

# **JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY**

# **JAC Online**

**Issue 110, August – September 2017**

Copyright © 2017 Journal of Aggressive Christianity

## **In This Issue**

### **JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY**

Issue 110, August - September 2017

**Editorial Introduction [page 3](#)**

**Editor, Major Stephen Court**

**Missional Salvationist or Cultural Salvationism [page 5](#)**

**Commissioner Phil Needham**

**Engaging Needham: The view from Australia Eastern [page 9](#)**

**Lieut-Colonel Miriam Gluyas**

**Engaging Needham: The view from Australia Southern [page 11](#)**

**Lieut-Colonel Winsome Merrett**

**Engaging Needham: The view from Romania [page 13](#)**

**Major Leanne Ruthven**

**Engaging Needham: I hope I die before I get old [page 16](#)**

**Aaron White**

**Engaging Needham: Military Reformation [page 18](#)**

**Phil Wall**

**Engaging Needham: Smashing the idol of cultural salvationism**

**Major Danielle Strickland [page 21](#)**

**Engaging Needham: The view from USA [page 24](#)**

**Major Stephen Court**

## **Editorial Introduction**

by Major Stephen Court, Editor

Greetings in Jesus' name. Welcome to the 110th issue of Journal of Aggressive Christianity. The innovations just keep coming at JAC and this issue we're tabbing 'Engaging Needham'. Commissioner Phil Needham has written an article called 'Missional Salvationist or Cultural Salvationism' that ran to much interest in a recent issue of The Officer magazine. The General and the Commissioner granted us permission to run it here.

Commissioner Phil Needham doesn't pull any punches in his challenge to the status quo. He warns, "The worst threat to the future of a missionally transformative Salvation Army could be... 'cultural Salvationism'." He inspires, "The DNA of a true Salvationist cannot be limited to traditional Salvationist practices." And he prophetically outlines the way forward: "What it does do when given a chance is to release such a passion to live the transformative life of Jesus in the world that its bearer will do just about anything beyond or within current Salvationist practices to live and witness to the Kingdom of God in today's world."

JAC invited some Salvationists from around the world to reflect on Needham's thoughts. And they've taken varying perspectives.

Lieut-Colonel Miriam Gluyas (AUE) contextualizes Needham's article in Ephesians 4 (apostles / prophets / evangelists / and shepherd\teachers) and Papua New Guinea and Australia to apply his proposed mission toward a 'glorious future'.

Lieut-Colonel Winsome Merrett (AUS) attends to Needham's challenge personally, offering biographical testimony to its truth in her experience growing up, and then applying the challenges of the proposed personal mission statement to her own life and warfighting.

Major Leanne Ruthven (Romania) compares the Army to a battleship, a cruise ship, and a fishing boat. Applying examples from Romania, the country in which she leads The Salvation Army, Ruthven argues that we must aim always to play the role of fishing boat, focusing on Jesus.

Ministry Director Aaron White (C&B), in *I Hope I Die Before I Get Old*, compares our situation with the rock band, The Who, and figures that, "Survival becomes more essential than mission."

CSM Phil Wall (UKI) argues for a 'Military Reformation' that turns the conventional challenge – 'are we too Army?' on its head by wondering, instead, 'are we Army enough?' With a dip into military history and a dash of Pentecost, Wall proposes a redemption of the culture of salvationism.

Major Danielle Strickland (C&B) is clear on her approach to Needham's article in the title of her piece, 'Smashing the Idol of Cultural Salvationism'. She outlines 10 indications of entrenchment, and then 10 solutions.

And I also took a stab at Needham's article, extracting a handful of the many quotables to give them closer attention from a typically primitive salvationist point of view.

This is the start of a conversation. We hope that you pick it up and extend it across tables and alleys, with soldiers and officers, on Sundays and on other days in this coming season.

## **Missional Salvationist or Cultural Salvationism**

by Commissioner Phil Needham

I was born into the culture of Salvationism. My earliest memories flow with images of uniformed preachers, spirited choruses, testimonies, open airs, Sunday meetings, and weeknight prayer meetings. I attended the meetings and ‘fired the cartridge.’ I’ve lived through the stages of a Salvationist life: cradle roll member, jr. soldier, corps cadet. sr. soldier, and then officer, now retired officer. I absorbed the culture, and the culture absorbed me.

I treasure the blessings of this culture of Salvationism. It schooled me in doctrine, shepherded me in holiness. It gave me a certain Christian identity, and there’s a good measure of security in that.

I have been a witness to expressions of authentic Salvationism. I’ve seen the calling of this Salvation Army lived out in compelling ways. I’ve seen Salvationists serving incarnationally (by embedding themselves) in broken communities, building relationships, and sharing the gospel and the compassion of Christ. As often as not, I hope I have been faithful to this calling myself.

I must confess, however, that sometimes (often?) we Salvationists have gotten ourselves too absorbed in the culture of Salvationism. And when this happens, I’ve observed, our mission suffers. Ironically, our practices evolve into a closed culture isolating us from the very world to which God calls us. They actually undermine our missional calling.

I think the worst threat to the future of a missionally transformative Salvation Army may well be an increasingly isolationist, self-protected Salvationism. Let’s call it ‘cultural Salvationism.’

Let me explain more fully what I mean by ‘cultural Salvationism.’ What often (perhaps inevitably) happens when a vital movement becomes an institution is that creative, often bold, initiatives that shaped the mission and grew the movement become standardized programs and practices. They were so effective for the movement in its early days it is assumed they must be preserved to ensure present and future success. Some of them may, indeed, still be effective. Open airs, for example, are still missionally successful in some countries or locales; and a top-down hierarchical structure may still serve our mission well in some parts of the world. But to assume they must be retained everywhere simply because they served the Army’s mission well at one time is to assume falsely.

