Member of Parliament, the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister Blair, to protest about human rights abuses being perpetrated against Christians in China, when the invitation to submit an article about The Salvation Army and social justice arrived in my inbox.

At this time of writing, I haven't heard from anyone at the Chinese Embassy or Westminster, but I hope they have all noticed that my words of protest were written on Salvation Army headed notepaper – point being, Stephen Poxon has virtually no influence on international affairs whatsoever, but I have sufficient faith in the reputation of this Movement to believe that the realisation of the Army's involvement in these matters (albeit by proxy) might cause at least a wee flutter of consternation in the corridors of power.

It might not, and I might be naive to carry such a hope when dealing with ambassadors and politicians. It does, however, remain my strong conviction that the Army needs to be at the forefront of protest whenever and wherever issues of social justice are in focus. Much of our credibility lies within our willingness to put our collective head above the social and political parapet, time and time again. Even if we are ignored, or ridiculed, or opposed, it remains the right thing to do. If we believe in righteousness for righteousness' sake (and in terms of theology, I think we do), then one of the yardsticks by which we measure our Movement in terms of integrity is by how often and how vociferously we speak out on behalf of the oppressed, and those who are unable to speak out for themselves, and not necessarily by how much influence we have.

There is a tired old rumour that would have you believe politics and religion should remain at a distance. Tell that to Amos! Tell it to W.T. Stead and General Booth! Tell it to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who is quoted as having said, "When people tell me not to mix politics and religion, I wonder which Bible they are reading"! Tell it to Terry Waite, whose heroic and selfless political negotiations with Hezbollah fanatics, in his role as the Archbishop of Canterbury's special envoy, cost him five years of his freedom and very nearly his life! Tell it to Baroness Cox, whose marvellous efforts on behalf of Christian Solidarity Worldwide often go unnoticed and unreported! Tell it to the late Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who removed his shirt at a United Nations gathering to convince politicians from across the world of the persecution of Christians in Eastern Europe, by way of showing them the scars he bore as a result of beatings and torture!

There is absolutely no question that The Salvation Army must take a stand at every opportunity against social injustice of every kind. We have no option, if we are to represent a God whose heart burns against oppression, torture, neglect, wicked discrimination and so forth. If God in Christ was so outraged by exploitation that he physically overturned the money-lender's tables, then the very least we can do, as his followers, is to overturn and disrupt the plans and tactics of those who would still exploit today.

Back to China. I remain incensed that there was no official, public Salvation Army protest when Queen Elizabeth II afforded the President of China a state welcome at Buckingham Palace a little time ago. There might well have been some private form of protest made, for all I know (and I sincerely hope there was). However, justice not only has to be done, but has to be seen to be done, and in my opinion, the Army missed an opportunity to strike a telling blow for persecuted Christians in China and the sorely oppressed innocents of Tibet by

not drawing attention to this particular President's appalling record on human rights.

I remember the television news scenes vividly – British police officers, under orders from the British government, stifling the Free Tibet campaigners and confiscating their flags so that a murderous President might not be offended. I felt ashamed to be British, that day. I also felt very uneasy indeed that The Salvation Army failed to raise a whisper of public protest. Shades of Ceausescu's visit in the 1970's, when he famously stole a number of items from Buckingham Palace, before returning to Romania to continue his insane and bloodthirsty dictatorship.

May God help The Salvation Army to never again be so silent and paralysed in the name of politics.

If a society pursues a programme of laissez-faire so that the poor suffer then the Church must speak authoritatively from the Bible on the moral obligation God lays on the strong to care for the poor. If a society pursues a programme of collectivism so that there is no freedom, neither political nor economic nor religious, for the individual, then the Church must speak out against that oppression...(the Church) has a wider responsibility to bring before the nation the universal laws of God about freedom and truth, justice and mercy that are binding on all people because he is their creator. The Church consequently will never be popular with politicians. A prophet has never been a politician's best friend." (Bishop James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool, England, in his book, 'People of the Blessing - God's love as found in the Psalms').

