



A Publication of The Salvation Army

Word & Deed Mission Statement:

The purpose of the journal is to encourage and disseminate the thinking of Salvationists and other Christian colleagues on matters broadly related to the theology and ministry of The Salvation Army. The journal provides a means to understand topics central to the mission of The Salvation Army, integrating the Army's theology and ministry in response to Christ's command to love God and our neighbor.

Salvation Army 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 the love of God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination.

Editorial Address:

All manuscripts, requests for style sheets and other correspondence should be addressed to Lt. Colonel Marlene Chase at The Salvation Army, National Headquarters, 615 Slaters Lane, Alexandria, VA 22314. Telephone (703) 684-5500. Fax: (703) 684-5539. Email: marlene_chase@usn.salvationarmy.org.

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Editorial

Our Theological Moment

The theological life of The Salvation Army has been greatly enhanced by the recent International Theology and Ethics Symposium held on May 23–28, 2001 at the Army's William and Catherine Booth College in Winnipeg, Canada. This international theological conference was a first in Salvation Army history, and bears witness to the importance given by the Army today of centering our life and ministry carefully in biblical theology and the theology of the Christian Church.

As the editors of this journal we have often said that this time in Army history is such an exciting one because of what can be accomplished for the kingdom of God through the Army. It is a theological moment in the history of our movement not to be missed. We believe that God is guiding and directing the Army during this extremely important time, and the international conference on theology and ethics is, we trust, a sign of such guidance.

We are indeed grateful to the two people who were primarily responsible for setting up this conference, Colonel Earl Robinson, the chair of The Salvation Army's International Doctrine Council, and Dr. James E. Read, the executive director of The Salvation Army Ethics Center located at William and Catherine Booth College. The hard work to which these two colleagues committed themselves has already proved to be invaluable in the conference itself, and we are convinced will continue to be significant for the ongoing life and ministry of the Army for the sake of the kingdom of God. We have asked Colonel Robinson and

Dr. Read to serve as guest editors for the next three issues of this journal because those three issues will contain the major papers read at the conference. No persons are more qualified to set both the conference and the papers in context for the readers of this journal, and we are delighted that they readily accepted our invitation to be guest editors.

We were privileged to attend the conference and so we know the quality of the work accomplished there. That is why we are excited in the following three issues to share some of the papers of that conference with our readers, praying that the contents of these issues will be beneficial to your own lives and to whatever ministries God has granted to you by His grace.

RJG

JSR

Guest Editorial

The International Theology & Ethics Symposium

As announced in the last issue of *Word & Deed*, this is the first of three issues that will publish the papers presented at The Salvation Army's International Theology and Ethics Symposium held at the William and Catherine Booth College in Winnipeg, Canada in May 2001. Fifty-two presenters and observers from 17 different countries were chosen to attend this gathering by the International Doctrine Council in cooperation with The Salvation Army Ethics Center and international and territorial leaders. Delegate choices were based on the belief that the persons so chosen would represent the Army internationally as contributors to Salvationist theological and ethical development.

A Landmark Event

In a letter of welcome to the delegates, General John Gowans described the Symposium as "the first of its kind in the history of The Salvation Army" and declared it a landmark event.

The Founders of The Salvation Army were nothing if not passionate. They were passionate about people, and, surprising though it may seem, they were also passionate about theology—the essential link between believing and doing was very clear to them. That link has not, I suspect, been so

Colonel Earl Robinson heads The Salvation Army International Headquarters Office for Spiritual Life Development & International External Relations and is chair of the International Doctrine Council of The Salvation Army.

clear to Salvationists in the generations that have followed, but I believe there is now a change, and that this International Theology and Ethics Symposium is a sign of that change and will be a catalyst for more. It is especially appropriate, then, for such a landmark event in the development of the Army that the focus of the conference should be on that crucial interface, so important to our Founders, where faith promotes action and action is informed by faith.

General Gowans pointed out that the specific focus of the symposium—the doctrine of the Trinity—was a daring choice, “opening up every significant issue of Christian theology from creation and salvation to fullness of life here and hereafter.”

The Trinitarian Mission of the Church

Miroslav Volf, professor of systematic theology at Yale Divinity School, delivered the keynote address. Born and raised in the former communist state of Yugoslavia, Professor Volf endured the anti-Christian hostilities of that regime. His address, “The Trinitarian Mission of the Church,” reflected on that background and defined rebirth of persons, reconciliation of people and care of bodies as essential to the Church’s mission on earth.

Selected delegates then presented prepared papers on the theme, “Salvationist Theology and Ethics for the New Millennium.” The theme was developed to indicate ways in which the Trinitarian gospel impacts the Church and contemporary society. Under the heading of “A Theology of God the Father,” consideration was given to ecology in a damaged world and human dignity in an oppressive world. Under the heading of “A Theology of God the Son,” issues were raised concerning the Kingdom of the risen Lord in a world searching for a future and Jesus the Son in a pluralistic world. And under the heading of “A Theology of God the Holy Spirit,” there was discussion concerning creating Christian community in a fragmented world and holiness in a world of changing values.

After the presentation of each paper, chosen delegates gave prepared responses followed by open-forum discussion. Discussion reached a climax on the final day of the Symposium when delegates met in small groups to define affirmations, vision for the future, and recommendations for consideration by Army international leadership. The recommendations will receive further attention through responses directed through the International Doctrine Council.

Symposium Affirmations

Ten agreed upon affirmations incorporate much of what is hoped will be the outcome of the Symposium in Salvation Army implementation.

