

intended' as a derogatory term, the Wesley's welcomed it.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps while studying the classics with the Holy Club, Wesley came upon Justin Martyr's writings on Holy Communion, in which he advises that a collection be received following the sacrament for the aid of widows and orphans:

Henceforward, we constantly remind one another of these things. The rich among us come to the aid of the poor, and we always stay together. For all the favors we enjoy we bless the Creator of all, through His Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. On the day which is called Sunday we have a common assembly of all who live in the cities or in the outlying districts, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets are read, as long as there is time. Then, when the reader has finished, the president of the assembly verbally admonishes and invites all to imitate such examples of virtue. Then we all stand up together and offer up our prayers, and, as we said before, after we finish our prayers, bread and wine and water are presented. He who presides likewise offers up prayers and thanksgivings, to the best of his ability, and the people express their approval by saying 'Amen.' The Eucharistic elements are distributed and consumed by those present, and to those who are absent they are sent through the deacons. The wealthy, if they wish, contribute whatever they desire, and the collection is placed in the custody of the president. {With it} he helps the orphans and widows, those who are needy because of sickness or any other reason, and the captives and strangers in our midst; in short, he takes care of all those in need.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever the source of his concern for the poor, John Wesley made it clear that works of both piety and mercy are necessary for sanctification. Being engaged in both of these works was a means of working out our full salvation.

### **The impact of his ministry**

John Wesley's economic ethic is often quoted, paraphrasing it as Wesley

himself did, in three phrases: "Gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can." <sup>12</sup> Wesley's actual economic ethic can be summarized in four points:

1. Ultimately everything belongs to God;
2. Resources are placed in our care to use as God sees fit;
3. God desires that we use these resources to meet our necessities (i.e., providing shelter and food for ourselves and dependents), and then to help others in need; thus
4. Spending resources on luxuries for ourselves while others remain in need is robbing God! <sup>13</sup>

John Wesley would have thought it a mortal sin to possess surplus accumulation while being surrounded by those whose economic needs remained unmet. He was not entirely successful in convincing others of this, for Methodists were prone to retain any hard-won surplus for themselves. Wesley issued warnings in numerous sermons against retaining wealth instead of sharing it with those who were in need, admonishing his hearers that this correlated directly with a decline in their spiritual growth and in the progress of the revival. <sup>14</sup> There is a noted absence of such an emphasis, for the most part, in present day North American Methodism, if not in the Protestant faith in general.

While serving as pastor of a Church in Virginia, I maintained a running argument with the Chairperson of the Church's Mission Committee. He would say to me "all this prayer and Bible study you do is nice, but that's not where it's at! People need to get involved in social action! That's what is really important!" I would respond: "No, *you've* got it all wrong. Prayer and Bible study come first, *then* comes the social action. Otherwise, people won't understand *why* they are involved in social action, and the tendency is to pat yourself on the back for what you did and think that your service came from a sense of duty rather than serving in the name of Christ. His response was not Wesleyan! John Wesley maintained that consistent and faithful social action must be grounded in communal spiritual formation. The empowerment for social action stemmed from one's personal relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

Wesley linked one's sanctification (the holiness of heart and life) with one's involvement with the poor. In 1743 he published *The Character of a Methodist*,

his first tract on Christian perfection. He listed as characteristic of his movement, these emphases:

♦ By *salvation* [the Methodist] means holiness of heart and life. ... We do not place the whole of religion (as too many do, God knoweth) either in doing no harm, or in doing good, or in using the ordinances of God ...

♦ “What then is the mark?” ... a Methodist is one who has “the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him”; one who “loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind and with all his strength” ...

♦ And while he thus always exercises his love to God ... this commandment is written in his heart, that “he who loveth God, loves his brother also” ...

♦ ... His obedience is in proportion to his love, the source from whence it flows. And therefore, loving God with all his heart, he serves him with all his strength ...

♦ Lastly, as he has time, he “does good unto all men”—unto neighbours, and strangers, friends and enemies. And that in every possible kind; not only to their bodies, by “feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that are sick or in prison”; but much more does he labour to do good to their souls, as of the ability which God giveth.<sup>15</sup>

In his 1765 sermon “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” Wesley integrates the two emphases: (1) Salvation is by grace, yet (2) God upholds a place for our responsive appropriation of this grace. Wesley insists that both works of piety and works of mercy are “necessary to sanctification,” being the way that God has appointed us to “wait for complete salvation.” This connection is also prominent in his classic sermon “On Working Out Our Own Salvation” (1785), where the major means that he recommends for working out our full salvation is faithful engagement in both works of piety and works of mercy.<sup>16</sup>

On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the community of believers was so open and responsive to the Holy Spirit that they were *unanimously* and *immediately* transformed into *full* holiness of heart and life. An expression of this transformation was the members’ love for one another, which constrained them to hold all things in common. John Wesley lamented the way that the later Christian church had fallen from this pristine model. He longed for the Methodist movement to become the pioneering community that led to the church’s recovery.<sup>17</sup>

I John 3:17 no doubt impacted John Wesley: "*If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?*" (NIV) To have the love of God within was to imitate Christ. Embracing a life of self-denial was a mark of a disciple of Jesus Christ, because self-denial was a defining characteristic of the life of Jesus.

In his sermon on "The Means of Grace," John Wesley defines the means of grace as "outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the *ordinary* channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace." His initial list of the means of grace includes three elements: "prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the Scriptures ( which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon), and receiving the Lord's Supper." Later Wesley adds fasting and Christian conference. <sup>18</sup>

I have served as pastor of a two-point charge (two congregations served by one pastor), a city congregation, a larger wealthy suburban congregation, as a District Superintendent with supervisory responsibilities for 82 congregations and 54 active pastors, and as a member of the Bishop's Cabinet in Virginia where the Bishop has pastoral oversight for 1225 congregations. For the past two years I have served as General Secretary of the World Methodist Council, an organization which links the "people called Methodist" in the Wesleyan tradition in seventy-seven member churches located in over 132 countries of the world. All of this has taken place while living in the United States, for the first 32 years in the state of Virginia and the last two years as a resident of North Carolina. My current appointment puts me in contact with the Methodist family worldwide as well as other Christian World Communions, including the Salvation Army. I have discovered in my ministry that, although the name of John Wesley is regularly lifted before the people, and the "Wesleyan Heritage" is proudly proclaimed, very few of Wesley's ideals and admonishments regarding the poor are upheld. Some of the realities in my ministry, which I have found to prevail include:

1. No congregation will ever "out-run" its pastoral leadership. The pastor sets the tone for ministry. The congregation and pastor may share the same vision, and if so, then significant advances in the Kingdom of God may occur. If the pastor and congregation do not share the same vision, both are capable of hin-

dering any progress or advancement toward the other's vision for mission and ministry, and often working toward a shared vision for mission and ministry is difficult at best. Too much potential good for the Kingdom of God is lost over such stalemates.

2. When invited to participate in mission and ministry, most people favor responding by "sending a check" rather than "getting involved." While this may soothe one's conscience, it denies the personal experience of one human being involved in the life of another human being, and maintains a distance that avoids intimacy and caring at a deeper level.

3. "Mission is provided for in the apportionments." This is a common statement heard when an opportunity arises for a congregation to respond to a need, particularly a need that does not hit close to home. The apportionment system is a levy applied to congregations who share in the general ministries of the denomination. In my experience in the United Methodist Church, the apportionments are more often viewed as a "tax" and thus often become the last thing to be paid (or the first to be cut if a shortage of funds exists) rather than viewed as mission and ministry which is vital to the congregation's purpose and reason for existing. As a District Superintendent, I discovered that many pastors were negligent in their duties to promote the missional giving of the denomination through the apportionment system, leaving that instead to me, thereby avoiding taking a stand, avoiding potential conflict with the nay-sayers of the congregation, and neglecting the opportunity to exercise leadership in this area.

4. Institutional maintenance prevails! Maintaining the facilities is often more important to a congregation than ministering to the needs of the community around the church. My own Annual Conference spends a disproportional amount of time discussing clergy benefits while devoting less time to "Christian Conferencing," Bible study, prayer and discerning God's will for the Church. The popular church consultant in the United States, Lyle Schaller, once said "the purpose of the board of trustees in a church is to keep people from using the facilities!" I have often quoted the anonymous person who said that the "pillars of the church are the ones that are always holding things up!"

5. Giving to the poor, serving the poor, helping the poor is often a "seasonal" or a momentary event, and not a lifestyle. Examples: In the United States, churches will share "Thanksgiving baskets" with "the needy" in late November,

often showing little or no concern for the same individuals the remaining eleven months of the year. Charities target the Christmas season because our hearts are more motivated toward giving at that time than at other times of the year. My mailbox receives more solicitations in the last two months of the calendar year than in the entire previous ten-month period. Churches may stock their food pantry once a month with donations and wait four more weeks to “ask again,” regardless of the need that may arise in the intervening time.

6. In spite of what we want people to think, human beings are basically selfish. A prominent attorney, Mr. Martin, in a congregation I once served, told me that his mother would cut the buttons off of the shirts she gave to Goodwill because “she thought she might lose a button one day, and then where would she find one?” Most of us know where our next meal is going to come from, and yet there are those who have no idea from whence their next meal will come, and it is of little or no concern to most of us. Our closets are often lined with clothing, which we seldom, if ever, wear, while others are in want. A parishioner of mine was once convicted of her excesses when a homeless mother with two children the same age as her children came to the homeless shelter the week our congregation sponsored it. She went home and gathered enough “surplus” clothing to provide multiple outfits for both children and the mother, and never even missed the items of clothing!

7. We tend to “pick and choose” the parts of scripture we take to heart: We want to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1: 22a) while we choose to disregard the words John, “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?” (I John 3:17 NIV)

8. In the United States, the “Great American Dream” (owning your own home, having more than one automobile, raising children to be successful and productive members of society, building a comfortable retirement portfolio with abundant leisure opportunities on the horizon, etc.), and buying into the advertisement of Madison Avenue, which targets your own selfishness, your desires, happiness, beauty, good times, etc., have contributed to a self-serving, unfulfilled, “chronically unhappy with what you have and with who you are” population who may know of the Great Commission (“Go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit...” Matthew 28: 16-20) and the

Great Commandment, ("A new commandment I give you, love one another." John 13:34) but who are inclined to go to Church and then go home, remaining unchanged by the message of the Gospel to reach and care for the least and the lost.

9. "God only calls a certain type of person to be a minister or a missionary. If you're not that type of person you get a regular job. People in "regular jobs" have to support the people who "do the ministry." This is a quote from a relative of mine! We have developed a "professionalized" ministry and neglected teaching the "ministry of the laity." John Wesley would never have allowed for this differentiation, for the role of caring, teaching, visiting, and providing for the poor was the responsibility of every believer.

Methodism, as it began in Oxford in the 1730s, emphasized a ministry of mercy to the poor. Children's educational needs were attended to, food was taken to the needy, wool and other materials were provided from which people could make clothing or other durable goods to wear or to sell. An extensive prison ministry was carried out. The "Methodists" were characterized by their particular emphasis on "love of neighbor" and by their following of Christ's example ("who went about doing good," Acts 10:8)

Methodism lacks such a defining characteristic today at the local level. In the mid 1990s the United Methodist Church in the United States, the largest member church of the World Methodist Council, hired a consulting agency to determine society's image of the Church. The results of the costly study determined that the United Methodist Church "had no image to speak of." An intensive and expensive advertising campaign was then approved, and the results will be shared with the next General Conference of the denomination in 2004.