In the big picture, programs and procedures are secondary matters, means to an end. They came into being as effective ways to facilitate our mission in certain cultures, eras, and circumstances. But cultures and conditions change over time, and previously effective methods and programs may still not serve the mission well. When this is so, to

continue them is to sacrifice missional effectiveness for the preservation of practices because we have become accustomed to them and comfortable with them. It is then to make what is secondary (and therefore expendable) primary (and therefore permanent and indispensable). To continue to do things the same way when they are no longer serving our mission is indefensible. Mission cannot be ritualized and survive.

When blind continuation of inherited customs prevails, the mission is in serious danger. Increasingly programs, or the way we do programs, no longer serve the mission. Procedures no longer facilitate missional effectiveness. And to the extent this happens, The Salvation Army becomes a culture to preserve rather than a mission to perpetuate. We may be doing many good deeds, serving some people in helpful ways. We may have happy, spirited gatherings of Salvationists and blessed worship. But we are not The Salvation Army fulfilling its mission.

What is our mission? Let's look at our International Mission Statement:

The Salvation Army, founded in 1865, is an international religious and charitable movement organized and operated on a quasi-military pattern and is a branch of the Christian church. Its membership includes officers (clergy), soldiers/adherents (laity), members of varied activity groups and volunteers that serve as advisors, associates and committed participants in its service functions.

The motivation of the organization is love of God and a practical concern for the needs of humanity. This is expressed by the spiritual ministry, the purposes of which are to preach the Gospel, disseminate Christian truths, supply basic human necessities, provide personal counseling and undertake the spiritual and moral regeneration and physical rehabilitation of all persons in need who come within its sphere of influence regardless of race, creed, sex or age. (The Song Book, p. 351)

I would describe this statement as a comprehensive summation of what we do, as well as what personally motivates us. It is not, however, a mission statement for Salvationists. It's an organizational mission statement, and a very long one at that. (Good mission statements are brief and easily recite-able.) A Salvationist finds nothing in this statement that clearly defines his or her role in the enterprise.

Furthermore, the statement doesn't really define the bottom line, the ultimate outcome sought. It describes various means but not the prize. If I read Booth and the early Army correctly, the prize is to bring people, especially the marginalized, first to faith and then to holiness. I personally like to call that making radical followers of Jesus Christ.

Such a mission would be the mission of every Salvationist. It would be the covenant all Salvationists are held accountable to uphold. The standard of their Salvationism would not be how well they observe the inherited rituals and customs of a Salvationist culture, but how passionately they follow Jesus, live the life of Jesus in the world, and engage people in ways that open them to the gospel.

What we need is not the preserved culture of Salvationism but the practical calling of missional Salvationists. Let's learn from our past, but not worship it. What our Salvationist forebears did was nothing less than radical. We best honor it, not by preserving the programs and products of their creativity, but by imitating the wild spirit that dared to engage people, cross barriers, and risk radically holy living.

I am convinced that the culturalizing of Salvationism will spell our demise as an effective missional force in the world. The DNA of a true Salvationist cannot be limited to traditional Salvationist practices. What it does do when given a chance is to release such a passion to live the transformative life of Jesus in the world that its bearer will do just about anything beyond or within current Salvationist practices to live and witness to the kingdom of God in today's world.

How, then, do we allow this missional DNA to shape us? I think we must begin with clarity about our mission, the mission of every Salvationist. Such a mission must meet three criteria. It must:

- 1) apply to all Salvationists (no exceptions);
- 2) clearly state the bottom line (the ultimate outcome sought); and
- 3) be easily recite-able (memorable).

Here is an attempt at one such statement. It is the fruit of a territory-wide process that garnered considerable reflection and input in its formation:

We Salvationists are called to make radical followers of Jesus Christ who love inclusively, serve helpfully, and disciple effectively in all the communities where we live.

Based on this mission statement, it is clear that every Salvationist is called to be both a serious disciple (a radical follower) of Jesus Christ and also a disciple who is making disciples. (Note: 'Evangelism' is not named here because it should not stand on its own. It is the first and crucial step in becoming a disciple and should not be disconnected from it. Jesus' ultimate purpose, as the Gospels make clear, is not to save us [just barely get us into his kingdom] but to make us his disciples, to change our whole life, to make us holy.)

The loving, the serving, and the discipling in the statement describe the threefold calling of all who then become disciples. The closing phrase identifies the locales of this mission: everywhere the Salvationist lives, moves, and has his being (not just the few hours of the week a typical Salvationist is involved in corps outreach programs).

Such a mission then requires an accountability on the part of each Salvationist. He must ask and answer three questions:

- 1) How am I growing as a radical follower, disciple, imitator of Jesus Christ?
- 2) How am I currently fulfilling the mission of a Salvationist (as defined by the Mission Statement)?
- 3) What steps will I take better to fulfill this mission?

This begins, of course, with the officer, the spiritual and missional leader. So, how are you, and how am I, doing? And where do you and I go from here?



## **Engaging Needham: The view from Australia Eastern**

by Lieut-Colonel Miriam Gluyas

How well Needham captures what we need right now in our Salvation Army.

Culture can be defined as "the way we do things around here", or " the things we tolerate". We define it, we have buy in from our leaders and our people, we live it, we correct it when it's wrong, and we keep talking it up.

We were born to have this culture of "making radical followers of Jesus."

We were born to love inclusively, to serve helpfully and to disciple effectively.

And, this plays out in the community where we live....creating real community in every community. A place of loving and being loved, serving and being served, knowing and being known, and celebrating and being celebrated. (Gilbert Bilezikian)

Ours is a culture of the priesthood of all believers.

That's the way we "do things around here"

How it happens will be different in different places.

In PNG I saw people in very large open air meetings finding Jesus as Lord and Saviour. In Australia, very few open air meetings are held, as people are watching TV, not hearing what is going on, out in coffee shops or on sporting fields.

We can't keep on with "same old, same old" if it is not working. We are still about being Spirit led and relevant in what we do.....for the purposes state above.

If in my nation the issues are a lack of hope, being strangers in our own neighborhoods, longing for real community, homelessness, addiction, mortgage stress, domestic violence, suicide, and the list goes on.....