1. Because humanity is created in the image of God, we affirm the dignity and value of each individual. We have a desire to see this reflected in our personal relationships and Salvation Army organizational structure.
2. We affirm the significance of holistic mission, which calls us to engage with the community.
3. We believe that there is an essential link between Christology and holiness doctrine: that a Christology which seeks to stay close to the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus and affirms his full humanity will lead naturally to holiness language of restoration, wholeness and re-creation.
4. We affirm Galatians 3:28, that all are one in Christ—and all that this entails for our life together.
5. We affirm the call to live a life marked by Kingdom values.
6. We believe that our corporate life together must mirror the self-giving, mutuality and celebration of the life of the Trinity and that in a suffering, needy world it is essential to reaffirm that mission emerges from the life of the worshipping community.
7. In affirming our international Salvation Army identity, we celebrate our unity and diversity; our capacity to value, respect and learn from one another; and our denominational heritage.
8. We affirm our ecclesiastical identity and look for the further development of our sacramental theology.
9. We affirm that holy living should manifest itself in service to the poor and disadvantaged.
10. We affirm our concern for the stewardship of all creation by caring and advocating for the body, people and planet.

Worship, Mission and Thought

Throughout the Symposium, three essentials of Church life seemed to come together: worship, mission and thought. Delegates led morning and evening prayers each day as they focused on worship of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Commissioner John Larsson, Chief of the Staff, and

Commissioner Freda Larsson, World Secretary of Women's Organizations, provided a Sunday morning worship service. In his message on Sunday morning, Commissioner Larsson expanded on Peter's admonition to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). He highlighted three factors in such growth: "wanting, working and waiting." It was in that worship service that many delegates came to a renewed understanding of what those factors mean for them personally as they work in Christ's Church corporately and seek to grow more like the Master they serve.

Giving glory to God in worship leads naturally to glorifying God through what we do in his name for his glory. It leads to a strong sense of mission. That sense of mission came through clearly in the Symposium presentations. Each of the sections of the outline began with theology. But as we centered on the theology of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we recognized that theology is not complete without action. We saw how important it is to link theological teaching concerning the nature of the Trinity with our being called to address contemporary issues in today's world. We particularly deliberated on ways in which we can do something for God and through God about:

- our ecologically damaged world,
- present-day oppression and abuses that damage human dignity,— the loss of hope in the lives of so many people who wonder if there is any positive future to living,
- the religious and ethical pluralism that has caused the doctrines and teaching of the Church of Christ to be marginalized,
- the aloneness that is felt by so many whose fragmented lives cry out for the support of genuine community, and
- the changing social and moral values of a society whose only hope of integrity and meaning lies in moral restoration in the image of a holy God, through his indwelling presence and purity and strength as the resource for holy living.

In the concluding paper of the Symposium, Commissioner John Larsson summed up one of the major intentions of the Symposium in pointing to the third essential of Church life—that of thought—in the trilogy of worship, mission and thought. He advised, "Let's not forget the big picture we have been looking at. It

is inspired thinking in the form of deeply held convictions that leads to inspired action. And the actions of the Army in the 21st century will therefore be determined by its thinking, its beliefs and its vision.”

The Salvation Army in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries properly focused on mission, and that must be reinforced as a continuing focus. There is however an increasing awareness in the Army, as we have entered the new millennium, that what we do must be reinforced by careful thought and planning. A priority in such thought and planning for a faith-based holiness movement like The Salvation Army should be to link its actions with a strong theological and ethical base.

A Better-educated 21st Century World

The papers that will be published in this and the subsequent two issues of *Word & Deed* form the foundation for a continued focus on theological and ethical thought in our movement. It is our prayer that the deliberations of this event will help the Army face a better-educated 21st century world.

As indicated in the rationale for the Symposium, we believe that the Army has a contribution to make to theological/ethical dialogue in the Church. This is especially true with respect to the inclusive gospel, a mission-based ecclesiology, the partnership of evangelism and social action/service, the call to holiness, high moral principles, sacramental living and equality in ministry. All of those subjects were reflected upon at the symposium.

We were individually enriched by our interaction concerning those reflections and other thoughts of ways in which the Trinitarian gospel impacts on the Church and contemporary society. We then left the intimacy of those reflections to go in the strength of the Lord with a desire to better equip his Army in its mission to “save souls, grow saints and serve suffering humanity,” as summarized by General John Gowans.

We give glory to God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—for calling together thinkers to interact with one another, and to dialogue over issues of crucial importance for his presence as the body of Christ in the world of today and the future.

ER

Salvationist Theology and Ethics for the New Millennium

John Larsson

This symposium on the theme of "Salvationist Theology and Ethics for the New Millennium" is of great significance for the future of The Salvation Army. Let me suggest three reasons why this is so.

Conviction Gives Birth to Action

Firstly, it is thought in the form of deeply-held convictions that gives birth to action. Every bodily action begins as an impulse in the mind. In the same way every organization or movement is impelled and energized by the underlying philosophy, cause or conviction which brought it into existence. Any dichotomy between "thinkers" and "doers" is quite false. Without the thinkers there are no doers. From where do today's animal rights activists get their incredible energy, courage and stamina? It is from the deep-seated convictions they hold with such tenacity, and for which they are prepared to suffer and sacrifice. Without the conviction there would be no action.

The beginning of The Salvation Army is the story of a "big idea" that suddenly took hold. Permit me to quote from my own writings:

Commissioner John Larson is Chief of the Staff of The Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army did not begin with a big bang. By early 1878, after 13 years of plodding growth as The Christian Mission, it had only 30 stations and 36 evangelists to show for its labors.

But in 1878 came the dramatic change of name to The Salvation Army. "From that moment," wrote W.T. Stead, "its destiny was fixed—the whole organization was dominated by the name." New strategies to match the inspiration of its name were devised with breath-taking speed. Old methods were discarded or adapted and new ones invented. "An irresistible spiritual offensive swept over cities, towns and villages in every direction, and set the whole country ablaze," writes Robert Sandall. The results were spectacular by any standard. By the end of the year the number of stations doubled and the number of evangelists had trebled. By 1886, eight years later, there were 1,006 corps in Britain and 2,260 officers!¹

Why this sudden explosion? Because the theology of the movement had been made visible in a dramatic way. The concept of an Army mobilized by God to win the world for Jesus caught the imagination of thousands. Here was a "big idea" that could be readily grasped. And the "big idea" released enormous energy and willingness to suffer and even die for the cause. Of course, the "big idea" gave rise to new methodology. But it was the thought that came before the action—not the other way round.