Methodism would be strengthened and the Kingdom of God significantly enhanced, in my opinion, if the emphasis that John Wesley's placed on works of piety and works of mercy going hand in hand were actively adhered to in today's world. Believers would then be compelled, not by a sense of "duty," but out of a sense that caring for and sharing with others, particularly those who are poor, marginalized, disenfranchised and disadvantaged, is as vital as caring for one's own spiritual life.

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# The Witness of Early Methodist Women

*Paul W. Chilcote*

## **Introduction**

The Wesleyan Revival under the direction of the Wesley brothers arose as a renewal movement within the Church of England. The Wesleys never intended to found a new denomination; rather, they organized small groups within the life of the church in order to rediscover a living faith rooted in love. These "Religious" or "United Societies," as they were originally called, functioned as catalysts for renewal and provided a supportive environment within which new disciples could explore their calling as Christians. In these groups, which augmented the liturgical rhythms and normal worship life of the Anglican Church, the early Methodists shared the vision of the Christian life as a spiritual journey, a way of devotion in which faith working by love leads to holiness of heart and life. The heartbeat of the whole movement was personal religious experience and its power to transform both the individual and society. This revival of essential Christianity involved a rediscovery of the Bible, an emphasis on the experience of conversion or saving faith, and a vision of activity in the life of the world as women and men together participated in God's mission. In contrast to the cultural context in which it emerged, the Methodist movement gave elevated status to the place and role of women within its structures and common life.

*Rediscovery of the Bible.* The Wesleyan Revival, like virtually all other

authentic movements of Christian renewal, was quite simply a rediscovery of the Bible. The early Methodist people understood the Bible to be the supreme authority in matters of faith and practice. In both preaching and personal study, the scriptural text sprang to new life, forming, informing, and transforming their lives with immediate affect and lasting influence. For the women, scripture was liberating; but the freedom they discovered in Christ through the Word often demanded their prophetic witness to the truth in the face of opposition. Their defense of the ministry of women, for example, ran counter to the accepted social and ecclesial norms of their day and required great courage.

*Liberation through a Community of Grace.* Encounter with the Word immediately draws God's children into community through shared experience. From the time of Christ there has always been an evangelical faith—a community of life rooted in a God who proclaims good news. There have always been men and women of faith who have experienced God's love in their lives through Jesus of Nazareth as a liberating experience of grace. This was particularly true for the women of 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain. It is not too much to say that early Methodism was comprised, in large measure, of many small communities of women.<sup>1</sup>

*Centrality of Mission/Evangelism.* Those who encountered the good news of the gospel and were subsequently drawn into Christian communities of love were also propelled into the world with a mission of witness and service. Wesleyanism is essentially concerned with social justice and mission rooted in evangelical faith.<sup>2</sup> The women of early Methodism were people of vision, and the image of the church they lived out was one of active social service, commitment to the poor, and advocacy for the spiritually, politically, and socially oppressed.<sup>3</sup> For the women there could be no separation of their personal experience of God in Christ from their active role as agents of reconciliation and social transformation in the world. Mission and evangelism were not viewed as separate (and even, perhaps, optional) aspects of the Christian life; rather, they were the very essence of what it meant to be a Christian in the Wesleyan tradition.

Methodist women, therefore, sought out people in need—the poor, the hungry, the destitute and the neglected. They preached the Word, visited prisons, established orphanages and schools, and practiced their servant-oriented faith as devoted mothers who discerned the presence of God in the most menial of chores. Hardly passive Christians for whom ministry was performed; these

women were active, ministering servants who cared for one another and extended their ministry into the communities they served. The advice of Wesley to a Methodist woman aspiring to "perfection" is a typical expression of this gospel alongside the poor: "Go and see the poor and sick in their own little hovels. Take up your cross, woman! Remember the faith! Jesus went before you, and will go with you. Put off the gentlewoman: You bear a higher character."<sup>4</sup>

### **The Elevated Status of Methodist Women**

Why was it that women tended to find enlarged opportunity for participation and service in early Methodism? Certainly a wealth of factors combined both in the founder and the movement to create a climate conducive to the acceptance and empowerment of women. Three factors, however, seem to have been particularly significant.

*The Personal Influence of John Wesley.* Firstly, the elevated status of women within the Wesleyan Revival cannot be understood apart from the person of John Wesley. Much of his appreciation for the place of women in the life of the church can be traced to his formative years in the Epworth rectory. Largely due to the influence of his mother, Susanna, Wesley seldom wavered from this fundamental principle: No one, including a woman, ought to be prohibited from doing God's work in obedience to the inner calling of her conscience. This conviction would later lead him not only to sanction but to encourage the controversial practice of women's preaching. Wesley was an outspoken advocate for the rights of women in an era of tremendous social upheaval. Many statements from his sermons and treatises reflect his desire to translate spiritual equality into day to day reality in the lives of women. Many students of Wesley today claim him as one of the most significant "feminist" thinkers of the 18th century.

*The Egalitarian Impulse of Wesleyan Theology.* Secondly, the egalitarian impulse of the Wesleyan Revival was founded upon certain principles held in common with a number of Christian renewal movements. Included among these were the value of the individual soul, the possibility of direct communion with God, the emphasis on the present activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, the importance placed upon shared Christian experience, the rights of conscience, and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. These views all combined to create a theological environment conducive to the empowerment of

women. Wesley's goal was personal, religious experience and its power to transform both individuals and society. His dynamic view of salvation and the Christian life, evoked by a gift of grace, tended to transcend gender and social differences. His stress on charismatic leadership fostered a leveling sentiment among the Methodists. The unity and equality of all believers in Christ became an inherent aspect of the evangelical preaching of Wesleyan itinerants. Not only was faith to be expressed in the works of all, but individual talents were to be developed as a sacred trust from God. These attitudes undercut prevailing stereotypes about the status and role of women in society. And so, the phenomenon of female leadership was a natural progression, a logical extension of the Wesleyan theology of religious experience.

*The Liberating Environment of the Methodist Society.* Thirdly, the Methodist Society provided a liberating environment for women. One of the unique features of early Methodism was its capacity to create its own leadership from within. The early pioneers who were responsible for the initiation of new Societies naturally assumed positions of leadership. The large extent to which women functioned in this sphere was a major factor contributing to the inclusiveness and vitality of the movement. By allowing women to assume important positions of leadership within the structure of the Societies, Wesley gave concrete expression to the freedom he proclaimed in his preaching. The end result was that individuals who stood impotently on the periphery of British society were empowered and gifted for service in the world. Women, who were otherwise disenfranchised in a world dominated by men, began to develop a new sense of self esteem and purpose.

The Methodist Societies, which were themselves *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* (little churches within the church, functioning as catalysts of renewal inside the established church), were composed of still smaller groups known as class and band meetings. All members of the Methodist Society were allocated to "little companies or classes." But while the classes were heterogeneous groups of about twelve members and integrated with regard to gender, the smaller band meetings (4-7) were divided between men and women and by marital status. These intimate circles of married and single women, under the leadership of women, were the primary locus of leadership development as well as spiritual accountability. Characterized by close fellowship and stricter obligations, the

bands were potent in the empowerment of women and the development of their gifts for ministry and mission. There is no question that this cellular structure of the Methodist organism accounts in large measure for the growth and dynamism of Wesley's mission.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Status and Role of Women in Early Methodism**

What still remains to be fully appreciated is the major role that women played within the life of this movement, both historically and theologically. The fact of female preponderance in the Methodist network of Societies only serves to illustrate a much larger reality.<sup>6</sup> Anecdotal evidence concerning the formative influence of women abounds in journals, diaries, and has been preserved in some local history. Women were conspicuous as pioneers in the establishment and expansion of Methodism. They founded prayer groups and Societies, and in their attempts to bear witness to their newly-discovered faith often ventured into arenas that were traditionally confined to men.

The story of Dorothy Fisher illustrates a typical missiological scenario. Converted under John Wesley's preaching in London, Dorothy joined the Society there in 1779. She introduced Methodism to Great Gonerby in Lincolnshire in 1784 by inviting the itinerant preachers to hold services at her home after her move to the north. Two years later she purchased a small stone building which, after renovation, served as a Methodist chapel. Learning of Dorothy's pioneering work, Sarah Parrot (having been told by God to do so) invited her to help establish a Methodist Society in Lincoln. Discerning that this was indeed a call from God, Dorothy consented, settled her affairs, moved to Lincoln, procured a suitable residence, and commenced her pioneering labors once again in Pauline fashion. In 1788 a small Society was formed in an old lumber room near Gowt's Bridge, consisting of four women, Dorothy Fisher, Sarah Parrot, Hannah Calder, and Elizabeth Keyley. Dorothy built yet another chapel with an adjoining residence, all of which was deeded to the Methodist Conference in later years. This story is consistent, in much of its tone and detail, with the many accounts of Methodist origins throughout the British Isles.

*The Preponderance of Women in Methodism.*<sup>7</sup> A little more than two years after the establishment of the Foundery Society in London, Wesley drew up the first list of sixty-six leaders. Of this group of formative leaders within nascent

Methodism, forty-seven were women. This example from the heart of the early movement is typical of the whole. Early records of the Society in Bristol afford similar evidence with a 2:1 ratio of women to men. Exclusively female societies were noteworthy in the early years of the revival and actually elicited some of Wesley's antagonist most biting criticism concerning the founder and his intentions. There can be no doubt that women wielded tremendous influence during these critical years wherever Methodism was planted and flourished.

