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Editorial Introduction

By Major Stephen Court, editor

Greetings in the name of our great God and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome to JAC146 - the 146th issue of Journal of Aggressive Christianity. This is a short issue with a theme that will emerge naturally to you, the careful reader.

We lead off JAC146 with a 'JAC First Person' feature, a testimony called Identity by Tara Foster, a soldier in Canada. This will be enlightening to some and liberating to others.

Envoy Steve Bussey, territorial mission strategist in USE territory, follows with a 'Denominational' breakdown, clarifying for casual readers and casual 'salvos' what we are and what we aren't.

And then we've got a little feature updating General William Booth's Chief Dangers of the last century. Here's some context:

This is a day in which influential voices among the people of God in western society have publicly expressed personal doubts about their faith, questioned time-honoured beliefs, and even renounced Christianity. The trendy deconstruction of our theology has reached a critical inflection point. Some are decidedly pessimistic about Kingdom prospects in the developed world in light of cultural moral declension.

But Salvationists have always been missionally optimistic. Though not official doctrine, primitive Salvationists, following the Founders, were confirmed post-millennialists, believing that their movement would inaugurate the millennium!

At the turn of the last century (1900), in response to a query about his perspective on the future and the Gospel, William Booth opined:

“The chief danger that confronts the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, heaven without hell.”

It's a huge prophecy, one that has straddled a couple of centuries now. And it has proven true. We're going to add a few more dangers for a new century in JAC146. These are far from exhaustive, but might get our thinking hats on and our prayer knee pads on. They are;

Friendship Without Evangelism

Conversion Without Discipleship

Professionalization Without Democratization

Read, pray, share, apply. And if you finish before Jesus returns and before the next JAC issue, then feel free to plunge into the free archives, 145 issues' worth.

Courage and Godspeed!

JAC First Person: Identity

By Tara Foster

“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Jesus' words in the light of today's worldview can seem so confusing. Everyone is told to find their truth, but really, Jesus didn't say know your truth. He said you shall know THE truth. The freedom that comes from knowing and living a life with Christ is truly something the world cannot give you.

As a child I was exposed to horrors no one should have to endure. Physically, sexually, and emotionally abused from as young as 2, I bounced in and out of foster care. The only light in that time came from my grandparents, who provided my younger brother and I with the only stability we would ever know as young people. They ensured we got a Catholic education, and our grandmother would take us to church.

Throughout my teenage years I couldn't understand why God, who was able to move mountains if He so desired, allowed so many horrific things to happen. I decided that if He was real, He definitely didn't love me, and I wanted nothing to do with Him.

As a teenager I was often angry, and just desperate to feel like I mattered, that even people would care if I was alive or dead. The trauma of the abuse left me with a huge distrust of people, but men particularly, something I'm sure many trauma survivors resonate with.

From about the age of 13 or 14 I started to realise that I wasn't like most girls my age. I had always been a tomboy, but it was different. I was different. I began having feelings of attraction toward other girls, and eventually I came out as a lesbian.

Coming out was terrifying. I was scared of how people would react, in particular my grandparents with their 'Christian' beliefs. All the while, I was still asking the question why did God make me this way? No matter who I asked, the only answer I would ever get was that I was born this way, and I should be proud of who I was. So, as a result, my sexuality became my identity.

I found myself looking to relationships with other girls as well as drugs and alcohol to fix the brokenness that my childhood had left me with. At the end of 2013, a knock came on my door that I'll never forget. My Mum had died, at just 44 years old. Mum's death had an effect that I never saw coming. Even though we had a complicated relationship, and often didn't get along, I was filled with guilt and anger for the way things ended and even blamed myself for it.

Eventually I moved back to the city and it put even further pressure on the already unhealthy relationship I was in. The pressures and stress of my dysfunctional life caused me to become the worst version of myself. However, the Lord in His graciousness created opportunity for me to play drums at The Salvation Army and I strangely accepted it. The first thing I noticed about these Salvo Christians is that

they were nothing like I thought they would be. They really loved Jesus and I could clearly see it.