That thought comes before action has profound implications for the future of The Salvation Army at this time in its history. Much effort is being put into renewing programs and methodology in order to recapture some of the Army's original dynamism. But perhaps the root problem lies deeper. Perhaps it won't be until the "big idea" is renewed and presented in a way that will capture the hearts and minds of this generation that the essential release of energy will occur. It is new thinking rather than new action that will stop the Army from running out of steam.

General John Gowans hits the nail on the head when in his greeting to this conference he writes:

The Founders of The Salvation Army were nothing if not passionate. They were passionate about people and, surprising though it may seem, they were also passionate about theology—the essential link between believing and doing was very clear to them. That link has not, I suspect, been so clear to Salvationists in the generations that have followed, but I believe there is now a change, and that this International Theology and Ethics Symposium is a sign of that change and will be a catalyst for more.

Watershed in the Army's Self-understanding

Secondly, this symposium is important because The Salvation Army has reached a watershed in its self-understanding.

One would have thought that after being in existence for 136 years The Salvation Army would long since have discovered what it is. But in fact its search for self-understanding has been long and convoluted.

As early as 1894 William Booth declared:

The Salvation Army is not inferior in spiritual character to any organisation in existence We are, I consider, equal everyway and everywhere to any other Christian organisation on the face of the earth (i) in spiritual authority, (ii) in spiritual intelligence, (iii) in spiritual functions. We hold "the keys" as truly as any church in existence.²

Despite the use of the word "organisation" that comes remarkably close to describing The Salvation Army as a church. But for various reasons our forefathers held back from saying so unambiguously. "It was not my intention to create another sect ... we are not a church. We are an Army—an Army of Salvation" wrote William Booth.³ And yet Bramwell Booth could write, "Of this Great Church of the Living God, we claim and have ever claimed, that we of The Salvation Army are an integral part and element—a living, fruit-bearing branch of the True Vine."⁴

In *Who Are These Salvationists?* Shaw Clifton reviews comprehensively the history of this discussion. He quotes John Coutts' piquant comment that "Booth became the founder of a new denomination, while believing—like most founders of new denominations—that he was doing nothing of the kind."⁵ Shaw Clifton concludes that the authoritative *Salvation Story* published in 1998 settles the matter once and for all with its assertion:

Salvation Army doctrine implies a doctrine of the Church. Each doctrine begins: "We believe ..." "We' points to a body of believers, a community of faith—a church."⁶

Whether the Army is or is not a church is not a matter of playing with words. When our self-understanding truly is that we are a church all kinds of consequences flow—or ought to flow. And it is in this area that a great deal of thinking has yet to be done.

It can also be argued that in one sense it is only now—after more than 100

years of existence—that the Army in reality is evolving into a church and that we are therefore facing a time of transition. How we handle that transition will vitally affect our future.

John R. Rhemick in *A New People of God* makes a strong case for the Army of today being in transition from a “movement” to a “church.” The implications are profound as the following selected quotations will illustrate:

As a movement of salvation, [the early Army’s] goals and purposes were relatively few and specific. To oversimplify, a movement gives the impression that it has one thing to do. People join this movement to accomplish this goal. If a person is not interested in the goal, he does not join the movement.

In the formative years of the Army, people joined the movement to win the world for Christ ... However, as the second, third, and fourth generations of Salvationists have come along, the primary goal of the Army, while still direct and clear, for many people is not the motivating principle as they seek membership. As children are born into the ranks of The Salvation Army, they no longer attend because they identify with its mission. They attend because their parents bring them ... They need to be taught to think about others before themselves.

This is one sense in which a movement is transformed into a church. The nature of the Church is to work with its own people, teaching them, inspiring them, chastening them, all in an effort to help them mature to the point where, to them, the mission of the Church is once again the contemplative, emotional, and deeply sober rallying point of the movement. The movement must never be abandoned, even within the concept of the Church, while the Church must ever be more than the movement.

I believe that it is this problem of transition with which the Army is grappling today. Its concerns as a movement have outweighed its concerns as a Church, and now it has some catching up to do. It must engage in the process of instructional programs that teach the Army, and especially its theology, as catechism classes of a church do ...

In the formative years of the Army, it was the dynamic theology of salvation which resulted in the concept of a new people of God and endowed the movement with growing as well as staying power. The Army truly became an expression of its theology. Unless this theology is again raised to pre-eminence in the hearts, minds, and lives of the Army’s people today,

The Salvation Army will be left with a mission that defies its spiritual capabilities. This theology of salvation can only be lifted up as the Army develops the strengths and mysteries of the Church, even if in a peculiar Army way, as well as the commitment and urgency of the movement.⁷

The picture painted by these quotations endorses the significance of this symposium. We are in a period of transition towards a fuller understanding of ourselves as a church—and theological concerns lie at the very heart of this process.

The Symposium—a Culmination and a Launching Point

A third reason why this symposium—the first of its kind—is so significant is that it can be seen as both the culmination of a process, which has greatly quickened in recent times, and the launching point for the next stage of the journey. It is as if a number of streams are flowing together to form a flood.

That the Army actually holds an International Theology and Ethics Symposium is in itself significant. But why only after 136 years? The reason is probably two-fold.