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## **JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY**

Issue 19, June - July 2002

The Mission of The Salvation Army  
Captain Geoff Ryan

*“Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves on the town garbage-heap; at a crossroads so cosmopolitan that they had to write His title in Hebrew, Latin and Greek; at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where He died and that is what He died about that is where churchmen should be and what churchmanship should be about.” (George MacLeod)*

*“Meanwhile our churches, like secular associations, are concerned with fund-raising, beautiful buildings, large numbers, comforting sermons from highly qualified preachers, while they display indifference to the poor, the insane, and the lonely. Jesus himself would find no place in our all-too-respectable churches, for he did not come to help the righteous but to bring sinners to repentance. Our churches are not equipped to do that sort of thing.” (John White)*

A corps officer should understand that he is sent by God and the Army to all the unconverted, non-church-going people in his district, especially to the most needy and depraved among them. (Orders and Regulations for Corps Officers)

The Only Two Questions

What is the mission of The Salvation Army? Who were we created to be? What is it we were created to do? Identity and function – the only two questions that really need answering and they are being asked all over the place, all the time and by all sorts of people.

The Russians summed it up nicely for me. Walking around St. Petersburg in the early 1990's, not speaking a word of Russian and with "The Salvation Army" in large, silver Cyrillic script nailed to my forehead like the Old Testament priests with their "Holiness to the Lord" head plates. The difference is that the Israelites respected their priests while the Russians viewed me a little bit differently. Upon seeing my unusual uniform and reading the boast emblazoned across the front of my cap, they would invariably ask or shout or laugh, one of two questions: "What is The Salvation Army?" or "Who do you save?" Always one or the other and sometimes both.

It took me some time to realize that these questions were not only valid, but well asked and that between those two questions lies the answer to everything else. They require examination of our identity and our mission: who are we and what do we do? In trying to answer these questions, for the sake of the Russians, I gradually started asking them to myself. I spent nine years trying to answer those questions and at times I wonder how good a job I really did. In some ways I'm still asking.

The asking is taking place on this side of the Atlantic as well, as I soon found out upon return from Russia. Who are we? What should we be doing? I wonder though whether the questions are being asked honestly though? Because if you ask an honest question then you should be able to expect an honest answer. You at least deserve one. But honest answers to these questions carry with them a host of implications and a horde of consequences. The Pandora's box for The Salvation Army is the one that contains the true and direct answers to these questions and we are wise in approaching it with more than a little fear and trepidation.

We lament our confusion and uncertainty. But our instinct is to avoid the bright sun of clarity for the netherworld of uncertainty and questioning and tentative assertion. Muddy the waters, set off a smoke bomb, turn the lights off and you

can avoid the obvious - the hard facts that bruise your shins and skin your ankles and generally just make life more of a hassle. "The truth will set us free", Jesus warned us. But freedom is often frightening, it has implications, carries consequences and demands an investment and responsibility that our commitment-phobic culture instinctively shies away, rather like a priest on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

With less and less to lose with each passing year, let us open the box, clear the water, turn the lights on and answer the questions. Personally I think the truth therein is relatively simple. To be sure, a hard truth, but nothing too complicated. As a Russian philosopher once said: "Life is simple. People complicate it". So it is with our life as an Army. The difficulty lies not in the obvious answers to the questions asked – but in the fact that we lack the honesty to listen steadily to these answers and live our lives – individually and corporately – in that truth. The answers are not what we want to hear so we root around in the box hoping to turn up some other answers, some different ones, some that better fit with what we had in mind and how we have constructed our lives and corps and ministries. A liar is not only someone who speaks a falsehood but includes also those who hear falsehoods amid the spoken truth.

Enough obfuscation. It needs a look back, of course, a long, gaze at the "rock from whence we were hewn". Not as an exercise in nostalgia which is nothing more than a cul-de-sac. Webster's dictionary defines nostalgia as "a wistful...sometimes abnormal yearning for return to or return of some real or romanticized period or irrevocable condition or setting in the past." As one writer noted, "rampant nostalgia plunders the past and bankrupts the present." Indulging in nostalgia about our imaginary past (the way we weren't) will prove unhelpful, a red herring in the search for clarity and truth.