Somehow, during my time of trying to deal with my Mum's death and attending meetings with the Salvos, my relationship with my partner came to an end. My inability to deal with my trauma in a healthy way had left both of us unhappy and unfulfilled.

I decided it was too hard to keep attending church because it was just too hard to keep hiding my hurt. Besides, I thought I didn't need God and that it was best to cut myself off from the 'Jesus people'. Once again, I fell deeper into the darkness that had become comfortable and turned back to old habits to numb the pain.

The Lord however is so gracious, and faithful. He never gives up on us, even when we try to give up on ourselves. The Lord used my officers, who kept trying to reach out, and even went as far as to show up to my final graduating recital of my music degree.

In the weeks following, I found myself back at church. Immediately, I could tell something was different. I couldn't put my finger on it at the time, but now I understand that I was encountering Holy Spirit for the first time in my life. I can't explain how it happened, but I suddenly had a desire to learn about this Jesus that everyone was so in love with. So, I approached the officer and asked if I could borrow a Bible. He replied by saying, "No, you cannot borrow a bible. But you can keep one... only if you promise to read it." I agreed and started reading the Bible. For the first time in my life, I found myself believing it and desperate for more.

As an LGBT youth, I was constantly told that I was born gay and that I should be proud of my sexuality. Nothing could change it because that was 'who I was'. My definition of myself and my self-worth was summed up in the word 'homosexual'. But, as God began to soften my heart, I began to listen to His voice.

My sexuality defined me. I considered it my identity. But if that was really who I was, then why has there always been this empty hole in my heart?

The healing I experienced in the months following my encounter with Holy Spirit left me knowing in my heart the answer. Jesus was what I had been missing. Only through Him could I ever find the true peace and happiness I so desperately craved. I was seeing answers to prayer in a way I could never have fathomed, and at first, I struggled to accept it.

As I learned to love God more the issue of my sexuality kept coming to my mind. Throughout my life I had been told by most people that there was nothing wrong with same-sex relationships. 'Love is Love'. While it's become more of a noted conversation now, at that time, even at The Salvation Army it was very rare to hear people talk about homosexuality in church, and the truth is, it didn't really come up at all in any of the Sunday meetings I attended.

Yet, as I read the Bible and reflected on the life of Jesus, this is exactly what God kept bringing to my attention. I decided I had to repent and give it over to Him. I

found myself willing to surrender every part of myself, no matter what it cost, because my identity is found as a child of God. Not anything the world can tell me. When I did, an indescribable peace came into my heart!

My whole life the one thing I had been missing was Jesus. It may sound surprising, but God has even helped me forgive the person who abused me as a child. His power truly is limitless. My purpose, my heart's desire, and especially my identity come from Him.

I no longer call myself a lesbian. I simply tell people that I'm a Christian.

Saved by grace through faith and a loved daughter of God!

Denominational Envoy Steve Bussey

The word “denomination” comes from the old French and Latin, meaning “to name something completely.” Some etymologists believe the Latin word “nomen” and the Greek word “nomos” are interchangeable. The Greek word refers to the idea of “law” or “precept.”

A denomination is a band of people who share a complete and logical understanding of the precepts of Scriptural interpretation. In Judges 17:6 we read about how in Israel “everyone did whatever seemed right in their own eyes” - they interpreted the law (nomos) subjectively and in isolation.

In today’s postmodern world, we have come to celebrate radical subjectivity. “My truth” is absolute. In many ways, every person has become their own denomination, their own tribe. Recently, it has become popular to say, “I am post-denominational” - I don’t associate with any tribe. I’m a theological “nomad.” This sounds better, right?

Let’s play this out: Romans 12 challenges us to “not be conformed to the patterns of this world” but rather to “be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we can test and approve what God’s will is.” That makes sense! I read Scripture, interpret it, and live it out. Simple.

How do I test and approve what God’s will is? Do I just do what is right in my own eyes? No. I need to be accountable. Who should I be accountable to? People who are going to tell me what I want to here? Doesn’t this lead to confirmation bias? To groupthink? Yes, somewhat. But how do I know what God’s will is? How do I make sure I am not “drinking the kool-aid of some crazy cult?”