- Salvationists—despite the example set by its founders—have tended to think of “theology” and even of “ethics” as abstract, nebulous concerns more suited to the contemplative sitting in his cloister than to the soldier girding himself up for war. But, as already argued, the truth is precisely the opposite. It is the Army’s theology that has been the mainspring of its energy and action.
- The Army has tended to consider its theology as something that was settled once and for all by William Booth and that there is therefore nothing more to be said about it. But, again as already argued, unless that theology is made to come alive in each generation it loses its power to impel action.

These same considerations help to explain the paucity of theologians in the pantheon of well-known Salvationists. Ask for a list of pioneers, and the names of the Marechale, George Scott Railton, Frederick Booth-Tucker spring to mind. Ask for a list of musicians, and the list becomes even longer: Eric Ball, George Marshall, Erik Leidzen, Ray Steadman Allen, Erik Silfverberg, Steve Bulla. Request a list of the Army’s theologians—and the response becomes much more uncertain.

But the scene is changing. And that is as good an introduction as any to look at some of the strands that have been coming together in recent times for which this symposium is both a culminating point and a starting point. I deal with them under two headings.

Increase in Theological and Ethical Writing

Firstly, there has been a marked increase in recent years in the flow of theological and ethical writing in the Army.

The Army's theologians have always been engaged in the front-line of ministry. They have been communicators of the gospel, for whom theology was a secondary concern. They have been "working theologians"—engaged at the front-line of ministry. Their writings have not been theoretical expositions to argue abstruse points of doctrine, but messages to their readers aimed at changing lives. This is as it should be, and in this they have followed some of the greatest thinkers of the church—Augustine, Luther, Wesley, to name but three.

But the fact that for the Army's theologians theology has been a secondary concern makes them harder to identify. How precisely do you identify from the thousands of communicators the Army has had—and has—those that have contributed in a significant and creative way to the advancement of theological and ethical thinking within the Army? There are no set parameters for this exercise. Though the criteria that they should be writers, not only verbal communicators, is one. That immediately reduces the list to more manageable proportions. And fortunately, when it comes to the past, history has a way of clearing away the mists and leaving the high mountains clearly discernible.

Early Era. Looking back, what hits one is how few high mountain peaks there are to be seen. In the ranks of the Army's "early church fathers" four names stand out: William Booth, Catherine Booth, Bramwell Booth, and—perhaps more controversially—George Scott Railton. But I include him because of the influence of his thinking on the Army at a time when the Army was like flowing hot molten lava and before things became set in stone.

The three Booths, not to mention Railton, were voluminous writers, but none of them sat down to write a theological treatise. Their theology has to be extracted piece by piece from their books, sermons, articles and letters. In this regard, Roger J. Green, has done the Army a singular service through his *War on Two*

*Fronts: The Redemptive Theology of William Booth.*⁸ This unique study not only summarizes William Booth's redemptive theology, but also explores how William Booth's own understanding of salvation widened to include not only individual salvation but the salvation of society.

Middle Era. When one looks at the "middle ages" of Army history there are surprisingly few mountains peaks that stand out. A notable one is of course Samuel Brengle. He would be the first to disclaim the title of theologian, but his heart to heart writings have had a profound impact on thinking within the Army and that influence continues to this day. A high peak visible from afar is that of Frederick Coutts. His was a writing life—but always linked with practical ministry. He took a few years off to be General, but before that he had spent his time writing, and after that he kept on writing! The influence of his ministry and of his thinking will always remain with us. There are other "middle ages" peaks to be seen—Alfred Cunningham, Milton Agnew, Harry Dean—but none with quite the same prominence as Brengle and Coutts.

Contemporary Era. When one looks out over the contemporary scene what strikes one is how many mountains peaks there are to be seen! And this is the significant fact that I want to underscore. There are more "thinkers" than ever in the Army these days. We are seeing a renaissance of creativity that holds out high hopes for our future as an Army. Many of these thinkers bring not only innate creativity but also hard earned intellectual qualifications to the task.

In preparing this paper I drew up a long list of contemporary Army thinkers. Many are present at this symposium. But I have discarded the list as being impractical for inclusion. However, at the risk of gaining a few friends at the expense of losing many more, I want to mention some representative names to illustrate the point I am making. How enriched the contemporary Army has been by the theological and ethical writings of officers like Shaw Clifton, Earl Robinson, Phil Needham and Chick Yuill—all of them writing while being in the front-line of ministry. How enriched the contemporary Army is being—and this is a most significant new factor—by the writings of lay Salvationists such as Roger Green, David Rightmire, James Read, Jonathan Raymond and Donald Burke.

Let me say it again: never in its history has the Army had so much trained and

qualified intellectual fire power at its disposal. And I have no hesitation in saying that most, if not all, of that “thinking power” is linked with passionately motivated hearts that want the Army, in Lord Roy Hattersley’s phrase, to do what it was called to do, and be what it was called to be.

Now let me turn to a further strand—with its many tributaries flowing together to form a flood—that points to the significance of this occasion.

Confluence of Initiatives and Events

Secondly, there has been an amazing confluence of initiatives and events in recent years, which have been part of a discernible trend towards greater emphasis on theological and ethical thinking within the Army. Let me mention some of them.

William and Catherine Booth College. Firstly, the opening in 1982 of the Catherine Booth Bible College—which hosts us today here in Winnipeg, Canada—was a most significant milestone in the Army’s intellectual history. Under the direction of its first President, the then Major Earl Robinson, this college was set on its course to be the fulfillment of William Booth’s vision of Salvation Army universities for the training of men and women in the science of humanity. Since 1982, this college—in 1997 renamed the William and Catherine Booth College—has provided not only an intellectual, but also a physical location, for the development of Salvationist thinking.

Structures for Consideration of Moral and Ethical Questions. Secondly, the widening and intensification of the Army’s “thinking agenda” to include research into a multitude of ethical, moral and social issues, and the setting up of more formal structures within the Army for the research into such questions.