Then what is needed is, for us as salvationists to...

- Love inclusively
- Serve helpfully
- Disciple effectively
- in every community that we live.

And as we do, make radical disciples of Jesus.

What we do will be shaped by that. And this very creative God will show us how to get beside people to do this in the very best way possible.

The mission is clear, the culture is clear, the vision for our place will become clear, as we seek Jesus, and then we will know how to meet needs around us and introduce people to Jesus, who in turn become radical followers of Jesus.

Great corporate and personal challenges by Needham.

Many would tell me that we have become risk averse. I think they are right in many ways. Where are the prophets and apostles? Many have left us. We need all. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. We have moved from the early days, from a predominantly sending church, where we still gathered ...to now being a predominantly Gathered church, where sometimes we send. We need to gather to encourage, inspire and grow, and then enter our mission field, really championing the priesthood of all believers. We are all on mission.

Are we really prepared to do whatever it takes to see this become the reality of what a Needham is saying?

I believe he is right. These are urgent and exciting days if we can grab hold of this. Yes, we need to honor and celebrate the past, we need to seek God right now, and we can have a glorious future, if we move this way. "Lord, please help us"

## **Engaging Needham: The view from Australia Southern**

by Lieut-Colonel Winsome Merrett

Phil Needham's article refers to the absorption of Salvationists into a culture which can lead to inward thinking rather than an outward focus, thus weakening the missional focus of the movement and of individuals. It wasn't until I moved away from home as a young adult to attend University that I became aware of this 'cultural Salvationism' referred to by Phil Needham. I would not have articulated it as succinctly as Needham has at that time, but I knew something was missing in the community of faith where I started to attend worship during this time of my life.

I was the daughter of officer parents who had been privileged to commence a corps in an isolated community in Australia. As a child, I had seen lives radically transformed by an encounter with Jesus and a church develop from a family of six to a growing, worshipping community of 70 or more. By the time I was 12, my expectation of a Salvation Army corps was one of life and vitality and evidence of the power of Christ to transform people's lives. My parents following appointment took us to a location where a local revival was occurring. My understanding of what it meant to be The Salvation Army and a Salvationist was confirmed. Salvation Army gatherings continued to be places where planned worship often looked different because God's Spirit brought newcomers and conviction of their need of a Saviour. Salvation Army gatherings were places where prayers were made and God answered. They were places where God's people were mobilised to share their faith and see others find hope in Christ. Belonging to The Salvation Army was not about predictability in the worship service. It was about living out our faith every day, and responding to the community in which we lived in ways that made Jesus real and helped others to experience his love. While this was led by the corps officer, there was a part for everyone to play, including youth and children.

But when I moved city to undertake tertiary education, I discovered a different Salvation Army. The form was similar, but the power and reality of the Holy Spirit's presence seemed diminished. It was 'muffled' by the noise of the form. The form itself, (programme and some 'tradition') had taken precedence over the purpose of the form. I understood that purpose was to assist Salvationists to engage with those who do not know Christ, to grow disciples and along the way to find ways to relieve the suffering of others. It seemed that the practices of Salvationism assumed greater importance than the kingdom impact of those practices.

The corps functioned smoothly, people turned up for worship, sections operated regularly, fellowship was enjoyed. While I recall some godly people in this community of faith, I do not recall anyone getting saved during my few years there. The call to a radical life of discipleship with which I had been familiar was not front and centre anymore. Another culture than that with which I was familiar took precedence. This culture was attractive to many. It enabled people to remain comfortable and engaged with what was familiar and safe. However, I believe perpetuation of this eventually

leads to lifelessness, and the form or the culture can itself become the object of our worship.

So I have no disagreement with Phil Needham's statement that "what we need is not the preserved culture of Salvationism, but the practical calling of missional Salvationists". It is disappointing that there is a need to differentiate between missional Salvationist or cultural salvationism. The term missional Salvationist should be able to simply read Salvationist, with the latter always implying the former. While the world is a better place because The Salvation Army exists, what the world really needs is Salvationists committed to this radical call of discipleship, committed to live out this life-changing message and demonstration of the gospel in the places where we live and work and play.

Needham's mission statement is potentially a mission statement for each individual Salvationist. Imagine how radical this movement called The Salvation Army would become if every Salvationist took up the challenge of this mission statement for themselves, and the impact that would have in the streets where we live, the places where we work and the nations in which we live. How many relationships would be restored, how many more broken people would find wholeness in Christ, how many more Christ-followers would develop and use their gifts for God's kingdom purposes and then teach and mentor others to do the same.

I am called to make radical followers of Jesus Christ, to love inclusively, serve helpfully and disciple effectively in the communities where I live and work. I can only do this effectively in proportion to my willingness to follow Jesus closely myself, to put his agenda before my own and seek to allow the Spirit of God reign in my life.

This mission is a challenge, it often unsettles and takes me out of my comfort zone. It stretches my faith and my dependence on God. It brings fulfilment and life and divine purpose. It supersedes any absorption into cultural Salvationism, breaking out of that which can seduce the Salvationist into believing the form is what accomplishes the mission when it is an individual radically following the living Christ.

It begins with the individual - it begins with me. It's a mission. It's a calling. It's only attainable by the power of the Spirit. My prayer is that I would increasingly reflect this mission in my living.

## Engaging Needham: The view from Romania

by Major Leanne Ruthven

Commissioner Phil Needham's corporate challenge to The Salvation Army, 'Missional Salvationists – or Cultural Salvationism?' reminds me of British theologian Derek Tidball's description of the church which, he suggests, 'sometimes...looks like a battleship with the guns trained on herself; a cruise ship, affording comfortable leisure opportunities; or a galleon, living in the past'.<sup>1</sup>

Having served and soldiered in many places, I have seen these various incarnations of cultural Salvationism at work. I have experienced a corps tearing itself apart over the matter of speaking in tongues. I have known places where the main aim is to provide comfortable, interesting activities for those already on board. And I have attended corps where people are happy when Sunday worship is 'traditional Army', despite the world buzzing literally outside their closed doors.