Interesting to note that “cult” has to do with worship... It is also where the idea of “culture” comes from - a group that shares an identity, a set of beliefs, values, and behaviors. Those shared ideas entice folks to come together and share in community around those shared convictions. Many cultures are shaped online these days by virtual groups of people who share their ideas - their views of the world.

But back to the kool-aid: How do I know I’m not in a cult? How can I figure out whether my culture is healthy? If I am a sheep (stay with me on this metaphor) - and I know sheep have a tendency to stray... How do I make sure I am not being led by a wolf in sheep’s clothing? How do I make sure the culture that is shaping my identity, values, beliefs, and behaviors is good for me - and, more importantly, is true? How can I know whether “my truth” (or, for that matter, “our truth”) isn’t a bunch a baloney?

Back to denominations - why am I a part of a denomination and how can I make sure it is not a cult?

A “denomination” is not merely a Facebook group or a couple of folks meeting together to form a book club. A denomination roots itself in Scripture - which is what we in The Salvation Army call “the DIVINE RULE for Christian faith and practice.”

However, we do not interpret this independently, but we test it in light of TRADITION. To help avoid groupthink and slip into the whole “doing whatever is right in our eyes” thing, we connect to a broader movement that has tested and approved interpretations of what should be believed (what is called “orthodoxy”) and how this should be lived out (which is called “orthopraxy”). The “wisdom of crowds” idea applies here - in that we look to a global and historic community to test and approve these ideas. Those ideas should work together - you don’t want something that is illogical, testing an idea to make sure it works is a good practice!

There are, however, different interpretations of “what is true” and “what works” - and this is where we have the gift of REASON and EXPERIENCE to wrestle through these matters.

A denomination is a band of people who share a coherent and logical orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Those who share these convictions make up that culture. They share a view of Scripture that is rooted in a particular tradition and embrace an articulated logical belief system which they commit to living according to. Like any group, there are certain rules which govern the band. If I am a fan of Coca-Cola, I join that club. If I am a fan of Pepsi, I join that club. If I think Coke should be Pepsi, I am entitled to that opinion... but I should probably join the Pepsi club...

Likewise, those who are part of a denomination share those convictions. A person is entitled to change their views, but this ends up changing which group one associates with.

In our denomination, The Salvation Army, we are global, we are diverse, we are historic. How do we remain united? What is it that brings us together? This movement is rooted in Scripture. We are part of the universal church. We come from the Protestant tradition. We come from the Classical evangelical tradition - and more specifically the Arminian, Wesleyan, revivalist, and reform tradition. We were founded by William and Catherine Booth who rooted us in the worldview we call “Salvationism” which is tethered to this tradition.

Our orthodox beliefs are articulated in our Handbook of Doctrine. Our orthopraxy (behaviours) are articulated in our Orders and Regulations. These continue to be wrestled through with international governance councils. We are connected to the broader evangelical community and the wider ecumenical church. This is not merely a Facebook group, this is a denomination.

One other important point, while some tribes/denominations operate on a Congregationalist governance model, we do not. We are an autocratic movement - which means that we don’t “vote” whether or not we are going to change our beliefs. This was abandoned in 1875 when the Booths realized the governance model of the Methodist New Connexion would lead to mission drift.

To keep “the main thing the main thing,” the members of the Christian Mission began to make the shift from mission to Army. They shifted from their 'superintendent' leadership to 'General' leadership.

Superintendent to being a “General” - yep, a person who says, “this is what we are doing - and we do it.” Wow - that’s some serious trust! How do we make sure this person is aligned? There are checks and balances out into place. In fact, there are limits to even the authority of the General to change things! That’s how serious this movement is about not drifting from our convictions and mission! The Army even set a succession plan in place (modified in 1929 for extra checks and balances) to guard this identity and purpose and to protect the movement from straying from these convictions of belief and practice.