*The Pioneering Work of Women.* Certainly, the primary training ground for the women was in the area of band and class meeting leadership. It was within this arena that women found the widest range of opportunity. These leaders also stood nearest to the rank and file of the movement, and for this reason occupied a strategic position within the Societies. The primary function of these leaders was to assist their Methodist brothers and sisters in a common quest for holiness. Appointment to such an office was based primarily upon one's ability to empathize with the spiritual and temporal struggles of the members for whom they cared. Of the other offices in which women functioned as pioneers, the most important include those of housekeepers, visitors of the sick, preacher's wives, and local and traveling preachers.<sup>8</sup>

Of much greater significance than might be inferred from the title, housekeeper was an office within the Methodist institutional structure which entailed serious managerial and spiritual responsibilities.<sup>9</sup> Sarah Ryan was one of the earliest housekeepers and viewed her provision of hospitality and the maintenance of order among her appointed "family" to be serious aspects of her Christian vocation. Another office in which the early Methodist women excelled was that of sick visitor. Wesley first developed this office in London in 1741, but described this important role in his *Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*: "It is the business of a Visitor of the sick, to see every sick person within his district thrice a week. To inquire into the state of their souls, and to advise them as occasion may require. . . . What was Phebe the Deaconess, but such a Visitor of the sick?"<sup>10</sup>

Grace Murray, later Bennet, was an early example of this type of leadership in the early years of the Wesleyan Revival and stands out as the clear model of the Methodist woman. An important excerpt from her journal reveals the extent of her work in the newly established Society at Newcastle:

Mr. Wesley fixed me in that part of the work which he thought proper; and when the House was finished, I was appointed to be the Housekeeper. Soon also, the people were again divided into Bands, or small select Societies; women by themselves, and the men in like manner. I had full a hundred in Classes, whom I met in two separate meetings; and a Band for each day of the week. I likewise visited the Sick and Backsliders. ... We had also several Societies in the country, which I regularly visited; meeting the women in the day time, and in the evening the whole society. And oh, what pourings out of the Spirit have I seen at those times!<sup>11</sup>

*Women Preachers in Early Methodism.* It is a little known fact that Wesley promoted and approved the preaching ministry of women in his evolving movement as early as the 1760s. He had come to the affirmation of women preachers over time, and not without some personal struggle; but once he was convinced that God was working through a whole host of women called to preach, he embraced their work on behalf of his movement wholeheartedly.<sup>12</sup> A number of these women were key players in the amazing drama of female liberation and promotion. Primary among them are Sarah Crosby, the first authorized woman preacher; Margaret Davidson, blind evangelist and first woman preacher in Ireland; Hannah Harrison; Elizabeth Hurrell; Sarah Mallet; Dorothy Ripley; Mary Stokes; and Mary Taft, greatest female evangelist of the nineteenth century, among others. Whether a member of this illustrious band or a simple class leader in a local Society, however, in the multiplicity of the offices they assumed, early Methodist women functioned as co-workers, pastors, and partners in God's renewal of the church. They felt free to express themselves, exercise their gifts and lead the Methodist family in simple acts of worship and service. They were the glue that held Wesleyanism together on the most practical levels of its existence.

### **The Spirituality of Early Methodist Women**

Before turning to several distinctive characteristics related to the spirituality of early Methodist women, it might prove helpful to survey some of the common,

salient themes of Wesleyan spirituality, namely, the foundation of grace, spiritual autobiography and the narrative of liberation/new-creation, accountable discipleship and the communal nature of spirituality, works of piety (including prayer and fasting, immersion in scripture, worship and Eucharist), and works of mercy.

*The Foundation of Grace:* Christian discipleship—the arena of God’s continuing activity in the life of the believer—is, first and foremost, a grace-filled response to God’s all-sufficient grace. Perhaps no early Methodist woman was more widely acclaimed for her proclamation of grace than Grace Murray, whom we have just met, the major prototype for female leadership within the movement. At the end of her life and many years of faithful service to the Methodist cause, she left this dying testimony:

I would have no encomiums passed on me; I AM A SINNER, SAVED FREELY BY GRACE: Grace, divine grace, is worthy to have all the glory. Some people I have heard speak much of our being faithful to the grace of God; as if they rested much on their *own* faithfulness: I never could bear this; it is *GOD’S FAITHFULNESS to his own word of promise*, that is my only security for salvation.<sup>13</sup>

*Spiritual Autobiography and the Narrative of Spiritual Liberation.* All Christian faith is autobiographical.<sup>14</sup> One of the characteristic emphases in the writings of early Methodist women, therefore, is the experience of conversion—a process involving a call to personal repentance, moral transformation, and concomitant freedom to love. The decisive conclusion to be drawn from these accounts, however, is that salvation for women essentially meant liberation. This new found freedom was rooted in the concept of “new creation” developed primarily in the Pauline corpus of the New Testament scriptures.

*Accountable Discipleship and the Communal Nature of Spirituality.* Intimate circles of married and single women, the Wesleyan band meetings under the leadership of women, were the primary locus of spiritual accountability. Characterized by close fellowship and stricter obligations, the bands were potent in the empowerment of women and the development of their spiritual gifts. The primary purpose of these bands was intense personal introspection coupled with



rigorous mutual confession for those who were "pressing on to perfection."<sup>15</sup> It was in these intimate groups that friendship and fellowship emerged as critical aspects of a developing Wesleyan spirituality. The Christian fellowship and intimacy provided through the class and band meetings were, for the women in particular, a potent means of grace. Frances Pawson, one of the guiding lights and a leading force in Yorkshire Methodism, recalled: "I cannot repeat all the good things I heard from Mrs. Crosby, Mrs. Downes, and others. I can only add, that those little parties, and classes, and bands, are the beginning of the heavenly society in this lower world."<sup>16</sup> In the intimacy of these small groups, and particularly the bands, women learned what it meant to grow in Christ and, together, plumbed the depths of God's love for them all.

### Works of Piety and Works of Mercy

*Works of Piety.* The "means of grace," namely, prayer and fasting, Bible study, Christian fellowship, and participation in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, not only nurtured and sustained their growth in grace, but also provided the "energy" which fueled the Wesleyan movement as a powerful religious awakening.<sup>17</sup> Those aspects of Wesleyan spirituality that surface most frequently in the pages of the women's writings have to do with the necessity of growth in grace and immersion in the means of grace.

No means of grace, however, was as important to the Wesleys or the women as the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The early Methodists sang, and the women bore witness to the testimony of the hymn:

The prayer, the fast, the word conveys,  
When mix'd with faith, Thy life to me;  
In all the channels of Thy grace  
I still have fellowship with Thee:  
But chiefly here my soul is fed  
With fulness of immortal bread.<sup>18</sup>

These "feasts of love," as the women often described them, shaped their understanding of God's love for them and their reciprocal love for God, all powerfully symbolized for them in the sharing of a meal.

*Works of mercy.* Those who encountered the good news of the gospel and

were subsequently drawn into Christian communities of love were also propelled into the world with a mission of witness and service. Wesleyan spirituality always demonstrates an essential concern for social justice and mission rooted in evangelical faith. The women of early Methodism were people of vision, and the image of the church they lived out was one of active social service, commitment to the poor, and advocacy for the spiritually, politically, and socially oppressed. For the women there could be no separation of their personal experience of God in Christ from their active role as agents of reconciliation and social transformation in the world. Their autobiographical portraits are bold images of people living in and for God's vision of shalom. The women had learned from the Wesleys that authentic Christianity is mission and sincere engagement in God's mission is true religion. The center of this missiological calling and identity, moreover, was simply their desire to share the good news they had experienced in Christ with others. In other words, in their view, the heart of mission was evangelism.

Methodist women, therefore, sought out people in need—the poor, the hungry, the destitute and the neglected. They preached the Word, visited prisons, established orphanages and schools, and practiced their servant-oriented faith as devoted mothers who discerned the presence of God in the most menial of chores. Hardly passive Christians for whom ministry was performed; these women were active, ministering servants who cared for one another and extended their ministry into the communities they served.

### **Distinctive Themes in the Spirituality of Methodism Women**

In her preface to the life of Elizabeth Mortimer, Agnes Bulmer claims that the central thrust of early Methodist women's lives was "a renovated spirit, and a holy life."<sup>19</sup> She provides a simple definition of "spirituality" that helps frame the distinctive features of the spirituality lived out by women like the subject of her biography. Spirituality involves every aspect of life, she maintains, that demonstrates "there is a real, a delightful, a transforming intercourse to which the human spirit is admitted with the ever-blessed God."<sup>20</sup> In addition to the various aspects of spirituality held in common with many of the early Methodist men, the spirituality of early Methodist women is distinctive in its revolution around pathos (mystery in life), beauty (majesty in life), and love (miracle in life). It is a spirituality that is real, blessed, and loving.

*A Spirituality of Pathos—The Mystery in Life.* Early Methodist women were masters at practicing the presence of God. They managed to find God in the common round of daily life. Because of this their writings reflect a healthy realism grounded in the ordinary, the tragedies and triumphs of real life. One line out of an extended narrative related to the birth of a child under extremely harrowing circumstances speaks volumes with regard to the experience of women and the nature of their spirituality: “[God] made me the living mother of a living child.”

*A Spirituality of Beauty—The Majestic in Life.* The women are quick to make connections between life in the Spirit and the wonders of creation that surround them. While not creation-centered, theirs is an aesthetic spirituality that values beauty and majesty. The blind preacher-poet, Margaret Davidson, expressed it so well in her tribute to the five senses:<sup>21</sup>

Happy soul, what canst thou hear  
Midst all these various sounds?  
Jesus charms my list’ning ear—  
With joy my heart abounds.  
Thunder, hail, and tempests roar—  
Trumpet forth Immanuel’s name;  
Drawn by *Mercy’s* sweeter lure,  
I know no other theme.

Happy soul, what canst thou learn  
From all that feeds the eye?  
Only Jesus I discern—  
He shines thro’ earth and sky:  
Radiant orbs, and beauteous flow’rs,  
Sparkling diamonds seem to say,  
Glory to our glorious source,  
Who gives eternal day.

Jesus, thou art all in all—  
Thy love surpasses wine;  
In honey, vinegar, and gall,  
I taste thy love divine;

Seas'ning all our earthly food,  
 The curse incurr'd by sin departs—  
 Ev'ry creature leads to God,  
 Who banquets in our hearts.

Cassia, myrrh, and frankincense,  
 Their spicy odours breathe—  
 Rich perfumes they all dispense—  
 But oh! how far beneath  
 Christ, *the lilly of the vale!*  
 In fragrant fields, and gardens gay,  
*Sharon's rose*, well pleas'd, I smell,  
 More sweet by far than they.

What delights my feeling sense  
 Doth Jesu's goodness prove;  
 Still I feel his love immense,  
 Where'er I rest, or rove:  
 In downy bed, or balmy air,  
 The scorching sun, or cooling tide,  
 Faith can find its object there—  
 My Jesus crucified.

Whate'er I hear, or see, or taste,  
 Whate'er I smell, or feel,  
 Christ's my music, light, and feast,  
 My rose, and pillow still:  
 In him I always live and move—  
 Exercise thy senses five,  
 O my soul, and let thy love,  
 Be fervent, and alive.

Omnipresent Lord, *my God*,  
 I can no longer doubt;

Now I feel thy precious blood,  
And loud Hosannahs shout:  
Glory, honour, thanks and praise  
Be render'd to the sacred Three!  
Praise employ my happy days,  
And bless'd eternity!

*A Spirituality of Love—The Miracle in Life.* The language of spirituality that is more pervasive than any other among the women is related to their overwhelming sense of God's presence or the gift of overflowing love. It is the language of the heart filled with love. Linked directly in the Methodist mind to holiness, this image often carries with it the overtones of humility, purification, and the miraculous wonder of in-filling love. The spirituality of the Wesleyan women is quite simply, but profoundly, a spirituality of love. Holiness equals love; love equals holiness, and all is miracle as the faithful live out their lives on the foundation of God's grace.<sup>22</sup>

For the Wesleys, the purpose of the Christian life was the restoration of the image of God in the heart of the believer. "Ye know that the great end of religion," John would repeat on a number of occasions, "is to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total loss of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parents."<sup>23</sup> Holiness in the Wesleyan tradition, however, was both a holiness of heart and a holiness of life; it is internal and external, love of neighbor a necessary co-implicate of love of God. The essence of the Christian spirituality lived out daily by the women of early Methodism was this perennial bifocal nature of life in Christ—love of God and love of neighbor. Perhaps no woman personified this vision of the Christian life more fully than Mary Bosanquet.