However, Tidball continues, rather than being a battleship, cruise liner or galleon, the church should be like a fishing boat: 'The kingdom is about fishing for people, capturing them for God's service.'<sup>2</sup> I'm sure Commissioner Needham would agree.

I am currently the regional leader in Romania, a country that has over the centuries been ruled by various empires and is now emerging from its recent communist past. The Salvation Army has been here for less than 20 years, yet the various characteristics of battleship, cruise ship and galleon are all evident. Like everywhere else in the world, we battle both organisational and human nature. But thankfully we also see traits of the fishing boat, with Salvationists who get what it really means to be radical followers of Jesus.

Let me tell you about our newest opening, Bacau. This commenced in March 2016, but as of July 2017 the outpost still has no meeting place to call its own. However, most Thursdays the lieutenant and his volunteers set out chairs at the local library, ready for up to 60 young people aged between 17 and 30 who come to play games, learn about developing their potential, and explore what it means to lead a successful life. It's not an overtly religious program. If it was, they would be kicked out of the venue. Instead, it is tapping into where the young people are in life and slowly broadening their horizons.

Then there are the Bible studies held in the lieutenant's apartment. A smaller group meets, but i

In May this year Bacau's first two soldiers were enrolled – praise God. Cultural Salvationism might have stressed the importance of Sunday meetings and evangelistic campaigns, but things have still been happening without these activities. While worship of God and engagement with people are vital, the forms they take in Bacau are different. At the moment, it's a small fishing boat with a young crew who are putting out some nets.

\* \* \* \* \*

As well as a corporate challenge, Needham's article also poses a personal one, and I base my response to this on the standard of Salvationism he proposes. This, he says, should not be 'how well we observe the inherited rituals and customs of a Salvationist culture, but how passionately we follow Jesus, live the life of Jesus in the world, and engage people in ways that open them to the gospel'. So how am I doing?

How passionately am I following Jesus?

I love the Lord and am trying to follow him with all my heart. I am 15,000 km from family and friends in Australia. It's not easy being so far from home, but I'm here because I believe this is where God has placed me. Despite the difficulties, God has blessed us and our ministry. If I hadn't said yes to this opportunity I wouldn't have been truly following Jesus.

However, I leave Romania at the end of the year and at the time of writing don't know what 2018 looks like. So at the moment, passionately following Jesus means waiting for his direction about the next step. This is both exciting and unsettling. Cultural Salvationism would say I should automatically take any appointment from the Army as being 'from God', but more than once I have rocked that boat. If an appointment proposal doesn't 'sit' with where I believe God is leading me I will say so. I need to pay attention to what God is saying, even if that differs from what the Army wants. I want to stay in the centre of his will and be the person he has called me to be.

How am I living the Jesus life in this world?

By trying with God's help to be humble, confident, loving, courageous, compassionate, firm and down-to-earth. By taking a stand against unjust, unethical and unhelpful attitudes whether they're expressed by the world or the church. Living the Jesus life means trying to see all people through his eyes. It means treating the cleaning lady the same way I would the chief accountant.

Out walking a few weeks ago along the uneven footpaths that are common in Romania, an unkempt, elderly man stumbled and collapsed in front of me. I went to his aid but he was too heavy to lift. A young couple nearby did not make a move to help until they saw I couldn't manage. Together we helped the man up, after which he looked at me in amazement, as if puzzled that someone would assist him in the first place. Small things.

How am I engaging people in ways that open them to the gospel?

By paying attention to the opportunities God gives for witness, whatever form they might take. This means keeping up-to-date about what's going on in the world in order to find common ground with people. It doesn't mean turning every conversation into a discussion about Jesus – unlike the manager of a Christian radio station who, when

interviewed by one of my editorial colleagues, answered every question with, 'Jesus. It's about Jesus.' True, his work was about proclaiming the gospel, but there were no thoughtful opinions, helpful insights or admission of difficulties. The answer was literally always 'Jesus'.

I won't be able to engage with people if don't think for myself. Cultural Salvationism has the potential to discourage honest questioning and make those who express doubt feel less than spiritual. People will be open to the gospel when I take the time to listen without judging, accept them as they are and then, when the time is right, point them in the direction of Jesus.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Army will always need to guard against cultural Salvationism. The battleship, cruise liner and galleon will always be afloat somewhere. The mission statement proposed by Needham and his thoughts about what it means to be a radical Salvationist make me all the more determined to be in the fishing boat rather than fighting, lounging around or reminiscing. The boat might be small and it might be rickety. But its purpose will always be to catch fish.

Footnotes

1 Tidball, D. 'The Kingdom of God', Guidelines, Bible Reading Fellowship, Jan-Aug 2015, p71

2 *ibid.*

## **Engaging Needham: I hope I die before I get old**

by Aaron White

Like Commissioner Needham, I was weaned on the structure, symbols and songs of The Salvation Army, and have in some ways continued in them until the present day. I imbibed these elements as a natural and inevitable part of my environment, never really questioning them until I began to extend my worldview beyond the traditional Corps where I was raised.

It did not require a long journey to expand my horizons, but I truly entered a whole new world: the world of the shelter, the homeless, the addict, the convict, the poor. Working the front desk of a shelter at the age of eighteen was a fiery baptism into the real world, the world in which the symbols and songs of The Salvation Army finally began to make sense. Spiritual Warfare was no longer a fantastical thing to sing and talk about. Prayer suddenly mattered. Holiness had a purpose beyond avoiding trouble and parental disappointment. Evangelism became a daily matter, and one that yielded surprising fruit. In other words, The Salvation Army finally came alive for me, outside of the insular setting in which it had been presented to me throughout my childhood.