The Army has always had to deal with difficult ethical questions. For example, in the 1940s it issued a statement on the then very controversial topic of Conscientious Objection to warfare. Such “positions” were arrived at after they had been carefully deliberated by *ad hoc* groups. But in 1980 a compilation of positional statements on ethical matters was issued by International Headquarters “to meet a long-felt need.” And since then the pace has greatly accelerated.

In 1987 a Moral and Social Issues Council was formed at International Headquarters to act as a continuous spotlight on issues that vitally influence the moral climate in the world. The trend towards positional statements being terri-

torial rather than international had already begun, and this was intensified with the separation of the international and national administrations in the UK in 1990, when the IHQ Moral and Social Issues Council became part of the UK Territory. This in turn acted as a spur for other territories to establish their own equivalent councils.

In 1994 The Salvation Army Ethics Centre was begun here at the William and Catherine Booth College as a resource to Salvationists and others in Canada and around the world “to study, proclaim and practice ethics with the highest possible degree of expertise and contemporary relevance.” This was followed shortly after—in 1998—with the establishment of a Social and Moral Issues Desk at International Headquarters, under the direction of Commissioner Margaret du Plessis. This desk is now a hive of activity, monitoring and guiding the production of territorial statements on ethical issues. A world-wide internal Lotus Notes database of territorial positional statements has recently been launched for the information of Salvationists at work in the field of social, moral and ethical issues. This use of our internal electronic communications system opens up great possibilities for the future.

Other Events, Councils and Conferences. Thirdly, part of the flowing together of tributaries to form a flood is the notable heightening of the *tempo* of the Army’s “thinking agenda” in recent years through a series of events, councils and conferences, which all inter-lock and impinge on each other. By the standards of church history these events are happening with amazing rapidity. After all, the Council of Trent lasted—on and off—18 years and got through three popes! I am indebted to Roger Green for noting this trend in his paper “Facing History: Our Way Ahead for a Salvationist Theology.”⁹ The convergence of events is such that other points can be added since that paper was published in May 1999. Notice how close the dates are:

- Publication of *Salvation Story* in 1998 and subsequently the study guide to its content. This was not just another edition of the Handbook of Doctrine. Its narrative presentational style represented a new departure for such documents. Its writing by a truly internationally representative International Doctrine Council—under the chairmanship first of Colonel David Guy and then of Colonel Earl Robinson—was a major event in the Army’s theological calendar.

- The launch of *Word & Deed: A Journal of Salvation Army Theology and Ministry* in 1998. This project, which had been a long time coming, finally got off the ground in 1998, and the twice-yearly editions have since then provided an international forum for the discussion of issues related to theology and ministry. It is a “first” in Army history, and all those involved—including the leadership of the Army in the USA—are to be commended.
- The publication of the report of the *International Spiritual Life Commission* in 1998, and the subsequent follow-up material, including the book *Called to be God’s People* by the commission’s chairman, Lt. Colonel Robert Street.¹⁰ The calling of this council, its deliberations and the publication of its report, together with the follow-up material, represents a major event in Army history. Its impact on the Army will continue for many years. The trickling down process takes time!
- Launching of *The Officer* in its new format in 1998. It is not just that *The Officer* has become more colorful in its presentation. Its editions are now more thematically centered and deal with issues at greater length and depth. Until the launch of *Word & Deed*, *The Officer* was the traditional—and virtually only—place for theological and ethical debate within the Army. *The Officer* of course has wider aims and its pages can only now and again be devoted to theological and ethical issues, but we find ourselves now not only with *Word & Deed* but also with a revamped *The Officer*.
- The *International Education Symposium* held in 1999. This was another “first” and another major event centered on the thinking side of Army life. Its papers and its report on faith education represent both a chart and a charter for the advancement of the teaching within the Army of the faith we hold. The influence of that symposium will be felt for many years.
- The published report of the *International Commission on Officership* in February 2000. The Commission on Officership dealt not only with the practical issues related to officership. It dealt also with such profound issues as servant leadership in an authoritative structure. It also touched on—but did not have time to resolve—the central issue of what precisely, and theologically, an officer is and how other forms of leadership within the Army are to be understood theologically. This in turn has led to the Doctrine

Council being asked to give greater urgency to its work on these questions. Within the near future, the Doctrine Council will be submitting a manuscript of a publication under the heading of *The Ministry of the Whole People of God*, which will deal with key topics such as the calling, ministry and leadership of God's people, and the scope and character of leadership as seen from the Salvationist perspective. Many await the manuscript with great interest.

- The establishment of *Colleges of Education* for Salvationists in a number of territories is another fact of great significance. Basically this is a two-fold trend towards opening up our training colleges for cadets to a much wider constituency and for centering all of the educational functions and resources of a territory in one establishment. What is happening, for example, in the UK territory, and the Australia Eastern and USA Western territories, to mention but three, is representative of this trend. A spin-off from this development is that territories are being provided physically and geographically with a "thinking centre." "Think tanks" play a large part in the charting of the way ahead for businesses and for governments. Here in embryo form are the Army's think tanks for the future.
- The *International Conference of Training Principals* held in April 2001 is yet another event that will prove historic. The delegates to this conference did not deal so much with the nuts and bolts of officer training and education, as with the vast panorama of new possibilities open to the traditional residential approach to officer training, and the challenge of flexible, individually tailored training where needed and where appropriate. The conference marked a turning point in the Army's approach to the training of its officers.
- And now this unique first-of-its-kind event in the Army's history, the *International Theology and Ethics Symposium* that we are celebrating in May 2001. The name of Colonel Earl Robinson has already been mentioned in more than one context, but I do so again, for the Colonel together with Colonel Benita Robinson have been the alpha and omega in the convening of this event. The General has called it "a landmark event in the development of the Army" and I believe that the influence of it will be felt for many years to come.