The legacy of Mary's early life is also an amazing testimony to the place and influence of Wesleyan women. In 1763 a property near her place of birth in Leytonstone, known locally as "The Cedars," became vacant. Mary and Sarah Ryan (the friend whom John Wesley would later describe as her "twin soul") moved there on March 24 with the intention of establishing an orphanage and school on the basis of Wesley's own prototype at Kingswood. After much careful deliberation the women decided to take in none but the most destitute and

hopeless. The children came, as Mary recalled, “naked, full of vermin, and some afflicted with distemper.” At first the family consisted of Mary, Sarah, a maid, and Sally Lawrence, Sarah Ryan’s orphaned niece of about four years of age. With the addition of five more orphans and confronted with the problem of Sarah’s declining health, Ann Tripp was secured as a governess for the children. They formed themselves into a tightly knit community, adopted a uniform dress of dark purple cotton, and ate together at a table five yards in length. Over the course of five years they sheltered and cared for thirty-five children and thirty-four adults. Mary and her circle of woman combined vital piety and social service and gave their Methodist progeny a model that would be replicated through the generations to our own day.

### **The Women’s Legacy: The Church As Mission**

This understanding of Christian life as servanthood is well expressed in one of Charles Wesley’s hymns, “A Charge to Keep I Have”:

To serve the present age,  
My calling to fulfil;  
O may it all my powers engage  
To do my Master’s will.

These very familiar words declare an extremely important principle. They remind us that God has chosen us to be servants. God has not chosen us for privilege. We are not called so that we can declare to others that God has not called them in order to make ourselves feel special. We are called to be servants, and the field of our service is God’s world. Our charge—our duty and responsibility as Christians—is to serve the present age. And we are to use all of our gifts, all of our powers, to declare the amazing love of God to all. The context of our ministry, therefore, is wherever we live. The women expressed these rediscoveries potently in their lives.

Social holiness, in this sense therefore, has everything to do with mission. And our calling to be servants of shalom is rooted in our vision of the church. What is the essential calling of the church? The conclusion of the early Methodist women was that the central purpose of the church is mission—God’s mission: The church is not called to live for itself, but for others. It is called, like

Christ, to give itself for the life of the world. It is not so much that the church has a mission or ministries; rather, the church is mission. The church of Wesley's England had exchanged its true vocation—mission—for maintenance, a confusion that often slips into the life of the church in every age! It had become distant from and irrelevant to the world it was called to serve: It needed desperately to reclaim its true identity as God's agent of love in the world. The Wesleys firmly believed that God raised up the Methodists specifically for the task of resuscitating a mission-church and often used the lives of women to illustrate this goal.

The primary question for the Methodist, therefore, is not, "How can I be saved?" The ultimate question is, "For what purpose am I saved?" For the Wesleyan women, the answer was clear. My neighbor is the goal of my redemption, just as the life, death, and resurrection of Christ are oriented toward the salvation of all humanity. The self-giving love of Christ must therefore become the goal, purpose, and style of our lives. The genuine Christian is the one who embraces the mission of Jesus in humility and servanthood. But what was the mission of Jesus in concrete terms? In what did it consist? Jesus' mission was characterized by healing those who were sick, liberating those who were oppressed, empowering those who stood on the margins of life, and caring for the poor. In all of these actions he incarnated shalom, God's vision of peace, justice, and well-being for all.

In the opening pages of his *Advice to the People called Methodists*, Wesley laid out the mission of his followers in this simple definition: "If you walk by this rule, continually endeavouring to know, and love, and resemble, and obey the great God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the God of love, of pardoning mercy; if from this principle of loving, obedient faith, you carefully abstain from all evil, and labour, as you have opportunity, to do good to all men, friends and enemies; if, lastly, you unite together to encourage and help each other in thus working out your salvation, and for that end watch over one another in love—you are they whom I mean by Methodists."

Mission, on its most basic level, is nothing more nor less than offering Christ to others through concrete actions.

Or listen to these powerful words of a "song for the poor" by Charles Wesley:

Happy soul, whose active love

emulates the Blessed above,  
 in thy every action seen,  
 sparkling from the soul within:

Thou to every sufferer nigh,  
 hearest, not in vain, the cry  
 of widow in distress,  
 of the poor, the shelterless:

Raiment thou to all that need,  
 to the hungry dealest bread,  
 to the sick givest relief,  
 soothest hapless prisoner's grief:

Love, which willest all should live,  
 Love, which all to all would give,  
 Love, that over all prevails,  
 Love, that never, never fails.  
 Love immense, and unconfined,  
 Love to all of humankind.

Notice in particular Wesley's language of "active love." A disciple with a living faith is the one whose whole heart has been renewed, who longs to radiate the whole image of God in his or her life *and therefore* hears the cry of the poor and wills, with God, that all should truly live! The Wesleyan vision of social holiness, thus understood, is a life that unites piety and mercy, worship and compassion, prayer and justice. It involves a humble walk with the Lord that is lived out daily in kindness and justice. Those who are truly servants of Christ in the world empty themselves of all but love and find their greatest reward in the realization of God's dream of *shalom* for all. This is the living legacy of the early Methodist women for us today.



## Notes

1. See Paul W. Chilcote, "An Early Methodist Community of Women," *Methodist History* 38:4 (July 2000): 219-30.

2. For a contemporary Methodist expression of this theme, see Rosemary Skinner Keller, ed., *Spirituality and Social Responsibility: The Vocational Vision of Women in the United Methodist Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

3. The fullest account of early Methodist women may be found in Paul W. Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1991); *She Offered Them Christ: The Legacy of Women Preachers in Early Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993); and *Her Own Story: Autobiographical Portraits of Early Methodist Women* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001).

4. John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 6:153-54, in a letter to Miss March, dated June 9, 1775. For an excellent discussion of Wesley's "preferential option for the poor," see Theodore W. Jennings, *Good News to the Poor* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 47-69.

5. For a full account of the rise and development of the Methodist Societies, see Rupert E. Davies, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 1-29. Cf. Frank Baker's chapter on "The People Called Methodists, 3. Polity" in Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, and Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 4 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1965-88), 1:213-55.

6. For a full discussion of the evidence related to female initiative in the formation and establishment of Methodist Societies, see Chilcote, *Wesley and Women*, 49-54.

7. See Chilcote, *Wesley and Women*, 60-61.

8. See Earl Kent Brown, "Standing in the Shadow: Women in Early Methodism," *Nexus* 17:2 (1974): 22-31; "Women of the Word: Selected Leadership Roles of Women in Mr. Wesley's Methodism," in *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller, 2 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981-82), 1:69-87, 384-86; and "Feminist Theology and the Women of Mr. Wesley's Methodism," in *Wesleyan Theology Today*, ed. Ted Runyon (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1984), 143-50.

9. See Chilcote, *Wesley and Women*, 68, 74-75, 125.

10. *WJW*, 26:55-56; *Letters*, 2:306.

11. William Bennet, *Memoirs of Mrs. Grace Bennet* (Macclesfield: Printed and sold by

E. Bayley, 1803), 13-14. Cf. Chilcote, *Wesley and Women*, 74-75.

12. My book, *Wesley and Women*, analyzes the evolution of this office in Wesleyanism from the training ground of lay leadership to the suppression of female preachers after Wesley's death in the early 19th century. Appendices provide biographical outlines of forty-two women preachers, sermon registers, and other relevant documents. A briefer version has been published under the title *She Offered Them Christ*.

13. Bennet, *Grace Bennet*, 83.

14. I have discussed this important matter in *Her Own Story*, see in particular 14-18.

15. See Davies and Rupp, *History of the Methodist Church*, 1:213-55.

16. Joseph Sutcliffe, *The Experience of Mrs. Frances Pawson* (London: Printed at the Conference Office, by Thomas Cordeux, 1813), 84.

17. The most important recent work on this topic is Henry H. Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992).

18. *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, Hymn 54, v. 4. Cf. J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1948), 176-249. For a discussion of the sacrament as an "effective means of grace," see in particular Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments: A Theological Study* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 183-217.

19. Agnes Bulmer, ed., *Memoirs of Mrs. Elizabeth Mortimer*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Mason, 1836), 7.

20. Bulmer, *Elizabeth Mortimer*, 10.

21. A poem appended to her *Extraordinary Life*, 160-62.

22. Elsewhere I have discussed the connection between holiness and happiness in the writings of early Methodist women. Their conception of the Christian life could equally be described as a spirituality of happiness or blessedness. See Paul W. Chilcote, "Sanctification as Lived by Early Methodist Women," *Methodist History* 34:2 (January 1996): 93-95.

23. Wesley's sermon on "Original Sin" (III.5.), *WJW*, 2:185.

# The Salvation Army's Priority Focus on Evangelism

Perspectives on the Army's Focus on Evangelism with specific  
emphasis on the Caribbean

*Lester T. Ferguson*

## **Evangelism: The Army's Heartbeat**

Late one summer's evening in 1865, William Booth walked through London's East End towards his home in Hammersmith. As he journeyed home from preaching at an evangelistic tent meeting held in East End, William Booth was overwhelmed by the prospects of the evangelical ministry in which he was engaged and his sense of God's leading him into that ministry. But along his journey home he was also overwhelmed by the sights of abject poverty and spiritual bankruptcy which had become characteristic of England's poor. Arriving home he slumped into a chair and declared to his wife Catherine, "Darling, I've found my destiny."<sup>1</sup> That became a defining moment for both William and Catherine Booth and the movement which would later become The Salvation Army, a movement which would encircle the globe with its mission to "win the world for Jesus."

William Booth said, "We are a salvation people. This is our specialty. Getting saved, keeping saved and getting someone else saved." Evangelism is at the heart of *who* The Salvation Army is and *what* it does. This dualism of identity and purpose is perhaps best encapsulated by the very name of the movement. Prior to being called The Salvation Army, the movement which Booth led was named The Christian Mission, "a volunteer Army of converted working people"

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reported George Scott Railton, William Booth's lieutenant and secretary of The Christian Mission. But Booth strongly objected to the use of the phrase *Volunteer Army*, insisting that the Mission's work of reaching the masses with the Gospel was mandatory and that its workers were always on duty. He crossed out the word *volunteer* on the printer's proof copy of Railton's report, and above it wrote *Salvation*, declaring, "We are a Salvation Army." The movement, whose nature and chief concern from its conception was the salvation of souls, now had a name that clearly enunciated who it was and what it was about.

William Booth intended the movement and mission of The Salvation Army to be purely evangelistic. Disappointed that churches of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were failing to evangelize in particular the poor and working class masses of people, there was no doubt in his heart and mind that God had raised up The Salvation Army to "partner with him in his 'great business' of saving the world."<sup>2</sup> This purpose is still captured in the Army's current international mission statement: "The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church. Its message is based on the Bible. Its ministry is motivated by love for God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and meet human needs in his name without discrimination."