We need to have a sense of history and continuity, a deep understanding of what God was up to in 1865 when he gave Booth the vision that was The Salvation

Army. Jacques Ellul, the French Christian philosopher, opined that “modern man was a man without memory” and that this was a dangerous thing. To be disconnected from the past and bereft of any tradition or sense of self leaves one a prisoner of the present, bound by the laws and and temporal and fleeting values of the transitory. We all need giants on whose shoulders we stand.

I believe there were three seminal moments in William Booth’s life that defined and directed the vision given him by God and consequently all The Salvation Army was and became. I believe that vision was crystal clear and specific and focused and guided Booth throughout his life from beginning to end. It was a while coming, but when it hit, it came with a certainty and clarity that I believe never left him. It grew and developed, evolved even, but in its essence remained as intact as the night God passed it on to Booth.

You see, vision is specific. Anything I have ever read about visions or visioning tell me the same thing in one respect - a vision has hard edges, sharp edges even. A vision is specific and unyielding in its focus - more laser beam than lamp. If it is fuzzy around the edges, if it is too wide and large and spacious and all-encompassing, then whatever else it might be, it is not a vision. A plan maybe, an idea, a strategy even. But not a vision. Visions are specific callings given by God to his visionaries, his prophets. Men and women that he calls as vessels to embody the vision, give birth to it and nurture it to full flowering. This is what happened to Booth.

### A Vision Birthed

It was summer 1865. Booth had been asked to lead a mission in London’s East end, filling in for a leader who had fallen sick. Specifically, it was a tent campaign in an abandoned graveyard in Whitechapel, then as now, one of London’s rougher neighbourhoods. After one evenings toil, around midnight, Booth returned home to his wife Catherine. She was waiting up for him. He was tired,

but “strangely excited” as he later remembered it (possibly an unconscious nod to Wesley’s famous heart experience of being “strangely warmed” over a hundred years previously). Walking in, William declared to Catherine, “I have found my destiny!”

He was 36 years old. He had been working as a full-time minister of the gospel, and more specifically a preacher and evangelist, for about 13 years at this point. He had preached to thousands of people and seen hundreds of souls won to the kingdom. Yet only now he finds his destiny? What did he mean? This is a vitally important question because it is from this point, this juncture, that the Christian Mission and subsequently The Salvation Army was created. So important is this event that we commemorate it officially in The Salvation Army as Founders Day, July 2, the day on which the evangelistic campaign on the Whitechapel graveyard commenced is rightly seen as the birth moment of our movement (and not William Booth’s birthday as is widely assumed).

So what was Booth on about to Catherine that summer’s night? He meant that saving these particular type of souls in this particular place was what God wanted him to do with his life and so he set about creating an organization in order to do it as effectively as possible. His destiny was to the poor, the marginalized, the disenfranchised, the submerged tenth, the last, the lost and the least.

#### A Vision Passed On

The second event came a bit later that same year when his son Bramwell was 12 years old and the Christian mission was just getting started, The Salvation Army yet to be birthed. It was again late on a Sunday night following a hard day of preaching. Bramwell Booth, William and Catherine’s oldest child, was twelve years old. Cyril Barnes writes of this moment in his book: “Words of William Booth”.

“They had left Mile End Waste and gone but a few yards along Cambridge Heath Road when William pushed open the door of a drinking saloon. What Bramwell saw he never forgot. As a grown man he recalled seeing a ‘brilliantly lighted place, noxious with the fumes of drink and tobacco, and reeking of filth... .The place was crowded with men, many of them bearing on their faces the marks of brutishness and vice, and women also, dishevelled and drunken.’

As the lad looked wondering what was the cause of all this sorrow, his father said: ‘Willie, these are our people; these are the people I want you to live for and bring to Christ.’”

This whole scene is full of Old Testament imagery. The Father and patriarch, giving his blessing to his first-born son, passing on his legacy, ensuring that what he has started will continue and flourish. The whole exercise undertaken by Booth is about sustaining vision with William taking the vision that God had given him and cloaking Bramwell with this mantle; a prophetic act foreshadowing Bramwell’s term as the second General of The Salvation Army.