This was only one piece of the puzzle. I had to encounter other missional and incarnational expressions of The Salvation Army before I could really grasp what the culture I grew up with was pointing to. In the end, it was only by getting out of an environment in which cultural Salvationism ruled that I could discover what The Salvation Army was for. For the last two decades I have found myself in incarnational communities that promotes holiness, mission, and radical hospitality in the midst of the poor and broken. We fly the Army flag, wear the colours, sing the songs, and it makes sense. Sort of.

But I have begun to see just how far removed this expression is from the modern, Western culture of Salvationism. It is considered aberrant, threatening, and dispensable.

It must be remembered that organisations tend over time to become conservative, in that they eventually exist to preserve themselves. This may be, as Commissioner Needham suggests, out of a reverence and familiarity for things that worked in the past. It may also be that as an organisation grows, gains reputation, and accrues more staff, structure and financing, these things begin to replace the mission of the organisation as top priority. Survival becomes more essential than mission, and those who are good at management and preservation rise to the top. Those who are good at the mission, but who take risks, tend to be kept far away from any real decision-making positions so as to minimise the damage they might do. Continuing to bang the drum of cultural Salvationism is one way to convince oneself and others that we are still all about the mission, the blood and the fire and the risk and the sacrifice, even if / when we are not.



It reminds me of the rock band The Who. They released the song “My Generation” in 1965, a rebellious teenage anthem that contains the lyric, “I hope I die before I get old.” The Who are still touring fifty years later, and they still play that song, and still sing that lyric. But they obviously don’t mean it. It’s just words, reminding them and their audience of a time long ago when they were relevant and risky. Now the edge is gone, the purpose, the hope, the fight. They have become an institution, with their lifelong culture and fans, and are about as risky and dangerous as elevator music. It might still be nice to see them in concert, for old time’s sake, but they aren’t going to change the world.

Is The Salvation Army there? Anecdotally, I can say that almost every instance of bold, innovative, risk-taking, sin-fighting, devil-defying Salvationism I have witnessed has taken place outside of the system, or on the marginalised edge of the system, often without official knowledge, and frequently punished when discovered. This is not to say that good things aren’t happening throughout the Army world; they certainly are. But the culture of Salvationism is not contributing to that, and more surely seems to be pulling back the reins on anything that remotely resembles the “red-hot religion” described by Catherine Booth.

Commissioner Needham proposes that our real mission, not the official mission statement but the real call on the hearts and lives of Salvationists, is *“making radical followers of Jesus Christ who love inclusively, serve helpfully, and disciple effectively in all the communities where we live.”* I like this statement because it includes radical mission, holiness, hospitality, service and love. These seem to be the point and purpose of The Salvation Army. If this is true, then everything within the organisation should be subjected towards these ends. I would find it very difficult to argue that this is the case currently. I agree with the Commissioner when he suggests that “the mission is in serious danger,” and that “we are not The Salvation Army fulfilling its mission. “

I can see why some might criticize his proposed mission statement, however. Not that they would take issue with what is included, but that there is no obvious Salvation Army reference or distinctive to be found. It could be argued that this statement does not tell us the mission of The Salvation Army, but simply of the Christian. A former General once wrote that if a Corps was saving souls, growing saints, and serving suffering humanity, yet it looked “too alien to the Army ideal and image”, he might have a problem with it.<sup>1</sup> This seems to be exactly the cultural Salvationism that Commissioner Needham is warning against in his article. When the ideal or image of the Army takes precedence over the mission and purpose of the Army, then all we have left is a PR machine that speaks and sings fondly of the good old days.

Lord, preserve us from such a fate, even if it means that cultural Salvationism must die.

#### Footnotes

1 General Paul Rader, Vision Splendid: Intercultural Ministry, The Army Perspective, 33.

## Engaging Needham: Military Reformation

by Phil Wall

Once again Commissioner Phil Needham has hit the proverbial nail on the head. Way back in the 1980's he wrote his ground-breaking book 'Community in Mission' that sought to explore an authentic Salvationist ecclesiology. It was one of those books that as I read it along with my newly converted Salvationist friends we were left thinking '*how on earth did he get permission to publish that?*' If you took seriously what he was saying and dealt appropriately with what he labelled 'ecclesiastical clutter', it demanded quite significant change. Having had the privilege of getting to know him and the honour of being mentored/guided by him over the years I am once again inspired by the fresh challenge of this article (it is also a little spooky that he appears to still have the same haircut!).

As I read it I was disturbed to realize that so many of the prophetic challenges he was raising back in the 1980's, are still present and I would suggest even more deeply embedded as we as a movement have insecurely responded to critical decline through reactionary conservatism. What it also did for me was raise questions about what we needed to once again do to become an effective missional force in the Western world capable of both effective evangelism and self-replicating discipleship. As I thought about this, a slightly different question occurred to me that I have not seriously addressed before. Whilst agreeing wholeheartedly with Needham's assertion about the negative impact of being trapped in a sub-culture of Salvationism, I came to the issue from a different place. Some would argue that our great challenge is that we are 'too Army' and that is what needs to change, but I wonder if the more relevant question is 'Are we Army enough?'. Have we taken the military metaphor (and let us remind ourselves it is only a metaphor) far enough and does our current dominant 'parade ground' expression of it require Reformation.

The disaster of the millions of young men who lost their lives during the first world war is well documented. The upper-class general's, stuck in a previous era, shaped by their experiences of the Boer War, applied 19th Century military tactics to a war being fought with 20th Century technology. The strategy of charging across the battle-field to attack the enemy lines was no longer fit for purpose in the age of the Gatling gun. Thousands upon thousands mown down as they went 'over the top' of the trenches to charge across the battlefield. The average life expectancy of a young lieutenant who led that charge was two weeks. Eventually military doctrine / culture had to change.