The mandate to organize a movement dedicated to evangelizing the masses was not just the result of the founders' own intense missionary zeal. There were renewed and deeply urgent convictions about the Great Commission to "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15 KJV). The founders were profoundly bothered that too many persons were not being given the opportunity to hear the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, and the chance to respond to that good news. The decaying social, moral and spiritual conditions of London's East End served to fuel the Booths' convictions that something urgent had to be done to win those who were 'dying in sin and going to hell.' From the very onset of establishing what would later be called The Salvation Army, the Booths' priority and passion were winning the lost. As William and Catherine Booth daringly followed God's leading, their efforts were highly successful: the early Salvation Army was characterized by numerous evangelistic meetings—sometimes up to four meetings in one day—and equally numerous conversions.

But in the beginning the Booths did not see their evangelical mission as sep-

arate and apart from the intended purposes of the churches. On the contrary, although their movement was undoubtedly distinct, they saw their work as complementary to the churches, for their priority was to preach the gospel and convert the masses to Christ, and then refer the resulting new converts to the local churches for discipleship and membership. But the local church congregations were not always accepting of those who were not akin to their socio-economic standing. The decision was then made that The Christian Mission would be the spiritual home of this group of new believers. The decision turned out to further the movement's mission rather than detract from it, for many of those new converts would themselves be enlisted and trained to advance the mission and introduce others to the kingdom of God.

William Booth's life (and by extension the life of the early and present-day Salvation Army) was influenced and shaped to some degree by his Wesleyan Methodism background. At the age of sixteen Booth was organizing street preaching, cottage meetings and other activities, and the following year was appointed a local preacher in a London circuit. Shaw Clifton, in his book *Who are these Salvationists?*, summarizes some aspects of Booth's indebtedness to John Wesley:

“... his desire not only to make sinners good, but to ground the saints in a good grasp of sound doctrine; the value of effective visitation in the homes of the members; the place of classes of systematic instruction of the believers; his organizational methods based on democratic committees ... his embracing of Wesley's doctrine of sanctification by grace ...”<sup>3</sup>

In chronicling the first one-hundred years of The Salvation Army, Bernard Watson said of William Booth that “Methodism had fixed his mind, possessed his heart with a ‘burning love for souls,’ a passionate conviction that only God could save men.”<sup>4</sup>

William Booth's later departure from the Methodist New Connexion may be seen not so much as the abandonment of his roots but the fulfilling of what he believed to be the purpose of the church: he was convinced that the church existed first and foremost for the sake of its mission to the world. That mission was urgent and clear: “to preach the good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom

for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to release the oppressed; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18 NIV). The propagation of the mission was neither exclusivist nor restrictive. The gospel could be preached by *any* saint, to *anyone*, at *any* time and in *any* place. For William Booth, evangelism was one of the ways in which that mission was to be expressed, but it could not be divorced from its twin-sister expression: social service or social action. The preaching of the gospel had to be accompanied by efforts to meet human needs, ease human suffering and liberate those who were oppressed, victimized and marginalized. The presence of the kingdom of God meant not just a transformation of the nature and position of individuals, but also a change in the condition of their personal or corporate existence and circumstances. It was clear that from those early days and throughout the next 130 years, the divine implications of Luke 4:18 would be the driving force that would give rise to the Army's focus on evangelism and service.

### **Emphasis on Evangelism**

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Army's sixteenth general, John Gowans, sought to refocus the Army and rally its soldiers to a renewal of the purpose for which the Army was called into being: "to save souls, grow saints, and serve suffering humanity." Throughout his tenure General Gowans reiterated this theme time and again as he traveled the Army world, eloquently expressing what the mission and ministry of The Salvation Army was all about.

The Salvation Army continues to make every effort to keep its focus on its mission. If evangelism is who the Army is and what it is about, then evangelism is encouraged as a way of life for all Salvationists. At their enrolment as Junior Soldiers of The Salvation Army, children each publicly declare that they have "asked God for forgiveness," "will be his loving and obedient child" and that because Jesus is their Saviour from sin, they "will try to help others to follow Him." A spirit of evangelism is encouraged and nurtured during the very early stages of a young Salvationist's life.

On becoming Senior Soldiers of The Salvation Army, adults also assert their intentions to further the evangelistic mission of movement and help bring other persons to Jesus. Before being publicly sworn-in as a member of The Salvation Army every prospective senior soldier signs The Soldiers Covenant or

Articles of War, part of which reads, "I will be faithful to the purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, endeavouring to win others to Him"

The *Orders and Regulations for Soldiers of The Salvation Army*, a volume originally prepared by William Booth himself and now used in the training of both new recruits and Soldiers, provide helpful instruction, guidance and encouragement in matters relating to evangelism. The following extract from the *Orders and Regulations for Soldiers*, though lengthy, is well worth noting here:

1. Just as the central word of the name of his Movement is salvation, so the salvation soldier will recollect that his Articles of War begin with a declaration about having personally received it and conclude with a dedication to personal work for the salvation of the whole world. The love of Christ requires him to make an unreserved commitment to His service.
2. Behind the unreserved dedication to the salvation war is the assurance "that the sure and only way to remedy all the evils in the world is by bringing men to submit themselves to the government of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Articles of War).
3. The salvation soldier must not therefore comfort himself with the knowledge that he is taking part in the collective endeavors of an association of people. He is also an individual agent of the Lord Jesus and has to show personal enterprise in the endeavors to win people one by one. He will be surprised how the numbers will grow if every soldier wins one person each year.
4. The salvation soldier must not be satisfied with a corps, however flourishing and attractive and strong, which is not above all striving to win new people for Christ. Soldiers who are truly saved must pray and work earnestly to save others.
5. While the soldier will be gripped by the assurance that "all have need of God's salvation," he will generally be well advised to give special attention to those with whom he has much in common and whose problems and situation in life

resemble his own. An adolescent is likely to be the best ambassador of Christ to another young person, a housewife to another, a converted alcoholic to one who is seeking deliverance from the same addiction and so forth. But the most important thing is to be led by the Holy Spirit and to act with tender love, assured that the motto, "Every soldier a soul-winner," is pleasing to God.<sup>5</sup>

Persons becoming officers of The Salvation Army also affirm the evangelistic purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army, and avow, by signing a covenant, their intention to make the ideals of the evangelistic mission the priority of their lives. The covenant signed by every officer of the Army reads:

**MY COVENANT  
CALLED BY GOD**

*to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ  
as an officer of The Salvation Army,  
I BIND MYSELF TO HIM IN THIS SOLEMN COVENANT:  
to love and serve him supremely all my days,  
to live to win souls and make their salvation  
the first purpose of my life,  
to care for the poor, feed the hungry, clothe the naked,  
love the unlovable, and befriend those who have no friends,  
to maintain the doctrines and principles of The Salvation Army,  
and, by God's grace to prove myself a worthy officer.*<sup>6</sup>

Both the *Orders and Regulations for Officers* and the *Orders and Regulations for Corps Officers* place much emphasis on evangelism, and rightly so. They reiterate that "An officer's supreme purpose with the unconverted must be to win them for God. He should determine that he will do all in his power to secure their conversion"<sup>7</sup> and "In all contacts with people the overriding objective of an officer is to effect their reconciliation with God and their growth in discipleship."<sup>8</sup>

Each time a junior or senior soldier or officer of The Salvation Army adorns his Army uniform, he is reminded, by the two 'S's' affixed to his lapels or shoul-



ders, of the purpose for which the Army exists. The twin 'S's stand for "saved to save" (though often interpreted "saved to serve") and help to keep the mission, and opportunities for that mission, in the clear view of the Salvationist, his peers and the world in which he lives. The uninitiated has often asked of Salvationists, "What do the 'S's mean?" Discerning Salvationists usually seize the opportunity not only to explain the symbolism, but also to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. The 'S's therefore have not only served the purpose of identification and reminder, but in themselves have often become an important tool of evangelism.

The songbook and other musical material of The Salvation Army is replete with reminders about the purposes for which God raised up the movement and to which all Salvationists were called. Irrespective of the language used, the joyful singing of our songs and the Biblical truths they enunciate can be an important way of helping Salvationists of an international movement to understand their gathered life as well as their shared life and calling as a people of God. Several verses which help to us to keep a priority focus on evangelism read:

"In the Army of Jesus we've taken our stand  
To fight 'gainst the forces of sin,  
To the rescue we go, Satan's power to o'erthrow,  
And his captives to Jesus we'll win."

*(The Songbook of The Salvation Army, 687)*

"Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,  
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;  
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,  
Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save."

*(The Songbook of The Salvation Army, 691)*

"The Lord's command to go into the world and  
preach the gospel unto all,  
Is just as true today as when his first disciples heard  
this mighty call;  
So let us gird ourselves and go to battle 'gainst the  
powers of sin and wrong,  
Join the fight for the right, in his everlasting might,

and sing our marching song.”  
*(The Songbook of The Salvation Army, 700)*

“We are witnesses for Jesus  
 In the haunts of sin and shame,  
 In the underworld of sorrow  
 Where men seldom hear his name;  
 For to bind the brokenhearted  
 And their liberty proclaim,  
 We are witnesses for Jesus  
 In the haunts of sin and shame.

Tell the world, O tell the world!  
 Make salvation’s story heard  
 In the highways, in the byways,  
 And in lands beyond the sea,  
 Do some witnessing for Jesus  
 Wheresoever you may be.”  
*(The Songbook of The Salvation Army, 832)*

### **Means and Methods of Evangelism**

Evangelism is emphasized, encouraged and expected at every level throughout The Salvation Army structure. Corps programs in particular, engage soldiers in lifestyle evangelism as well as regular evangelistic efforts. Today the open-air campaign, where the Army was born, still remains the hallmark of Salvationist evangelism in many places around the world. But for the early Salvationists there was no limit to the means and methods they would employ in their pursuit to “win the world for Jesus.” They were willing to do anything and try everything to drive home the gospel message. At open-air meetings, staged fistfights and persons jumping out of coffins, however sensational, were tactics deemed necessary to gain attention and get the gospel message across. Shaw Clifton writes that bombarding bars and drinking houses was taken for granted as a necessary prerequisite for reaching people.<sup>9</sup> The Army’s marching bands seemed sacrilegious enough, but that they blared the popular secular tunes of the day

(which the church called “the devil’s music”) to rewritten, Christian lyrics was another issue altogether (William Booth retorted to his objectors, “why should the devil have all the good music!”).

For the sake of their pragmatic evangelism, the beginning Salvationists thought nothing to face the risks of verbal and physical abuse; arrest and imprisonment; rejection of family and friends; and dismissal from places of employment. They courageously proclaimed the good news of salvation with complete abandonment of restraint and respectability.

Pioneering Salvationists were ambitious too: the British War Cry of November 16, 1889, gave report of a campaign to win 100,000 souls in six months! And if *what* they did to proclaim the gospel message was unconventional, then *where* they did it was just as unique. “We shall be guided by the Holy Spirit”, William Booth declared. “We propose holding meetings in halls, theatres, chapels, tents, the open-air and elsewhere as the way may be opened or we seem likely to attain the end we have in view.”<sup>10</sup> Some of these very shops, markets, theatres and music halls were later acquired by The Salvation Army and converted into and used as places of worship, a holy assimilation of the secular by the sacred.

Today Salvationists are using new ways to reach people. The information highway—the internet—is increasing becoming a tool for spreading the gospel of salvation. In Australia corps planters have used the initiative of telemarketing as a means of evangelism. In the United States, the Chicago’s Norridge Corps held summer meetings in their car park, giving away attractive CDs and free ice cream for the children. In some places in North America and Europe corps sanctuaries have been replaced (or supplemented) with coffeehouse styled settings, where coffee, music, and the Word of God are all generously served.