While we have a new Orders and Regulations for Soldiers - it really is the same, but just articulated in a new and fresh way. However, we in The Salvation Army believe strongly in free will. Every person chooses whether they will follow Christ. Likewise, every person chooses whether they will be part of a denomination.

So what band are you a part of? For me, I have wrestled and been convicted that I am called to be a soldier in The Salvation Army. My covenant is not to the General. It is to God. However, I will faithfully serve under my General and my Territorial leadership to live out these ideals. I hope you will join!

Friendship Without Evangelism

That is, while we agree that friendship evangelism is probably the most consistently effective means of evangelising for individuals (we'll grant that power evangelism and mass evangelism will trump this in some circumstances), in practice it is too often too much friendship and not enough evangelism.

And that's a gigantic problem. We came across an evangelism guide that prompts the evangelist to list 100 friends who don't know Jesus for purposes of prayer and to arrange evangelistic appointments. If 1.6 million Salvationists, for example, each did that, we'd evangelise 160 million people pretty quickly! That sounds impressive (and would be).

The challenges are as follows:

- too careful to nurture and protect the friendship that we don't evangelise the friends. Now, even if this isn't the case for you or for any Salvationists, for the sake of argument, it remains the case for too many Christians worldwide. And though the math might suggest that all of the Christians in the world are at least 1% of the global population, it seems patently and tragically obvious that there are billions of people whose Christian friends aren't evangelizing them.
- . not enough friends. The second part of the problem is that we don't have enough friends. Maybe you saw that bit about listing 100 friends and you figured that beyond your soldier friends you might get stuck in low double digits. You're not alone.

So, what's the takeaway?

Two-fold:

First, Salvationists have to step in the gap created by Christians who camp out at friendship and don't touch the evangelism by evangelizing some of the billions of people who lack a reasonable Christian witness. That means we have to evangelise other people's friends who are not (yet?) our friends.

Second? We have to make more friends.

Look ahead.

So, by all means, engage in friendship evangelism. If you are a solid Christian and you DON'T evangelise your friends, you are misrepresenting yourself to them.

Conversion Without Discipleship

This is gigantic. We're meant to make disciples, ideally multiplying disciples. The multiplication mandate (2 Timothy 2:2) depicts three generations of discipleship in one verse (Paul discipling Timothy is one 'generation'; Timothy discipling reliable people is a second; and reliable people discipling others is the third)! It is the means of winning the world for Jesus. Converts who don't get disciplined cannot generate more disciples efficiently.

The multiplication maxim – Salvos aim at multiplying multiplying disciples multiplying multiplying bases – should be our compass. And that is implied in 2 Timothy 2:2 as Paul focusses on one person – Timothy. And then Timothy doesn't just grow in his love and knowledge and experience of God. Timothy disciplines reliable people. Not just one person but maybe a handful. He's fruitful. He multiplies. Similarly (and not surprisingly, since Timothy is replicating himself in them so they end up being like him in many ways), the reliable people don't just grow in their love and knowledge and experience of God. They disciple others. And we can reasonably guess that the others carry on the process as they aim at multiplying multiplying disciples...

And the second part of the multiplication maxim is 'multiplying multiplying bases'. This doesn't make any sense at initial reading, except to note that these aren't any disciples but are engaged in significant activity. And what's this significant activity, multiplying multiplying bases?

Here's a simple formula: base = cells + hubs.

You are likely familiar with all kinds of cell groups, things like small group, life group, home group, house church, pocket church, micro church, and more. What they share in common, for our purposes, is this: all cell groups are OPEN groups. That is, we want more and more people to come to them each week to encounter Jesus, the Kingdom, Christian community, and so much more.

Infinitum hubs are, in contrast, CLOSED groups (in that they consist of a set group membership, typically of a couple or a few people) that provide the context for discipleship, accountability, and spiritual guidance (Infinitum is a rule of life focused on one vision – Follow Jesus; two virtues – Loving God and Loving Others; and three vows – Surrender, Generosity, and Mission^[1]).

So, not only are our disciples multiplying bases – these cell groups that are underpinned by hubs – but they are multiplying, multiplying bases (bases that don't settle with blessing the handful of people participating in them but aiming to replicate themselves again and again).