- Ahead of us lies the *International Conference on Poverty* to be held November 2001 in Bangladesh. One of the purposes of this conference, perhaps its main purpose, will be to re-emphasize and re-call the Army to its mission to serve the poor of this world. No stronger illustration of thought preceding action can be given. Re-calling the Army to its mission to serve the poor is not primarily about establishing better programs or getting new funding. It is primarily about re-discovering as a burning conviction that the relief of poverty is an essential and inescapable part of our mission. That has everything to do with Salvationist theology and ethics!

Each of these developments mentioned is, as already noted, a tributary which in this symposium is flowing together to form a flood. Nothing is quite as neat in reality as when set out in a paper like this. But that there is a definite flowing together of trends and events cannot be doubted. The future therefore looks inviting and looks promising for the exploration and dissemination of "Salvationist Theology and Ethics for the New Millennium."

If that future is to be grasped there are tasks to be performed. It will be up to the "thinkers" of our movement to establish not only the "what" of the agenda but also its "how" so that this intellectual force of which I speak can be transmuted into effective action.

I end by offering some comments on the "what" and the "how" of the task ahead.

The "What" of the Task Ahead

Article 3 of the rationale for the present symposium sets well the "what" scene for the task ahead:

The Army has a contribution to make to theological/ethical dialogue in the Church, especially with respect to the inclusive gospel, a mission-based ecclesiology, the partnership of evangelism and social action/service, the call to holiness and high moral principles and sacramental living, equality in ministry.

The same Article 3 also moves ahead to touch on the "how" of the task ahead: We will not be able to make that contribution in significant ways if we do not provide effective means of nurturing theologians and ethicists in Salvationist theological/ethical debate.

A number of the themes mentioned in Article 3 of the rationale have been the subject of this symposium. I commend the easy crossing from theological to ethical thinking, and the equally easy crossing from the theoretical to the practical. That strikes me as thoroughly Army!

- It is right that our theology of God the Father should lead to consideration of ecology in a damaged world, and to human dignity in an oppressive world. The Salvationist voice needs to be heard on these themes.
- It is right that our theology of God the Son should lead to consideration of the Kingdom of the risen Lord in a world searching for a future, and Jesus the Son in a world where religious and ethical pluralism threatens to marginalize the person and teaching of Jesus. The Salvationist voice needs to sound out.
- It is right that our theology of God the Holy Spirit should lead us to consider the creating of Christian community in a fragmented world where people in their aloneness cry out for the support of genuine community. It is right that that same theology should point to a holy God whose indwelling presence can provide resource for holy living in a world of changing social and moral values. The Salvationists voice needs to be heard loud and clear.

If I draw special attention to the need—the urgent need—for a mission-based ecclesiology it is because we as an Army have a great deal of catching up to be done in the field of ecclesiology and because it forms one of the central thrusts of this particular paper.

I began by saying that theology comes before action, and used the illustration of how the “big idea” of an Army mobilized by God to win the world for Jesus caught the imagination of thousands and impelled them to action. I then went on to say that in our self-understanding we are increasingly accepting that we are more than a movement—we are a church. But a key question for us is how we make the transition from a movement to a church in such a way that we do not lose the original dynamic that brought the Army into being. Or if we have lost something of that dynamic, how do we regain it? How do we rediscover the magic of the “big idea”? All of that is contained in that little innocent-looking phrase “mission-based ecclesiology.”

For all of his genius, William Booth never tackled in his thinking, writing and

speaking, the matter of Salvation Army ecclesiology. He might even have spluttered at the mere mention of such a phrase! To him—or at least to part of his mind—it was a contradiction in terms.

But we now know and accept that we are an Army in transition—from a movement to a church. We are self-confident enough to believe that we are a church with a difference, with our strong sense of mission, and a three-fold mission at that. But if in making the transition we lose the dynamic of the mission conviction, we will have lost the principal reason for our existence. Much therefore hinges on that phrase “mission-based ecclesiology”

The “How” of the Task Ahead

Let me finally look briefly at the “how” of the challenge ahead: namely how best to nurture, develop and give outlet to, the thinkers in our midst, and how to do so in an international context that celebrates and respects both our diversity and our unity.

Article 3 of the rationale for this symposium—as we have noted—touched on the “how” and Articles 1 and 5 of the rationale make the “how” their central point:

- Article 1. As we face a better-educated 21st century world, we also face the pressing need to nurture Salvationist theologians and ethicists who can think/write biblically and critically about issues that matter and who can help the Army keep on course theologically and ethically.
- Article 5. It is important to nurture those theologians/ethicists from all regions in the context of the one *international* Army, so that our diverse theological/ethical expressions are united in the one gospel, the one family of God, the one community of Salvationists, the one universal mission.

The key point to be made must surely be that we recognize how much of the “how” has, and is, already taking place. We praise God and thank every individual and group concerned that has in any way opened the way for the flowing together of the many tributaries already mentioned. I believe we are seeing a movement of the Spirit in all of this. But the Spirit works through people, and we are grateful to those who have seen the vision and who have responded and acted on the promptings from within.

The second point, is that each one of us—according to the possibilities that our official role or personal giftedness open before us—need to commit ourselves:

- to promote the personal development and nurture of Salvationist theologians and ethicists everywhere by all possible means—such as study and development opportunities, and the publishing of material, whether in paper or electronic form,
- to provide and support in whatever way is possible means for the thinkers of the Army to interface with each other—whether in person or in written form,
- to encourage personally those who make the Army think—however uncomfortable they sometimes might make us feel,
- to contribute personally, according to our giftedness, to the thinking life of the Army through our own speaking and writing.