### A Missionary Army

“With salvation for every nation,  
To the ends of the earth we will go,  
With a free and full salvation,  
All the power of the cross we’ll show.  
We’ll tear Hell’s throne to pieces,  
And win the world for Jesus,

"We'll be conquerors forever,  
For we never will give in."  
*(The Salvation Army Song Book, 800)*

The injunction to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel" was taken literally. To be certain, the borders of England could not contain the evangelistic, missionary zeal of the early Salvation Army, which, in 1883, had 500 corps. The decade of the 1880s was to see the movement assume an international character and position itself on every continent on the globe. "It was no longer possible for the Founder to close his ears to the calls which he had begun to receive from 'the regions beyond.'<sup>11</sup> Before his promotion to Glory in 1912, William Booth was to witness the expansion of the mission to 58 countries.

The expansion of the Army both at home and overseas was rapid. In helping to identify the reason for the phenomenal growth of the movement General Erick Wickberg, the Army's ninth international leader, explains that the Army was a revival movement. He suggests that the strategies of evangelism employed, and the relevance of those efforts, were what helped the movement gain its international appeal. In providing some perspective to those significant days of early development General Wickberg writes,

"Here was the personal witness in simple words, here was practical Christianity, down to earth and presented by laymen. Here was sensation, yes, women preaching, a uniform, a flag and trumpeters and drummers, but here was also the joy of salvation in a drab world where drunkenness and poverty and immorality had followed in the steps of the new industrial developments. Here was the authority of the word of God ..."<sup>12</sup>

The first expansion beyond the British Isles was to North America. In 1879 a Salvationist couple from Coventry, England, migrated to the United States. Their officer daughter soon joined them, and she held meetings that were so successful that a year later, in response to an appeal for officers, Commissioner George Scott Railton and seven women officers arrived to formalize the mission. When this official party disembarked the ocean liner which brought them to America, they knelt at the docks and claimed America for God. Diane Winston in *Red-Hot and Righteous: The Urban Religion of the Salvation Army* records that when a customs officer "asked the identity of this odd band, Railton

responded by holding an impromptu service.”<sup>13</sup> Characteristic of the beginning of The Salvation Army in many countries was the convening of an open-air meeting at the point of entry into the land. The Army's great evangelistic efforts met much success, but were not without equally immense opposition. However, when the Founder visited the United States just six years after the mission there began, he found 238 corps under the leadership of some 569 officers.

Intently focused on an evangelism that went wherever people were, even if it meant trekking clear across the globe, The Salvation Army continued to grow. Thousands of people were being converted, hundreds of new corps and social centers opened, and dozens of countries claimed for God. Two Christian Mission converts pioneered the work in Australia, which became officially established in 1881. That same year the work in France was commenced when the eldest daughter of the Army's founders conducted an open-air meeting there. The work in Canada was started by a convert from England in January 1882, and eight months later the Army was launched in India by a Salvationist who initially joined the ranks after reading a copy of the War Cry.

The Salvation Army was determined to “win the world for Jesus” and its spread around the world was unrelenting. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, 135 years after its first series of evangelistic meeting in Whitechapel, London, the movement was in operation in 108 countries, enlisting more than 25,000 officer-evangelists and well over one millions soldier-evangelists to further the soul-saving purposes for which God called into being The Salvation Army.

### **The Salvation Army in the Caribbean**

A bit of background information as to the history of The Salvation Army in Caribbean, as well as an understanding of something of the composition of the region itself, might prove helpful in gaining a broader perspective of Army's priority focus on evangelism in the region.

Like elsewhere around the world, The Salvation Army has a colorful beginning in the Caribbean (or the West Indies, as it was first called in colonial days). Born a slave in 1820, Agnes Foster (known locally as ‘Mother’ Foster) was in her 20s when she was taken by her mistress from Jamaica (then still a British dependency) to England. She lived there for 40 years during which time she married and had a family of her own. In 1883, the now converted Mother Foster

decided to return to Jamaica after the death of her husband. Leaving her officer-daughter behind she sailed home where, in true Salvation Army style, she immediately began evangelistic work in the streets of Kingston. Mother Foster had a commanding voice which drew large, curious crowds. She had good success in her evangelistic efforts and gained many converts, urging them to join the fellowship of local churches. Most of the converts were unchurched and dismissed her insistence to attend a local church because they preferred to attend her meetings. So, similar to the decision of William Booth, Mother Foster formed her own mission and conducted worship services in a disused store.

Mother Foster's efforts were eventually met with opposition and persecution and many official attempts were made to prevent her from holding meetings. Her faith and persistence soon gained the support of two ministers who assisted her in obtaining the necessary permission from the governor of the colony to carry on her ministry. Mother Foster continued her mission, declaring that she was "born in the Army fire"<sup>14</sup> and that the coming of The Salvation Army to Jamaica was what was needed to surmount the dearth of spiritual life.

Mother Foster's stance gained the attention W. Raglan Phillips, whose path would cross with hers in an inexplicable move of God's providence. Raglan was born in Bristol, England, and moved to Jamaica as a land surveyor, printer and publisher, where he and his wife, Agnes (nee Burke), attended the Baptist church. His two sisters in England had joined The Salvation Army there and were to become officers. They constantly wrote letters to him, updating him with news about their family and sharing what was happening in the movement in which they were involved. The sisters also encouraged Raglan in the surrender of his own life to God. One day while reading a letter from one of the sisters, Raglan fell under great conviction and prayed to God for forgiveness of sin. Eagerly he began to share his newfound spiritual wealth, and soon his wife became converted. Together they developed into enthusiastic mission workers and conducted meetings along Salvation Army lines as described to them through the letters of Raglan's sisters. It was not long before Raglan joined with Mother Foster in appealing to General William Booth to send Salvation Army officers to Jamaica to formally establish and further the mission in the island.

Two years after the first of many requests from Mother Foster and Raglan, General Booth finally dispatched officers, Colonel and Mrs. Abram Davey, to

officially commence the work of the mission in Jamaica. The Daveys and their five children, along with a very musical, blind young man whom the Daveys had adopted, arrived in Jamaica in December 1887 to "make war on sin and evil in the West Indies." The Daveys first organized open-air meeting saw some 7,000 persons gathered to hear the gospel, many of whom would respond to the stirring message delivered by Colonel Davey.

That essentially marked the beginning of the mission of The Salvation Army in the Caribbean region. From Jamaica, with its long-held reputation of being the commercial and cultural hub of the Caribbean, the Army spread to Guyana, then to Barbados, Trinidad, Antigua, Suriname and other countries throughout the Caribbean.

Today the Salvation Army operates in 16 Caribbean nations, the latest addition being the French and Dutch island of St. Maarten in 1999. Twenty-one million persons, predominantly of African descent, comprise the total combined population of all of the Caribbean islands (islands which are accessibly today only by air travel). The territory is as inherently complex as it is inherently magnificent: its sixteen divisions and regions encompass just as many governments, several diverse political systems, six currencies and languages, and an abundance of cultural and sub-cultural traditions. Needless to say, this makes the administration of the territory quite a challenge. Today 232 active officers give leadership to 182 corps and 127 institutions, schools and social service centers.

Migration became something of an unintentional but important 'tool' of evangelism. In the early days it played a major role in the expansion of the Army from Jamaica to some parts of the Caribbean. With the islands being in relative close proximity to each other, it was not too difficult for nationals of one country to travel (then, relatively cheaply by ship) to another Caribbean country in search of employment, trade or educational opportunities. It was a Barbadian-born, Grenadian-saved man who introduced the Salvation Army into Guyana. A Jamaican military soldier gave the Army a head start of sorts in Cuba. St. Lucia's introduction to the mission came as the result of the efforts of a young British sergeant in the Royal Artillery. And an Antiguan-born Salvation Army officer, who had migrated with his parents to Jamaica when he was just a young boy, brought the Army to his place of birth when he visited it while on holidays! The direct result of the courageous, enterprising spirit of one or two individuals

meant that thousands of persons would be reached with the gospel of Salvation through Jesus Christ. The records almost invariably reflect that someone witnessed—sometimes by chance—the evangelistic fervor of the Army's mission somewhere (usually in an open-air meeting), became saved as a result, and was so impressed with Army's spirit that they dared to "duplicate" the mission wherever they went. Evangelism by replication? Maybe not deliberately so in the minds of men, but purposefully so in the economy of God.

Throughout its formative years the Caribbean Salvation Army made every effort to make evangelism a priority. As a newly emerging movement in the region, it was more consumed with the message of the mission than it was concerned about the form and developing ecclesiastical structure of that mission. The early Caribbean Army also encouraged and utilized traditional as well as contemporary means of evangelism. Street meetings, gospel crusades, brass bands, were amongst the methods of evangelism employed. And, far from restricting the spreading of the gospel to its own shores, in 1920 ten Caribbean officers responded to the missionary call and traveled to Nigeria to help pioneer the work of The Salvation Army there. Some years later a singing group, comprised of Caribbean officers and soldiers, embarked on a tour of some parts of Europe to participate in congresses being held there as well as to share the gospel message in song and testimony at various evangelistic endeavours.

Has The Salvation Army in the Caribbean kept its rightful focus on evangelism over the years? If so, how? What means and methods of evangelism does it employ, and are those means and methods relevant and effective? In many places around the Caribbean territory the salvation meeting and the open-air meeting are still the primary means of evangelism. Whereas these meetings have become "negotiable" in some parts of the Army world (and understandably so, since there are civil regulations and laws governing outdoor public assembly, in the case of open-air meetings), they remain non-negotiable in parts of the Caribbean. For one thing, there are very few laws on religious outdoor public assembly in some places. Additionally, Caribbean people largely enjoy the outdoors and enjoy congregating in large crowds! What has been of concern however, is the format in which the open-air meetings are conducted. The open-air can still be an effective evangelism tool if the gospel message were presented in fresher, more relevant and contemporary forms.



Music has played a vital role as an evangelistic tool too. While in the Caribbean the brass band has long lost some of its popularity and appeal, more contemporary instruments such as the keyboard, electric guitar, and drum-set are being used, with a handful of vocalists, in more and more corps. This "rhythm" or "combo" group, as it is often called, has proven to a most effective means of attracting persons to some corps public meetings.

As a part of its program each Caribbean corps is encouraged and expected to have a series of gospel campaign or crusade meetings at least once a year. The preaching of the Word of God still has its appeal, particularly in an environment like the Caribbean with its very strong oral traditions. This tradition can be traced back to our African ancestry, well beyond the years of slavery, and the need for our ancestors to preserve and convey historical and other information from one generation to another by verbal or oral means (This perhaps also explains why literature evangelism has not been too successful in some places in the West Indies). Caribbean evangelistic preaching is usually characterized by fiery, animated sermons and though they are usually delivered in church halls and at open-air meetings, it is not too uncommon in a few of the islands to see a Salvationist standing solo in the aisle of a public passenger bus or in the middle of an agricultural or fish market, stridently proclaiming the good news of salvation to whomever would listen.