Then along came the 2nd World War where many battles began to become stalemates with two large armies with similar technology throwing ordinance & soldiers at each other. Once again to break the deadlock it had to change, and along came the 'eccentric misfit' Colonel Sir Archibald David Sterling. Though the vast majority of senior military leaders felt it would fail, he went on to invent the SAS whose focus was to get behind enemy lines and undermine their capacity to fight by blowing up lots of things like infrastructure, planes, bridges etc. They also demonstrated extreme bravery in

attacking armies from behind their own lines with the element of stealth and surprise. To this day they are the most feared soldiers on the planet, continuing to reshape military dogma and doctrine.

After the Cold War ended, military doctrine and dogma changed once again. The former American Army Chief of Staff, Gordon Sullivan recorded the story of the transformation of the post-cold war US military in his book 'Hope is Not a Method'. He said, *'It was possible to create your own future – to break down outmoded structures and create organisations that can thrive in tomorrow's uncertainty. It is a process grounded in values, shaped by vision and guided by a strategy... our task was to transform a successful organization, to take the best army in the world and make it the best Army in a different world.'* From this change came the strategies that were taken into future hotspots like Bosnia and Somalia & later Afghanistan and Iraq.

Up to the modern day, whereby the degrading of military capability of terrorists via Special forces, dressed and enmeshed in the culture of the local people, and digital, cyber warfare and drone strikes, military dogma and doctrine continues to change. Even the chain of command is changing with the concept of 'Ground truth' informing how leadership is expressed. Recognizing that in a battle those closest to the action, who through technology have all the information they have at HQ, are delegated to make the most important decisions relating to the front line. It continues to change as both the nature of war and the terrain upon which it is fought on continues to mutate.

Is a similar process of reformation and transformation the answer to the concerns Commissioner Needham raises about us getting 'stuck' in a form of Salvationism unfit for modern warfare. Could it be we also need significant reflection about the nature of how we are structured, the dogma and fighting strategies we use that are most effective 'behind enemy lines, what we train our leaders to do & how we train them, who does the fighting and who does the training, how the chain of command functions and how decision making happens, the culture (read spirituality) of our main forces and bases, and our ability to recruit & develop future soldiers (read evangelism and discipleship)?

What would we have the courage to let go of, for the sake of the war? How brave could we be in re-shaping an Army fit to fight in a very different world to the one in which we were born? What are the absolutes that should be held onto at all costs and what could be cast aside as mere 'ecclesiastical clutter' that hinders our fighting? It may be how we answer these questions that will determine what future use this particular part of the Armies of Heaven continue to be.

Of course it may be that 'Reformation' may not be enough, and what we actually need is Revival. Certainly I/we could do with this. A fresh baptism of the Spirit across all of our lives, compelling us through the doorway of repentance and more deeply embedding us in living faith, would profoundly re-shape and transform our futures. Chaotic, disturbing, often messy, ignoring all the rules of religious/military protocols, the history of revival is powerful. It gave birth to the Pentecostal/ Charismatic movements of the modern day which have spread the gospel powerfully across the Southern hemisphere and

represent most if not all of the largest churches in the Northern. Revival shaped movements like the praying Moravians who had a profound effect on the Wesleys and thus shaped something of our own birth. Revival, though unpredictable, ignites fresh hunger for God, a renewed passion for the lost, purity of life and sets a platform for sacrificial living. It disturbs our too often comfortable middle class lives, the routine of our religious encounters and challenges our priorities, vocation and safe spiritualities. At the risk of disagreeing with General Booth, we don't need 'another' Pentecost, the first one is all we need and we just need to become 'An Army, marching on its knees' and embrace the fullness of all God has gifted to us. Now that is the true Culture of Salvationism!

## Engaging Needham: Smashing the idol of cultural salvationism

by Major Danielle Strickland

Needham makes a strong argument on the idolization of cultural salvationism. I've said many times, even recently, that when process (systems and structures) get in the way of mission (what we are called to do) it is idolatry. And it is not submission or obedience to that system that is required - it is a radical dis-obedience that is needed. There must be a smashing of the idolization of a status-quo culture that insists on itself first. What Needham has beautifully defined as 'cultural salvationism' is perhaps the greatest enemy of our current Salvation Army. I see it everywhere.

Here are some signs that I've learned are indicators of entrenchment in our movement:

- **a defensive posture about new things.** Leadership having trouble even having a conversation that challenges the way things are done or suggests some new things.
- **a superior attitude.** People who find themselves living in defense of the 'old ways' are often very quick to assume a superior attitude about what they currently do. This arrogance is often not even rooted in fact - just fancy. Check your attitude.
- **highly critical of others.** Looking for fault in other systems is a wonderful way to make yourself feel better about your own.
- **using your authority as a stick.** Rather than engage in meaningful dialogue or debate about current systems and structures it is a top down attitude that perpetuates things that don't actually work in the field. This is when 'orders' trump 'logic'.
- **using fear as a motivator.** This is the oldest trick in the book for people who don't want to change. "What will happen if?" In the process of writing a new book on the Exodus I discovered that if you are using fear as a main motivator you will either be oppressed or be an oppressor. There is no other option. Fear is the currency of oppression.
- **big celebrations repeating the 'old story'.** Russia was filled with these ceremonies and celebrations right up until the eventual collapse of it's infrastructure. They failed to engage in 'reality' so they started to use public rituals as a way to 'prop up' the failing system. It's important to pay attention to that tendency in all failed systems.
- **rewarding the status quo and punishing risk takers.** Any thriving and changing organization will tell you that one of the secrets of their success is rewarding the risk takers and not accepting the status quo. When systems get

this wrong they do the exact opposite - they reward those who 'don't rock the boat' and punish those who do. This is a personel disaster and a sure way to cultivate a cultural salvationism that lacks real life missional power.

- **using statistics poorly.** What I mean is that the things we measure are different than our outcomes. Even at a corps level we measure attendance over missional impact. We measure finance over transformation. And at social levels we measure people fed instead of people who don't need to be fed anymore. This is a sure way of getting confused over what our mission actually is because what we say we value we don't even measure.
- **conformity.** behaving matters more than believing or belonging. Keeping an externally based set of regulations in order to belong to a people is not a kingdom community. Belonging is at the heart of the gospel.
- **major on minor things.** An emphasis on the details and specifics of systems and structures while ignoring the major emphasis of mission and outcomes of the gospel.