How many of us would take a twelve-year old son or daughter and expose them to such a scene? But Booth - gripped by a vision that would consume the rest of his life and one to which he would sacrifice everything he had, children included as it turned out, needed to ensure that his heir would know what he was about and understand the charge God had given him and that he himself would be come invested in developing and sustaining this vision.

Catherine Bramwell Booth, writing of this incident in her biography of Bramwell Booth goes on:

*“Prophetic, almost symbolic! For these two, Father and son, were destined to travel strange roads together; metaphorically speaking, one sees them hurrying through all, or nearly all, the Whitechapels of the world, always searching out the*

*sinful, repulsive and outcast of the children of men, and always saying to each other, "These are our people."*

*"That first vivid impression of mankind's misery and degradation, of its immeasurable spiritual need, which he received in Whitechapel, never left Bramwell Booth. More than sixty years later he lay dying in circumstances of peculiar personal sorrow and loss, but his thoughts and prayers were with "our people"*

### Summing Up

The third seminal incident occurs in May 1912, three months before Booth is promoted to glory. It is his last public address, delivered at the Royal Albert Hall in London before 10,000 people, a month after his 83rd birthday.

Last words are always very telling. We study the last words of the great and famous looking for clues about their speakers. Books are published containing nothing more than the last words of famous people. We somehow feel that a clue to the life and purpose of such people will be contained in their parting words, that what have they have experienced and learned will be summed up and explained. That if there is a legacy it will be passed on.

So what did Booth say? What charge did he give to the more than 10,000 Salvationists gathered to catch his closing statements?

Well Booth does do a summing up. He spoke of housing for the poor, of unemployment, and addictions, health issues, criminal and prison reform, noting that while not one of these was intentionally the object of life's efforts – his vision – The Salvation Army had nevertheless addressed each of these concerns. He declared that his object was to do God's will in his life and that sixty-five years

previously, he had consecrated his life to this end, to this “object”, as he termed it. And what was God’s will for William Booth?

With reference to the litany of social ills afflicting the poor that the Salvation Army had addressed, Booth continued:

*“And the object I chose all those years ago embraced every effort, contained in its heart the remedy for every form of misery and sin and wrong to be found upon the earth, and every method of reclamation needed by human nature.”*

Then he concludes with his now famous “I’ll Fight” declaration:

*“And now, comrades and friends, I must say goodbye. I am going into dry-dock for repairs, but the Army will not be allowed to suffer, either financially or spiritually, or in any other way by my absence; and in the long future I think it will be seen – I shall not be here to see, but you will – that the Army will answer every doubt and banish every fear and strangle every slander, and by its marvelous success show to the world that it is the work of God and that the General has been His servant...While women weep, as they do now, I’ll fight; while little children go hungry, as they do now, I’ll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I’ll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I’ll fight – I’ll fight to the very end!”*

This I’ll fight is probably the closest thing to a mission or vision statement that Booth ever made. It echoes Jesus mission statement given at the commencement of his public ministry as recorded in Luke 4: 18, 19 where he quotes Isaiah’s 61st chapter. It is the cry of a prophet “nailing his colours to the mast” (albeit more after the fact than before). Words to inspire the troops by pointing to personal example and history and personal vision.

In essence what Booth was saying was that this is what I have been about for the past 68 years: the drunkards and criminals, the prostitutes, the starving, those lost for time and eternity. This is the call - the vision - that God placed on my life and out of which came The Salvation Army. This is what we (read Salvationists) are about. This is why you are here today. Learn from me, follow my example, catch the torch as I throw it to you and move forward. And with that he left the platform and three short months later left for heaven.

Therefore...

If there is any value in looking at one's ROOTS, in returning to the fundament and source of the vision, it is for times and questions such as these. The way forward must needs be linked to a comprehensive understanding of the road already traveled. We need to attempt to understand God's purposes and plans with regard to our movement and the answer to this lies in the that vision that was birthed well over a hundred years.