An important way for the Caribbean Salvation Army to keep a deliberate focus on evangelism is to actually engage in evangelism. The following are points of methodology and their use and relevance vary from one degree to another throughout the region.

- ♦ Contact evangelism—visitation to institutions such as hospitals, prisons and schools; engaging in neighborhood (door-to-door) and one-on-one evangelism.

- ♦ Friendship evangelism—using already established relationships as a springboard for sharing the gospel and leading, over time, the individual to Christ.

- ♦ Crisis evangelism—it is amazing how crises (natural disasters, tragedies, personal challenges) can be opportunities to share the gospel and help point to Christ persons who have come to critical, deciding moments in their lives.

- ♦ Child and youth evangelism—concentrated efforts to reach children and

youths, especially through youth clubs, rallies, educational and recreational programs and community youth outings, like trips to beaches, parks and other places of attraction.

- ♦ Sports evangelism—chiefly in city corps in Kingston, the sports of basketball and football are prudently used as a means introduce especially young men to Christ.

- ♦ Social Services as a means of evangelism—the dual mission of the Army is to preach the gospel and meet human needs, the latter being both a type of the former, as well as a means of helping to introduce individuals to the Lordship of Jesus.

- ♦ Media evangelism—Some corps have regular or special radio broadcasts; at least two corps have telecasts on local community cable channels.

- ♦ Special Event evangelism—Each corps conducts an annual crusade; one corps hall is turned into a 'movie theatre' once a month where a gospel movie is shown using a video projector and a large screen (there is no charge for viewing, and an appeal is made after each showing); drama; musical concerts; JAM Sessions ('Jesus and Me' Sessions, a veritable out-door 'hang-out' for youths, replete with contemporary gospel music, refreshments, fellowship, personal testimonies and one-on-one witnessing and interaction).

It is true for the Caribbean as it is for the rest of the world that the most time-honored and effective means of evangelism is lifestyle evangelism, the simple but profound daily living-out in the ordinary, common life the extraordinary, uncommon life of Christ. The incredible witness of this 'salt' and 'light' through the life of the true believer to the world is sometimes quiet, sometimes imperceptible, sometimes bold but always inevitably obvious. Very recently a renewed focus on the mission of the Army in the Caribbean territory has resulted in the convening of several lifestyle evangelism seminars throughout the region.

### **The World for God.**

When Evangeline Booth, the founders' daughter, was elected the Army's fourth General in 1934, she penned a song that would summarize the spirit of the mission of the movement she was about to lead. Sixty-nine years earlier God had marvelously used her father to organize an evangelistic endeavor whose impact would span the ends of the earth and in so doing unite and mobilize persons from

a diversity of classes, races and nations to the decidedly important purpose of evangelism. Now it was Evangeline Booth's task, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, to further nurture and direct the missionary movement in its God-given assignment of helping to win the world for Jesus. The charge seemed daunting, and shortly after being elected General, Evangeline Booth said of her song, "I wrote it at three o'clock in the morning, bowed under the immeasurable burden of the stupendous responsibilities of the call that has come to me."<sup>15</sup> The lines succinctly and prophetically depict the purpose and anthem of God's Army, and indeed the mission of all of God's people everywhere:

"The world for God! The world for God!  
There's nothing else will meet the hunger of my soul.  
I see forsaken children, I see the tears that fall  
From women's eyes, once merry, now never laugh at all;  
I see the sins and sorrows of those who sit in darkness;  
I see in lands far distant, the hungry and oppressed.  
But behold! On a hill, Calvary! Calvary!

The world for God! The world for God!  
I give my heart! I'll do my part!  
The world for God! The world for God!  
I give my heart! I will do my part!"

*(The Songbook of the Salvation Army, 830)*

### Notes

1. Robert Sandall, *The History of The Salvation Army, Volume 1* (New York: The Salvation Army Supplies & Purchasing Department, 1947), p. 42.
2. Robert Sreet, *Called to be God's People* (London: International Headquarters, 1999), p. 7.
3. Shaw Clifton, *Who are these Salvationists?* (Alexandria, VA, Crest Books, 1999). pp.47-48.
4. Bernard Watson, *A Hundred Years' War* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1965). p. 16.
5. *Chosen to be a Soldier: Orders and Regulations for Soldiers of The Salvation Army* (London: International Headquarters, 1977). p. 74—75.
6. *Orders and Regulations for Officers of The Salvation Army* (London: International Headquarters, 1997).
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8. *Orders and Regulations for Officers of The Salvation Army.*
9. Clifton, *Who are these Salvationists?* p. 128.
10. Robert Sandall, *The History of The Salvation Army, Volume 1.* p. 42.
11. *Marching On! The Salvation Army—Its Origin and Development.* (London: The Campfield Press, 1990). p.32.
12. *Another Harvest of the Years* (London: Salvationist Publishing and Supplies Ltd., 1975). p. 7
13. Diane Winston, *Re-Hot and Righteous. The Urban Religion of The Salvation Army* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000). pp. 11-12.
14. Doreen Hobbs, *Jewels of the Caribbean. The History of The Salvation Army in the Caribbean Territory* (London: International Headquarters, 1986). p. 4.
15. Gordon Taylor, *Companion to the songbook of The Salvation Army* (Atlanta, Georgia: The Salvation Army Supplies and Purchasing Dept., 1990). p. 184.

## Book Reviews

Birch, Bruce C. *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. 383 pp.

Reviewed by Donald E. Burke, Booth College, Winnipeg, Canada.

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From early in the history of the Church, Christians have had difficulty knowing what to do with the Old Testament. They have perceived profound tensions between the Old Testament and the New Testament. As read by many Christians, the Old Testament characterizes God as holy, just and wrathful and the New Testament characterizes God as loving, forgiving and gracious. Another persistent manner of expressing this fundamental tension has been the simplistic and misleading contrast between "law" (Old Testament) and "grace" (New Testament). In the second century the problem of the Old Testament reached a crisis point when Marcion advocated the abandonment of the Old Testament as Christian scripture. Although the views of Marcion were condemned as heresy, the place of the Old Testament in Christianity has remained problematic for many. A willingness to retain the Old Testament as Christian scripture formally has often hidden a latent and functional Marcionism that has truncated the Christian canon and given the Old Testament second-class status.

We are fortunate that in our time there are resources available that help us move beyond the ancient heresy and its persistent manifestations to articulate the positive contributions that the First Testament can make to Christian faith and life. One such resource is Bruce Birch's book, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life*.

In *Let Justice Roll Down*, Bruce Birch, Dean and the Woodrow W. and Mildred B. Miller Professor of Biblical Theology at Wesley Theological

Seminary in Washington, DC, articulates the major motifs that arise in a sensitive reading of the Old Testament and shows how reflection upon them can enrich and deepen Christian faith and life.

Part One of the book is a methodological discussion of the role of the Old Testament and scripture generally in the formation of Christian character. Building upon an earlier book co-written with Larry Rasmussen (*The Bible and Ethics in Christian Life*, revised and expanded [Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1989]), Birch argues that the Old Testament provides rich resources that can be used to shape the character of individuals and communities. He places emphasis on the importance of recognizing the narrative form of the Old Testament and the manner in which story can help form character. This methodological discussion, while important to the overall argument of the book, may be skimmed by those who would find the content difficult. Readers could study the rest of the book first and then return to Part One to deepen their reflection on the overall impression of the book.

Part Two, entitled "The Old Testament Story as Moral Resource," includes seven chapters: Creator and Creation; From Promise to Deliverance; People of the Covenant; Royal Ideal and Royal Reality; Prophetic Confrontation; Exile and Return; Wisdom and Morality. The chapters move chronologically and canonically through the major sections of the Old Testament. Birch's intention is not to provide a commentary on the Old Testament or to provide a substitute for serious study of the biblical text, but rather to articulate the motifs that can spur reflection. He does not force the writers of the Old Testament to speak with one voice, but rather acknowledges the rich diversity of voices and perspectives that one encounters in the Bible. Nevertheless, there are some fundamental claims that are made by the Old Testament upon those communities that seek to be faithful to the witness of the Bible.

Each chapter provides a brief contextualization of the biblical material under consideration. This contextualization assumes that the reader already is familiar with the Old Testament. Birch draws upon a range of biblical scholarship in his writing. He cites many scholars who have wrestled with the Old Testament and who have enriched his own interpretation. Birch then identifies major motifs and issues that arise in the biblical text. He seeks in the first instance to articulate the claims that the text made upon Israel and then to comment upon what he under-

stands to be the major claims that the material makes upon the Christian community. In the process Birch is able to penetrate beneath a superficial reading of the Old Testament and to draw the deeper implications of Israel's life and witness. The emphasis throughout Birch's discussion of the biblical materials is to identify those materials and motifs that can form faithful character.

A few examples will illustrate Birch's approach. In his discussion of the moral authority of Israelite law Birch writes, "It has been customary to think of Israel's laws as specifying actions (frequently moral actions), but Old Testament laws often specify, even advocate, a particular identity for the reader (or hearer). Their function is not just in the shaping of community conduct, but in the formation and maintenance of a particular community character." (p. 165) What is evident here is that Birch tempers the understanding of biblical law as "commandments" that mandate (or prohibit) certain actions by interpreting it as "instruction" that can shape the character of communities and individuals.

The formation of character by the Old Testament is accomplished not only by the provision of positive models whose actions and attitudes should be emulated but also by offering examples of behavior and attitudes that should be avoided. Thus Birch uses the complex portrayal of David in 1 and 2 Samuel that recounts not only the Israelite king's virtues and triumphs but also his weaknesses and failures to demonstrate both the promise of human leadership and its perils. This is reinforced in his discussion of Solomon as a king who set in motion the deconstruction of the ideal of Israel as a covenant community. Birch characterizes Solomon's agenda—or at least the effect of his reign—along three trajectories: (1) Solomon replaced the older Israelite "economics of equality" with an "economics of privilege" in which a larger share of the kingdom's resources was directed to the king and those in privileged positions; (2) Solomon replaced the "covenant politics of justice" with the "politics of power" under which the instruments of power were wielded in the self-interest of the king and his cronies; and (3) Solomon domesticated Israel's God by replacing the theology of the covenant God of Israel who identified with the marginalized and who was uncontrolled by earthly power with an understanding of God as one who supports the privileged socio-economic structures and preserves the privilege of the powerful. In the process, Birch draws out of the biblical materials insights into the ambiguity of power in human communities and thereby provides oppor-

tunity for reflection on the nature of leadership.

Birch resists the temptation to resort to a simplistic "moral of the story" approach to the Old Testament and encourages his readers to think more deeply about the underlying claims that the biblical materials make upon us. He points his readers in the direction of further reflection without drawing all the conclusions for them. He also attempts to balance the obsession with individualism that is characteristic of our time with the biblical emphasis upon the formation of the character of communities. By dealing with the major traditions in the Old Testament, Birch allows his readers to glimpse the richness of the Old Testament witness and its importance for contemporary faith.

*Let Justice Roll Down* is a stimulating, well-written and articulate book. It should be read slowly and carefully. Birch does not develop all of his thoughts fully, so his readers must take the time to do their own thinking. This writer has used *Let Justice Roll Down* as a textbook for the past decade and has found it to be a stimulating and effective resource for students. A wider readership will benefit from Birch's synthesis of scholarship, reflection and faith. The book is recommended as a resource that will help the Church to overcome its Marcionite tendencies.