In Conclusion

May God bless His Army at this time of its history. Let's not forget the big picture we have been looking at. It is inspired thinking in the form of deeply-held convictions that leads to inspired action. And the actions of the Army in the 21st century will therefore be determined by its thinking, its beliefs and its vision. A great responsibility rests on each member of this symposium, and all those whom we represent. May God grant us vision, energy and courage.

Notes

1. John Larsson, *How Your Corps Can Grow* (London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1988), p. 1.
2. Quoted by Robert Sandall, *The History of The Salvation Army: Volume II: 1878–1886* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1950), p. 126.
3. Quoted by Earl Robinson in "The Salvation Army—Ecclesia?" *Word & Deed*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Fall 1999), p. 10.
4. Quoted in *Salvation Story* (London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1998), p. 100.
5. Shaw Clifton, *Who Are these Salvationists?* (Alexandria, VA: Crest Books, Salvation Army National Publications, 1999), p. 8.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
7. John R. Rhemick, *A New People of God* (Des Plaines, IL: The Salvation Army, 1984), pp. 220f., 224.
8. Roger J. Green, *War on Two Fronts: The Redemptive Theology of William Booth* (Atlanta: The Salvation Army, 1989).
9. Roger J. Green, "Facing History: Our Way Ahead for a Salvationist Theology," *Word & Deed*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Spring 1999), pp. 23–40.
10. Robert Street, *Called to Be God's People* (London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1999).

Neither Fearful nor Familiar: Imaging God the Father

Barbara Robinson

The children cower in the corner of their home. Their father, in an alcoholic rage screams at their mother, hits her hard and gropes in the jar of grocery money on top of the fridge for money for another drink. Next morning, the children are picked up for Sunday school by the captain of the local corps. They sit in church and sing with the others:

*Father—like he tends and spares us
Well our feeble frame he knows.*

What do these children imagine when they think of God as “Father”?

One whose will is law—powerful and capricious?

The politician bids his mistress good night and hurries home. Tomorrow is Sunday—family time—a day for church and brunch with friends and colleagues. He’s a pillar of the community, nurtured in the religious culture of America, a culture which literary critic Harold Bloom characterizes as infused with the belief that every individual is the object of God’s special attention. Bloom sarcastically comments that “To live in a country where the vast majority so enjoys God’s affection is deeply moving, and perhaps an entire society can sustain being

Major Barbara Robinson is Divisional Director of Women’s Organizations, Alberta & Northwest Territories Division, Canada.

the object of so sublime a regard, which after all was granted only to King David in the whole of the Hebrew Bible.”¹

What does this politician “think” when he thinks of God as Father? Someone generally preoccupied but harmless—innocuous and indulgent?

“Never,” writes Elie Wiesel, “shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.” The flames burned into Wiesel’s memory are the flames of Auschwitz. “Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath the silent blue sky.”²

How, laments Wiesel, having observed such scenes, could anyone continue to indulge an image of God as Father? What kind of father, with the power to protect, could stand aside silent and immobile while his children burned?

And yet, for a Jew to speak of God as *like* a Father or a Christian to affirm belief in God *the* Father is to give assent to a vital part of the faith community’s interpretive framework. Can it be dispensed with?

Is to call God “Father” as fraught with complication as many seem to imply? Does the prominence of the designation contribute to an overwhelming—if wrong—sense of God as male? And if so, do we have the right of substitution? Or do we understand our task as primarily a kind of linguistic rehabilitation—rescuing the phrase both from any fearful associations with oppressive patriarchy and from the kind of non-demanding coziness which popular culture would make of it?

I am not a theologian. Neither am I a biblical scholar. I am a historian—and a social historian at that. As such, my academic sphere of concern is with the actions and assumptions of men and women in history to the degree that they can be known from the documents and evidence they leave behind. When, as a historian, I intuitively blanch at the thought of even attempting a paper on foundational Christian doctrine, I remind myself that the formal articulation of Trinitarian doctrine came about as a result of the experience of the early church in history. In Christianity’s encounter with the surrounding culture, it was absolutely essential to be able to state who Jesus was in relationship to an implicitly acknowledged Creator and sustainer of all that is.

It is still historically critical. Then as now the most daunting missiological

pressure comes from pluralism. As Lesslie Newbigin put it, as soon as "one goes outside the Christendom situation to bring the Gospel to non-Christians, one soon discovers that the doctrine of the Trinity is not something that can be kept out of sight ... The truth is that one cannot preach Jesus even in the simplest terms without preaching him as the Son. His revelation of God is the revelation of an only begotten of the Father and you cannot preach him without speaking of the Father and the Son."³

But while it is missiologically critical to be able to state what we believe about the Father revealed by our Lord Jesus Christ, historical study also indicates that it is problematic. It is problematic at least in part because of our tendency to understand and explicate God's fatherhood on the basis of the understanding of what "fathering" means in our own time and cultural context.

Statement of Intent

This paper will attempt to demonstrate the way in which, even within our own short denominational history, a dominant biblical image—the image of God the Father in relationship to the prodigal—has been appropriated in different ways—ways that reflect the presuppositions of place and time. This can serve as a warning for the need for sustained evangelical attention to the "whole counsel of God."

Perhaps it is helpful to step back and remind ourselves again of what it is we do or attempt by the kind of intellectual work we call Christian "doctrine" or "theology."

Stanley Grenz defines Christian theology as "an intellectual enterprise by and for the Christian community, in which the community of those whom the God of the Bible has encountered in Jesus Christ seeks to understand, clarify and delineate the community's interpretive framework."⁴

If, as those committed to a cultural/ linguistic approach would insist, theology provides the "rules of discourse for the believing community,"⁵ a foundational question is "Who sets the rules?" How, as Salvationists, do we differentiate between a theological step and a stumble? What are the criteria for a legitimate or illegitimate conceptual move?