We speak here of ecclesiology and not methodology. Most of the disputes and identity issues that crop up in The Salvation Army today regarding who we are and what we should be doing (and where and among whom we should be doing it) pick methodological battlegrounds on which to battle out their issues. Yet method itself defines little if anything - rather it is defined by context and guided by philosophy, or in this case theology and ecclesiology. It is pointless to argue about things such as uniform styles, musical tastes, sacramental options, the role of officers etc which are inherently methodological and structural issues, if the vision remains questioned, ill-defined, confused or lost.

To say that Booth was simply about reaching the lost and leave it at that is to misunderstand the nature of vision and to misread the particulars of Booth's calling and vision. Yes, Booth was, at the end of the day, an evangelist – a pragmatic evangelist whose passion and inclination was to preach and evangelize and he would do this to anyone within arms reach as a natural

outworking of who he was and the gifts God had imbued him with. To move from this, however, to the assertion that this, in and of itself, constitutes his vision and that this was no more focused or particular than a “reaching of the lost”, irrespective of which “lost” he was attempting to reach, is to willfully ignore the evidence of our history as a movement and Booth’s own recorded thoughts on the matter:

“To help the poor, to minister to them in their slums, to sympathize with them in their poverty, afflictions, and irreligion, was the natural outcome that came to my soul through believing in Jesus Christ.”

The imperative to reach the lost does not constitute a vision. It is larger, wider than any vision. It is in fact a commission, in Christian circles generally termed the “Great Commission”. It comes from Christ’s words to his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20, taken as binding on all subsequent disciples. It is a non-negotiable for anyone who becomes a Christian. To say it is a vision per se, is a misnomer. To say that this general instruction to all believers constituted Booth’s is to misunderstand the nature of vision and calling and possibly to fail to grasp God’s wider plan for the salvation of the world.

Booth had a passionate understanding of his message as a gospel for the whosoever. The vision God gave him was for those of the whosoever that were neglected by the churches and rejected by mainstream society. His vision, and the vision for the Salvation Army was of a mission of, to and with the poor.

Certainly this vision is lived out within the context of the Great Commission. Picture if you can an actor, playing a particular role on stage, with a scenic backdrop that establishes the context and sets the tone and informs the theatre-goers of the period and setting for the play. This is how I believe God envisions us as The Salvation Army: One actor amid his troupe, playing a specific role with specific intent – our vision – as part of his grand play of redemption.

*“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love...Repent and do the things you did at first.” (Revelation 2:4,5)*

## **JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY**

Issue 19, June - July 2002

### **Why help the poor?**

General Eva Burrows

*(this is a condensed version of an address delivered by General Burrows at the opening session of the Third Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on Banking With The Poor held in Brisbane, 21-25 November 1995, used with permission)*

This is a subject about which I feel passionately, yet at the same time realistically- with a strong compassion rather than sentimentality. Nevertheless, as I have traveled the world, my indignation has often been aroused by the sights and sounds of human need.

I had the privilege once in Calcutta to meet Mother Teresa at one of her feeding centres for the poor and outcast of that teeming city. When I asked her how she coped with all the fame and adulation she receives, she replied, "It means nothing to me. But one thing I have done which I believe is important. I have helped people to talk to the poor and not just about the poor."

This is a simple but very significant statement which indicates 'the poor' are not just some conglomerate group which can be dismissed as an economically non-productive sector of society that we are unfortunately stuck with. They are fellow human beings- real people, individuals- for whom we have a concern and responsibility.

That is the first and most basic reason why we should help the poor- because they are fellow human beings, flesh and blood people like ourselves. We cannot turn a blind eye. In this global village, our planet, we are realizing more and more that we are interdependent. We are like a global family, albeit a dysfunctional one. We must accept that we are our brother's keeper. Some people misquote the words of Jesus who said, "The price you will have with you always." They use this to denigrate the poor. But Jesus was not acquiescing to

the permanence of poverty or maligning the poor. Rather He was indicating that those who have plenty will have an opportunity for generosity in helping those living in poverty.