Pohl, Christine D. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Wm. E. Eerdmans, 1999. 205 pp.

Reviewed by Andrew S. Miller III, Lexington, Kentucky

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What distinguishes Christian social ethics from professional social workers in society? Christine Pohl insists that a recovery of the tradition of hospitality provides rich meaning and purpose for contemporary social action. The word hospitality is often associated with domestic generosity, sometimes considered to a spiritual gift for those who like to bake, or is understood within the context of hospitality industries that ironically require payment for its hospitable services. In startling contrast to these misconceptions, Pohl argues that the tradition is rooted in biblical teaching and Church history. She contends that for seventeen centuries, practicing hospitality was critical to "the spread and credibility of the gospel, to transcending national, and ethnic distinctions in the church, and to Christian care for the sick, strangers, and pilgrims" (7). In seeking to enable the revitalization of the tradition, *Making Room* balances the ambiguous line between practical applicability and academic intensity.

In the first of three sections of this text, "Remembering our heritage" (3-60), Pohl reveals that hospitality is rooted in the Biblical tradition. This Biblical understanding of hospitality is expressed by imperative commands for people of God to welcome strangers, specifically those who are poor and in need. The author explains that the history of Israel and the greater picture of the Old Testament presents Israel as a community of "strangers welcoming strangers," and an alien people who had a "special relationship of dependence on and gratitude to God" (29). The teaching of Jesus is saturated with concepts of welcome that destroys social boundaries. This hospitable challenge is evident within the perspective of shared meals, a major connecting theme within the hospitality tradition. Pohl demonstrates that Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25:31-46 and Luke 14:12-14 were foundational for the entire tradition of hospitality. In these texts Jesus dually exemplifies that God not only "welcomes the needy and disadvantaged, but that God is actually welcomed in these people, these passages press Christians to include those most likely to be overlooked" (23). The author then

enters into a dialogue with historic and modern practitioners of hospitality, which makes her argument cogent and clear for contemporary appropriation. Pohl traces the tradition through leading exponents like: Jerome, John Chrysostom, Lactantius, Benedict of Nursia, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley (p. 43-56). Pohl also drinks from the well of hospitable understanding provided by later exponents like Dorothy Day, Edith Schaeffer, and Henri Nouwen.

After establishing the heritage of hospitality, Pohl develops the ramifications of hospitality as a profound moral and theological paradigm. In the second part of the text "Reconsidering the Tradition" (61-126), the author explains why hospitality is a paradigm that is imperative for Christian morality and theology. In Chapter 4, Pohl illustrates that hospitality asserts an intense form of dignity and respect for all humanity. Hospitality as a paradigm has the potential of moving past viewing a person's individual needs and towards recognizing the dignity in all people. This recognition has a relational quality: "Those who offer hospitality are not so much providing a service as they are sharing their lives with the people who come to them" (72). In Chapter five, the author confronts the ontological ambiguity of the stranger in contemporary society. The strangers in a privatized society are not only those in need of physical aid, but any person who is in need of welcome. Chapter seven Pohl discusses how hospitality often comes from and is most effective "from the margins" of society. Individuals and groups who have offered hospitality, like the Salvation Army, have adopted counter cultural identities so as to identify and serve those in need. Pohl describes that such service "reflects divine generosity" (105).

The third section of the book "Recovering the Practice" (127-188), considers current questions regarding the "fragility of hospitality", while insisting that the abuses of hospitable practitioners should not deter the imperative nature of the practice. The importance of practical boundaries is discussed so that abuses will not prevent God's grace to work through hospitable acts. In light of these challenges, Pohl encourages people to engage in the practice personally, in one's home, and corporately in one's church. She also discusses how hospitality can serve as a corrective to depersonalized social service systems. She illustrates: "Reclaiming hospitality is an attempt to bring back the relational dimension to social service, and to highlight concerns for empowerment and partnership with those who need assistance" (162).

*Making Room* is a pivotal work that reminds Christians that welcoming is an imperative expression of the Gospel. It is particularly helpful for the Salvationist who might at times lack self-understanding of the often dichotomized social and evangelical work of their movement. The contemporary Salvation Army's self-identity is often blurred by an unnecessary dualism between social and spiritual missions. In light of this crisis, the Christian tradition of hospitality can serve as a corrective paradigm for the self-understanding and self-identity of the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army scholar might also be able to understand the development of William Booth's theology and praxis as an implicit journey of hospitable understanding. To any reader, and specifically the Salvationist, Christine Pohl has challenged our society to truly strive toward making room.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (not) getting by in America*. New York: Henry Holt and Company. 221 pp.

Reviewed by James E. Read, Ph.D., The Salvation Army Ethics Centre and Booth College, Winnipeg, Canada

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I recall my sociology professor asking me when I was a young undergraduate whether I had read *In Darkest England and the Way Out*. Proud Salvationist though I was I had to confess that I had not. He urged me to do so not only for the sake of my heritage but also because it was one of the early classics in social analysis. Written for a broad, non-specialist reading public, *Darkest England* was to enlighten, shame and persuade. If its putative facts were debatable, they were at least *worth* debating.

Barbara Ehrenreich seeks to do similar things in our times. Although she boasts a Ph.D. (in biology), her claim to fame is as a public intellectual writing essays regularly for *Harper's Magazine*, *Time*, *The New Republic* and *The Nation*. *Nickel and Dimed* is written to shatter the thick wall of separation that divides Ehrenreich's comfortably upper-middle class professional readership from America's "working poor."

The premise behind the book is that she and her demographic peers (like us) do not really understand what it is like to live on minimum wage. So she sets herself the task of trying to do it. Three-fourths of the book is her firsthand narrative of a month waitressing in Florida, a month as a maid and nursing home aide in Maine, and a month as a Wal-Mart "associate" in Minnesota. In each case she found the task of making ends meet almost undoable.

Her evaluation? "Something is wrong, very wrong, when a single person in good health, a person who in addition possesses a working car, can barely support herself by the sweat of her brow. You don't need a degree in economics to see that wages are too low and rents too high." (p.199)

Now, one can challenge Ehrenreich's evaluation (which is fairly thin and predictable) and the findings, but then one feels the burden of doing better. Is it really such an incessant, spirit-crushing burden to be one of the "working poor" as Ehrenreich thinks? If not, what is the true situation? A similarly vivid account based on Salvation Army experience would be welcome.

And one can challenge the methodology. Is it really possible for a successful writer who has the secure knowledge that she is going back to uptown comfort to enter into the lived reality of her "informants"? To her enormous credit, however, Ehrenreich has at least tried. She has worked at strengthening her moral imagination. An incapacity to imagine what life is like for another person is one of the major impediments to growth in holiness (Christian virtue). How can we possibly love our "working poor" neighbors without ever sharing their experience—or even trying to?

Barbara Ehrenreich is openly, proudly atheistic—which makes her book something of an odd choice for *Word and Deed*, perhaps. But I find myself wondering whether she is rejecting Christians more than Christ. "The worst, for some reason, are the Visible Christians—like the ten-person table, all jolly and sanctified after Sunday night service, who run me mercilessly and then leave me \$1 on a \$92 bill ... As a general rule, people wearing crosses or WWJD? buttons look at us disapprovingly no matter what we do, as if they were confusing waitressing with Mary Magdalene's original profession." (p.36) Is this just a cheap shot or uncomfortably close to a truth we know?

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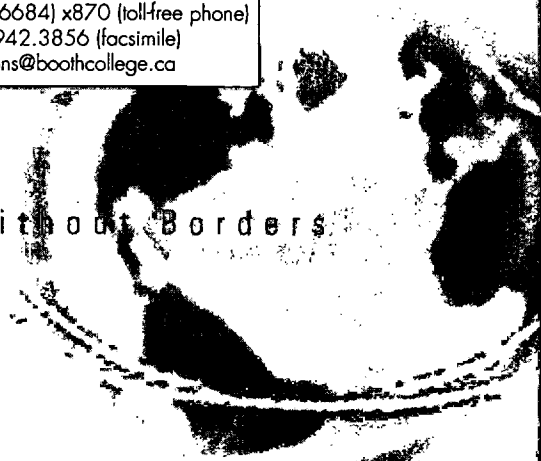
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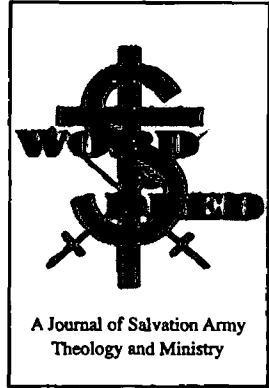
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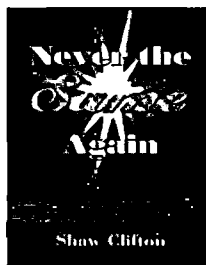
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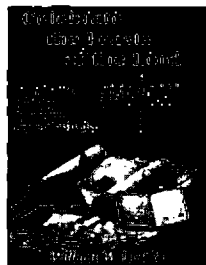
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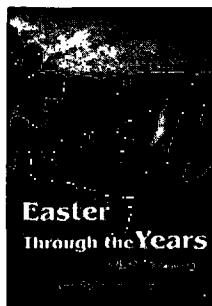
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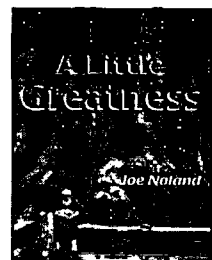
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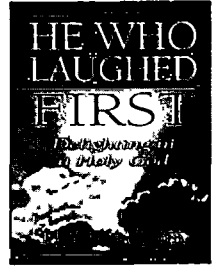
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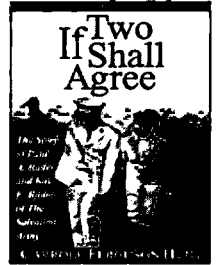
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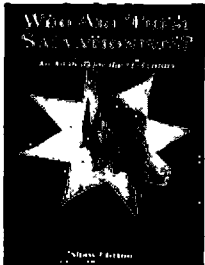
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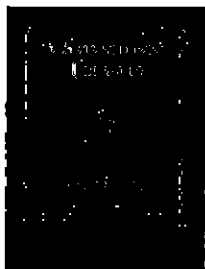
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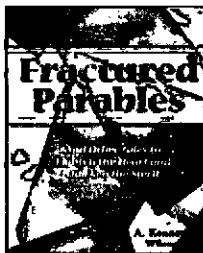
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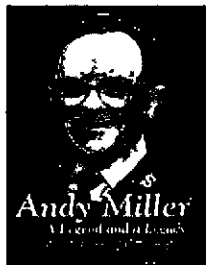
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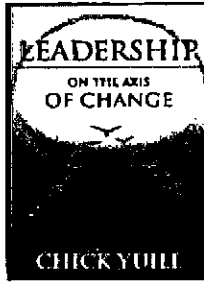
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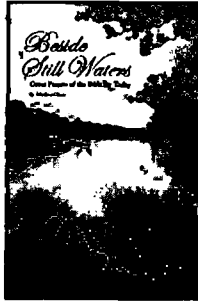
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