So, if we accept that cultural salvationism is a threat to the missional outcomes of The Salvation Army - what do we do??

What if we just reversed the signs? It's an idea.

- **an open posture of learning engagement.** Creating a culture that is not only open to change but wants it. what is the best way forward - is there a better way - how do we create better systems that serve the mission.
- **a humble attitude.** let's adjust our posture. God gives grace to the humble - let's be honest and humble and find some grace to lead us forward.
- **look at what's working.** I've spent a lot of years being told that no other church cares for the poor like The Salvation Army. And part of the last ten years of my life has been discovering how wrong that statement is. Not only do other churches care for the poor they have designed new ways of doing so! It would be so worth our time to look at what is actually working to bring about transformation in our world right now.
- **use your authority as a doorway to change.** Authority can be an amazing way to allow others to make a difference. Take a look at how Jesus spent His authority on empowering others instead of punishing them and you'll get what I mean.
- **use FAITH as a motivator.** This would be manifested in moves towards prayer and spiritual impact. Lose the fear. Seriously. If there are decisions being made

that are based on fear stop making them. Learn to make faith filled decisions in LOVE. This is the great Kingdom way.

- **celebrate the new stories.** If your testimony is still 25 years old it's time to challenge your own spiritual life. This is true personally and corporately. God is constantly doing new things and in new ways - He is the Creator God. Celebrate the NEW THINGS that God is doing... it will help to shift our culture.
- **reward the risk takers.** This will require much courage. Celebrate failures because they were people who TRIED and RISKED and that is how FAITH works. Promote risk-taking people to authority and leadership and give them permission to fail. This will release the creative energy of so many people in our movement.
- **measure what you REALLY value.** Measure transformation. Measure people's living standards in your community and try to change that! Measure people sent into mission. Measure spiritual transformations. Measure prayer meeting attendance. :-)
- **belonging trumps everything.** Recently my friend recounted a moment in William Booth's early life where he was at an ecumenical gathering. And they were getting into groups. The Anglicans stood up and said 'if you are Anglican come with us' the Methodists did the same and everyone else gathered with whomever they belonged. Booth stood up and said 'anyone who doesn't belong or isn't welcome can come find your place with us!'. The other fascinating outcome of this central gospel understanding is that once we are sure we all belong together we can celebrate our differences in the safety of loving covenant. It unifies our diversity with celebration. There is no other way to do this apart from a belonging community of love.
- **make the main thing the thing.** This will require the system to sacrifice anything that isn't the main thing. It may need to be ruthless but it will be incredibly fruitful to focus on mission outcomes and lose the baggage of traditional forms.

## Engaging Needham: The view from USA

by Major Stephen Court

We celebrate Commissioner Needham's analysis of the current situation and his vision of missional salvationism. It is refreshing to hear such an honest, compelling invitation from a senior leader in our movement.

Several contributors offer varied perspectives on this whole thing. We're going to tackle a number of outstanding statements he makes. Here goes...

----

"The word threat to the future of a missionally transformative Salvation Army may well be an increasingly isolationist, self-protected Salvationism. Let's call it 'cultural Salvationism.'"

### Our Biggest Enemy

So, we are our own biggest enemy. This goes even wider than Needham suggests. Agreed, 'tradition' and the comfort of the familiar and our (mis)understanding of life and God's purposes for us within it can stunt our growth, can decelerate (and reverse?) our advance in the salvation war.

We're not the first to fall into the temptation. But we should be the last. We can be the exception that proves the possibility of redemption. We can be the example of God doing the unprecedented. How?

We have to recognize the state of affairs.

I recently heard Ravi Zacharias on a podcast quote sociologist Daniel Bell define culture this way: "Culture is the effort to provide a coherent set of answers to the existential situations that confront all human beings in the passage of their lives."

Cultural Salvationism provides a coherent set of answers. I embrace the cultural foundations: the articles of war, the orders and regulations, the handbook of doctrine. These should be common to every strain of salvationism. But on top of these there have grown cultural accretions that interpret the foundational truths and convictions in specific ways and set standards of behavior and expectation for lifestyle and jobs and leisure and vacation and recreation – at least in the West (we suspect that there are similarly standards elsewhere, though likely quite different).

And it is these cultural accretions with their burden of expectations time and money and imagination and creativity and passion that suck away such precious resources from the mission. And after a couple of generations, they replace the exigencies of mission.

So, our grandkids – some of them, anyway – still develop through our stages, from cradle roll to junior soldiership and then corps cadets to senior soldiership. But too



often these become hollow rites of passage lacking the spirit of battle. And instead of being in the world but not of it, on our worst days we are of it but not in it, complete with a weird parallel structure that might in some places look like this:

...their kids take music lessons but ours are in singing company and junior band;  
...their kids play various sports but ours are in The SA hockey league and slow-pitch tournament;  
...their kids are in 'Reach for the Top' or 'Academic Decathlon' but ours are in 'Bible Bowl';  
...their kids go to parties or clubs but ours go to youth group;  
...their kids play video games but ours play video games (ah well, it couldn't last forever).

(don't get me wrong – I'm for the 'our' side; but, lacking missional impulse, it merely a 'healthy' sub-subculture)

So, Needham is definitely right on it. We are our biggest enemy. And it isn't just cultural. It is also structural.

The institution threatens the movement.

This is the formalized version of Needham's cultural assertion. Culture is to institution, here, as mission is to movement. And that is the subject of some consideration in other contexts. And this leads to our next outtake...

----

"Mission cannot be ritualized and survive."

I'll save you looking it up: ritualize: "make (something) into a ritual by following a pattern of actions or behavior."