Salvo Perspective: There are three types of spiritual units in The Salvation Army: corps, outposts, and societies. But outside of the Indian subcontinent and parts of Africa, you'd be hard pressed to actually find a society outside of the Year Book. By definition, a society is a company of soldiers working together in a neighbourhood without an officer. Now, because the term 'society' has different connotations in the western world than this, we've rebranded societies as bases.

Did you catch that? Now, ‘bases’, as official SA units, have these advantages, among others:

- they streamline salvationism. That is, everything that composes SA DNA can exist in a base.
- they bypass bureaucracy. According to the 1943 Orders and Regulations for Divisional Commanders, societies / bases do not require headquarters approval. Why is that? It’s mostly because bases don’t require vocational Christian leadership, dedicated facilities, or operating budgets.
- they replicate rapidly. The conventional model for starting a new corps is quite an exercise. It normally involves deploying of vocational Christian leaders, securing buildings (main hall and quarters and maybe a thrift store), designating significant financial resources for many years, and more. But to start a base really only requires the cell group to hit the maximum size in the model being used in a consistent way and having another leader ready to go.
- they revitalize the revolution. They feature the mobilization of the people – apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers (shepherds and teachers = disciplers!) – in real-life salvation war-fighting.

So, let’s aim at multiplying multiplying disciples multiplying multiplying bases.

[1] Infinitum is a Latin word that can be translated ‘boundless’. For more information, visit infinitumlife.com and/or download the Infinitum app.

Professionalization Without Democratization

(a 'chief' danger' of the 21st century)

What are we getting at, here? There's been a hyper-professionalization of western Christianity that strays from biblical norms and thus warps biblical Christianity and hampers the advance of the great commission (we are not here against the pursuit of excellence, effectiveness, and efficiency).

How does it look? In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul explains how the 'ecclesia' – the called out – are meant to operate.

11 He endowed us with the apostolic, the prophetic, the evangelistic, and the counseling and instructive, ^[1]

12 to prepare 'the sanctified', to kick up dust in a flurry of activity for their labours, to construct and build up Christ's body, ^[2]

13 until we arrive at unanimity in action on our convictions and a proper recognition of God's Son, in consummate adulthood, our stature measured by Christ's superabundance^[3]

14 Then, we will no longer be speechless and simple-minded, every new instruction blowing us, surging and conveyed around, into the fraudulent craftiness and trickery of human deception. ^[4]

15 We will speak truth, with affection, and in so doing grow in every way like Christ, who is our head.^[5] 16 Christ fits and holds together every supporting joint, each part playing its part causing the body to grow, building herself up in goodwill. ^[6]

How has that looked in practice? It has normally looked like the first three roles that Jesus gives – apostle, prophet, evangelist – being ignored. And it has looked like the separation of the fourth role into two separate, professionalized careers: 'pastor', and teacher. And, yet, that's not what it says.

First, the word translated 'pastor' is everywhere else in the Bible translated 'shepherd'. We have a general idea of what shepherds do. With a lot of patience and energy, they care for their flocks. They apply the rod to correct and the staff to direct, and they protect their sheep from all manner of threats. But how do people today see 'pastor'? From a neutral perspective, 'pastor' is typically assumed to be the (male) vocational Christian leader of a local body of believers. We're guessing that the opinionated perspective on 'pastors', coming from people who don't follow Jesus, is much less sunny.

So, to be clear, 'pastor' as vocational Christian leader is neither a biblical position nor strategically beneficial (because of the negative connotations of non-participants and the enervating effect on the non-'pastors').

Second, we have teachers. While this role is often conflated with 'pastor', in that 'pastors' typically carry the microphone on Sunday mornings, there is some respect

for teaching within conventional modern western communities of believers. A lot of respect. In some kinds of Christianity, the sermon is the focus of the weekly gathering (to clarify, this is not meant to be the case in The Salvation Army, in which the 'prayer meeting', also known as the appeal, is the climax of every meeting).

To recap this bit, we typically, these days, ignore apostles and prophets and evangelists and magnify 'pastors' and teachers.