Do we have any idea what it means to be poor? Poverty diminishes people. Extreme poverty is deeply demeaning. I have seen people competing with dogs on the rubbish heaps of many large cities of impoverished lands.

You may have seen the poor, but have you ever imagined how it must feel not to be able to provide food for your hungry children; not to have a shirt on your back; not to be able to help your dying child because you lack access to medicine; not to be able to send your child to school when you know that some education is the only hope of success for that child and for your family?

Despite the phenomenal economic growth of many Asian countries, there are still 800 millions lacking basic human needs like food, shelter, work, and minimal health care. Yet I have been deeply impressed in the many countries of Asia I have visited to the ingenious methods that the poor use to rise above their hopelessness.

In Delhi I saw a shanty dweller family pulling through cotton wool and bandages that they must have scavenged from hospital dustbins. There were using it to fill pillows to sell to their neighbours. In Colombo I remember an umbrella repairman, remaking and selling umbrellas with his own recycling techniques.

In Manila there are men who cart unimaginably large loads on bicycles to earn their daily bread. In hovels in Calcutta I have seen women slaving over pots of boiling fat making small cakes for selling at the street market. These people deserve our help in the most positive ways.

The plight of the poor, unemployed, and downtrodden always aroused the fighting compassion of William Booth, the founder of The Salvation Army. Speaking once to a group of parliamentarians in London toward the end of the last century he used as his illustration the cabhorse which was the main means of transportation around the city in those days. "What happens," he asked, "when a cabhorse collapses on the roadway? Men do not gather around the fallen creature and say, 'you stupid animal, you got yourself there, get yourself up! Nor do they gather round and academically analyse the environmental difficulties that caused the horse to fall down'.

"No," said William Booth, "men of goodwill gather round, put straps under the horse's belly and lift it back on its feet. They will then make sure it has three things- food to eat, shelter, and work. And if you do that for a horse, why will you not do it for a man, who is made in the image and likeness of God?"

The Salvation Army still operates under what may be called The Cabhorse Charter. Translated into contemporary terms, it means that every human being deserves:

- a reasonable standard of living;
- a reasonable standard of accommodation;
- an opportunity to use his abilities in satisfying work.

Another reason why we must help the poor is the need for social justice- one of the great themes of humankind's thinking about society, and a divine requirement of all religions. There is injustice when a small fraction of the population grows richer by the year, while others ache and suffer for lack of the most basic necessities. There is injustice when there is gross inequality in how a nation's resources are distributed.

Our difficulty with social injustice comes when we try to move beyond our intuitive ideas to put it into practice. But we must try.

We must recognise that a socially just policy can no longer be considered simply a supplement, an adjunct to economic policy. Indeed, economic and social policy are inextricably interrelated. In the context of an increasingly integrated world economic system, we can see that social justice and the social solidarity and cohesion it brings are essential for successful economic development. You can have- indeed, must have- a sound balance between economic policy and social justice strategy. In fact, we might say that the exclusion of large sections of a nation's population from full social and economic participation is very wasteful of human resources.

How do we give the poor the opportunity to rise above their grinding poverty? If lack of normal access to credit is a crucial reason why the poor remain poor, how can we give them access to credit that will enable them to create a productive and sustainable lifestyle?

I believe that Banking With The Poor is one such way. It has proved that the poor are good credit risks, especially when organised into self-help groups. Repayment of micro loans is excellent. Women especially have proved reliable borrowers, and evidence great success in their simple business ventures. This success breeds success and new confidence, and it encourages others.

By facilitating micro-enterprise of the indigent poor, and encouraging domestic financial institutions to provide for their credit needs, Banking With The Poor supports economic growth and financial independence in countries where the poor have been looked on only in negative terms.

It has been said of Mother Teresa that she merely loves, feeds, clothes the poor, and treats the dying and does not provide them with the means to fight for their rights- that she treats the symptoms only, and not the root causes.

Well, I don't think the Mother Teresas of this world are really cut out for that. But you are. You are the people who can tackle root causes, who can ensure that economic plans are linked to socially just development strategies, who can play a more balanced, positive, proactive role to sustain and develop your nation's social, human, and natural resources.