Now, we have to be careful on this one. There are certain patterns of action and behavior that are demonstrably effective for their purpose. Many athletes, in preparation for their sport, engage in specific patterns of action and behavior, beyond mere superstition, that includes sleep schedule, meal timing and menu, stretching, and warm-ups, and all kinds of other details to ensure that they can optimize the opportunities that will be theirs at tip-off or kick-off or the drop of the puck.

And there certainly are patterns and behaviours that can be significantly helpful for us in a similar way: reading the Bible, studying the Bible, memorizing the Bible, praying, evangelizing, discipling, worshiping, and other disciplines can be positive types of rituals that can help us optimize the opportunities that will be ours at the drop of the puck.

Needham is alluding the potential negatives of ritualization.

He describes a world in which programmes no longer serve mission and procedures no longer facilitate missional effectiveness. "And to the extent this happens, The Salvation Army becomes a culture to preserve rather than a mission to perpetuate. We may be

doing many good deeds, serving some people in helpful ways. We may have happy, spirited gatherings of Salvationists and blessed worship. But we are not The Salvation Army fulfilling its mission.”

It implies a DIFFERENT mission than the Booths threw away their lives trying to accomplish – winning the world for Jesus. An optimistic take? It implies blessing our people, showing generosity, serving the poor, wanting and working for ‘the best’ for our children, honoring our elders (in tangible ways, as possible), taking care of ‘our own’. And, look, these are not necessarily wrong or bad. They are, on a neutral field, very good. It is if and when they supplant our mission to win the world for Jesus that they become idolatrous.

And what goes for social / cultural approach, also goes for institutional. That is, when the institution primarily acts to protect and preserve rather than accelerate the advance, Needham signs the death warrant for the mission.

And what goes for social / cultural / institutional approaches, also goes for our personal approach. I remember, regrettably, peeling myself off the couch in front of the football game on Sunday afternoon during my college years to sally up for the second time that day and show up for the ‘Salvation’ (Sunday night) meeting at the corps. I wasn’t the only one in the family not thrilled with leaving the game’s second half unattended. But asked by my mother why I did it, I replied, “It is my duty.” The personal ritualization of mission suggests its imminent downfall.

----

“We Salvationists are called to make radical followers of Jesus Christ who love inclusively, serve helpfully, and disciple effectively in all the communities where we live.”

This is Needham’s stab at a soldiers’ mission statement. The idea itself is genius. He noted the gap and has filled it. And he didn’t just make it up. This has been battle tested through the mighty USA Southern Territory. Now, some might wonder if we need it. After all, we have the Articles of War. And we have The Army salute, which has a longer version than the ubiquitous ‘Hallelujah’ that goes like this: “I’m on my way to heaven and I’m doing everything I can to get everyone I can to join me.” And we have a slew of songs that we could quote affirming our dedication to ‘tear hell’s throne to pieces and win the world for Jesus’ and similar heroics.

The other nagging question about adding a personal mission statement is what it ends up saying. We’re guessing Needham would be happy for this to represent the final version. Others will want to make changes. Who decides?

Ours might omit some of the extraneous stuff – ‘in all the communities where we live’? and maybe some of the politically correct and grammatically elegant stuff (love... serve...)? while clenching hold of the underlying truth. What is that? Needham is having us say that we are meant to make disciples who make disciples. Did you get

that? And we could take that farther to say we're meant to multiply multiplying disciples. That's great as far as it goes. And on a personal level, is probably enough. But we can, with the addition of a simple clause, expand the mission from merely personal to broadly corporate. How about this?

As Salvationists, we're meant to multiply multiplying disciples who multiply multiplying bases.\*

Of course, in a war, a mission is given and then accomplished. For example, take that hill. When you've taken the hill, you've accomplished the mission. In a similar way, we'd want to be able to accomplish a mission in a mission statement. So, maybe we'd include a measurable in our proposal, something like, 'in every country' or 'every city' or 'until we have a million bases in our Base Network' or... THEN it would be a mission statement!

----

Needham asks questions based on his proposed mission statement:

...“How am I growing as a radical follower, disciple, imitator of Jesus Christ?

...“How am I currently fulfilling the mission of a Salvationist?

...“What steps will I take better to fulfill this mission?”

Whether or not you've found this article helpful, you can redeem the experience and the time by asking yourself Needham's questions, here.

----

“Where do you or I go from here?”

(where do WE go from here?)

Finally, where do we go from here? Is it just a nice article from Needham? Do have a few warm reflections and then get back to the swing of routine? Or does the conversation continue (this issue of JAC is the start of the continuation of the conversation!)? Or do we make it or some later version of it our soldiers' mission statement? And, more importantly, do we live and fight by the convictions expressed in it?

We lack the sway to implement a soldiers' mission statement that Salvationists multiply multiplying disciples who multiply multiplying bases. But this would be a win if a thousand (even a hundred – because 100 would pretty quickly get to 1000 and then explode from there!) readers or so decided to multiply multiplying disciples who multiply multiplying bases.

In a similar way, though to a lesser extent, even Needham lacks the sway himself to pull off a soldiers' mission statement. But how big a win it would be if 1.526530 million

senior and junior soldiers 'signed up' to this declaration: "We Salvationists are called to make radical followers of Jesus Christ who love inclusively, serve helpfully, and disciple effectively in all the communities where we live."

God help us and guide us!

-----

\* For those late to the party, The Salvation Army has three official missional units: corps, outpost, and society. Societies seem limited these days to India and Pakistan. We've rebranded societies as Army bases. Here's the simple formula: base = cells + hubs.

Cells are open groups in which people encounter the Kingdom of God, the Gospel, Christianity community, and heaps more.

Hubs are closed groups for accountability and discipleship, and are the component groups of the Infinitum way of life ([Infinitumlife.com](http://Infinitumlife.com)) committed to the following lifestyle:

One Vision: follow Jesus.

Two Virtues: Loving God, Loving Others.

Three Vows: Surrender; Generosity; Mission

(Infinitum's been crafted by a handful of Salvationists and its handy resources are free at [Infinitumlife.com](http://Infinitumlife.com))