Here's the rub: The Greek in the text includes shepherd and teacher together. They aren't even the 'fourth' and 'fifth' of these roles Jesus gives 'the called out'. Combined, they compose the fourth. So, biblically, there isn't such thing as a 'pastor' or a teacher. There is a role that combines both functions. So, think for a moment of what role in the Body of Christ involves shepherding and teaching.

Right! Discipler. Do you get it? Disciplers are disciples who disciple others. They shepherd and teach them. They are not necessarily, and not for the most part, professional Christians. They are like you and me – bi-vocational (in that they carry a day job and also fill this role as discipler).

Solution? Well, first of all, let's pay some attention to the apostles, and prophets, and evangelists. Let's identify and welcome and nurture and attend to them.

And let's identify the disciplers and magnify their role in the Body. This involves downsizing unbiblical roles of 'pastor' and teacher (as currently understood and normally activated in our day).

Democratization in this sense leans away from clerical and ecclesiastical professionalization into the role of the amateur – the opposite: 'amateur: "engaging or engaged in without payment; nonprofessional". Here's the origin of the word 'amateur': "mid 18th century: French, from Latin amator 'lover', from amare 'to love'."

We are mobilizing the people of God and deploying them as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and disciplers out of LOVE.

It's a wildly different operating Body of Christ.

Endnotes:

[1] didomi – Strong's give, endue (endowed)- endue- definition: endow with a quality or ability, originates in late Middle English 'induct into an ecclesiastical living'; tous = the ('the' as in ESV, NLT); poimen = shepherd; AV Translation count – shepherd 17; pastor 1; shepherd definition – person who tends and rears sheep; verb – gives guidance (counseling) didaskalos = instructor (instructive); (apostle, prophet, evangelist, and shepherd instructor are nouns in the original; they are rendered adjective here to smoothly accompany the definite article that precedes each and the verb endue) ['endued' verb tense aorist active indicative]

[2] katartison = preparing, equipping, complete furnishing (prepare); aigon = sacred, holy ('the sanctified'); ergon = work, toil, labour (labours); diakonos = attendant, servant; HELPS – thoroughly raise up dust by moving in a hurry, to kick up dust as one running an errand (kick up dust in a flurry of activity); oikodomen = building, architecture, edifying (construct and build up); somatos = body

[3] katantao = meet against, arrive at, attain (arrive at); henotes = oneness; Strong's – unity, unanimity, agreement (unanimity); pistis = persuasion, credence, moral conviction (action on... convictions); epignosis = recognition (properly recognise); aner = man; Strong's – distinguish an adult man from a boy; used generically of a group of both men and women (adulthood); teleios = complete;

Strong's – brought to its end, finished, perfect, consummate (consummate); metron = measure (measured); helikia = maturity, age, stature (stature); pleroma – fullness, a filling up; Strong's – a ship inasmuch as it is filled – manned - with sailors, rowers, and soldiers, the body of believers... ; Chandler – complement, as in crew being the complement of the ship; HELPS – even super abundance (superabundance)

[4] nepios = not speaking, simple-minded (speechless and simple-minded); kludonizomai = surge (surging); periphero = convey around (conveyed around); anemos = wind (blowing); didaskalia = instruction (instruction); kubeia = gambling; Strong's – deception, defrauding (deception); anthopos = man-faced (human); panourgia = adroitness; Strong's – craftiness, cunning (craftiness); methodeia = traveling over, wile; Strong's – cunning arts, deceit, craft, trickery (trickery); plane = fraudulence, straying from orthodoxy ; Strong's – straying about (fraudulent)

[5] agape = love, goodwill; Strong's – affection, goodwill, love, benevolence, esteem; HELPS – moral preference (affection)

[6] epichoregias = supply (supporting); energeian = operative power; + metron = measure (playing its part); poieo = make (causing); heautou = him or her (her, following the other role of the people of God as 'bride'); agape = love, goodwill; Strong's – affection, goodwill, love, benevolence, esteem; HELPS – moral preference (goodwill)