Methodologically, this is not entirely clarified for Salvationists by *Salvation Story*. In it, we read that "God discloses his person and purposes as Father, Son

and Holy Spirit in the unfolding revelation of Scripture *and* in his saving encounters with us.”⁶ The first clause emphasizes the total reliability and trustworthiness of scripture as the ultimate foundation and criterion of a saving knowledge of God. But what other kinds of intellectual exploration are authorized by the conjunction *and*? What other kinds of saving encounters reveal God to us?

Does this throw us into the theological camp which Peter Widdicombe in his important patristics study, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius*, describes as the “inclusivists”: theologians like Elizabeth Johnson, Ruth Duck, Sallie McFague who, in emphasizing the metaphorical nature of all language about God, argue that we are thereby emboldened to constantly risk the use of new ways of speaking about God—ways more relevant or potent for our time.⁷

The Inclusivists

For a theologian like Sallie McFague, any metaphor used to speak of God must be understood as what she calls a “strategy of desperation.”⁸ Metaphors are made necessary by God’s mysterious otherness. If God could be propositionally described, the church would have done so. Instead, we work with the best words or concepts at hand, seeking to describe what we can never know in terms of what we do know. But we must never lose sight of the inadequacy of all of our God-talk and constructs.

According to this perspective, writes Widdicombe, “No one term, least of all father, now a dead metaphor and bound up with patriarchal associations is adequate as an appellation for God.”⁹

McFague argues that it is the Bible itself which legitimizes a radically inclusive theological method. She asserts that “It is precisely the patchwork, potpourri character of the Hebraic and Christian scriptures with their rich flood of images, stories, themes—some interweaving and mutually supportive, and others disparate, presenting alternative possibilities—that give Christian theologians authority to experiment, to find grids or screens with which to interpret God’s transforming love within the givens of their own time.”¹⁰

In McFague’s very creative study, *Models of God*, she introduces the helpful distinction between a “metaphor” and a “model” of God, defining a theological model as a metaphor with staying power. That is, its stability and pervasiveness within the tradition come about because it manages to illuminate multiple aspects

of the subject. So, if God is explored through the model of “father”, many other aspects of the divine–human relationship become comprehensible. The model makes it possible to think of humanity as children, sin as rebellion, and redemption as homecoming.

McFague asserts that theology gets into trouble when it loses the ability to differentiate between a definition and a model; when it forgets that the biblical narratives are accounts of the ways men and women experience God. When we speak of God as our rock, tower, king, mother we are not defining God. We are describing aspects of the way in which we perceive our interaction with God.

The inclusivists call for a “free theology”—“willing to play with [linguistic] possibilities and ... not take itself too seriously. Though the situation it addresses, the salvific power of God for [our] time, is a matter of ultimate seriousness, theology’s contribution is not.”¹¹ Inclusivists acknowledge that novel ways of expressing or describing God’s relationship to the creation may not turn out to be better or more helpful, but still believe that they should not be ruled out until tried.

The Exclusivists

Those theologians whom Widdicombe would classify as “exclusivists” are not unwilling to engage in the “play with possibilities” which is always the nature of creative work. But it is not free play. They believe that they are constrained by certain rules of the game. For them Father, Son and Holy Spirit are God’s revealed self–designation, attested by scripture and therefore unalterable. The church’s address to God is authorized only as a repetition of Jesus’ address. Jesus, the full and final revelation, calls God “Father” and invites those joined in him to do the same. The words of the scripture can be relied upon because they are the words of the Son and the word the Son used for God was the word Father.

To reassert the ultimate authority of the Scripture as a witness to the nature of God is not to overlook the reality that the way we read and interpret the Bible is inevitably influenced by the cultural and philosophical assumptions of our own time. This makes hermeneutics a perpetually uncomfortable task. Martin Buber, in three simple statements, managed to convey the sense of an exclusivist commitment.

1. The Bible, though composed of many books, is nevertheless one book because of its basic theme—the encounter of a people with the nameless One.

2. Generations after generation must wrestle with the book—although they do not always do so in a spirit of obedience, or willingness to listen, but often with annoyance, even outrage.
3. Decay takes place only when a sense of commitment to the book has vanished.¹²

For methodological exclusivists, Christians encounter the nameless One in Jesus—and God is thus named and revealed.

The problem for many feminist theologians has been that these names are male, and therefore can create the impression that God is male. Feminist theology is to be thanked for the role it has played in calling attention to the negative consequences of this kind of thinking and for catalyzing renewed exploration of the essential elements of Trinitarian doctrine. Early outrage has given way to more sustained and subtle awareness of the issues of gender and language in the communication of Christian experience.

The One we call God is beyond all sexual distinction: neither male nor female. We use gendered metaphors because God is personal and we have no other way to speak of persons except in a gendered way. While it may be possible to substitute a phrase like “pure love” or “perfect fellowship” for Father, Son and Spirit in describing the life of the Trinity, the words do not invite a man or woman into the staggering intimacy with God which the doctrine and scripture reveals.

The Adopting Father

My husband and I are the parents of three adopted children. I remember receiving a card when our oldest son arrived. It described this child as one “carried not under my heart but in it.”

It is the image of adoption, not physical paternity, which is first explicitly used to reveal aspects of God’s fatherhood. Certainly, images of God’s creative paternity are implicit in the creation stories. God creates the universe as an expression of gratuitous love and declares it to be good. He fashions creatures with the capacity to give or withhold their love in return. “It is a love which blesses: which wills life and when life comes, exclaims, ‘It is good that you exist.’”¹³

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them “man” (Gen. 5:1–2 NRSV).

But explicit use of the description of God as father waits for his Exodus intervention. The Lord instructs Moses to say to the hard-hearted Pharaoh, "This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son and I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me.'" (Exod. 4:22,23). God, in anger and compassion, looks upon an enslaved and alienated people. He declares his desire to adopt them by the action of redeeming them from slavery, a right reserved for the nearest relative. God has chosen them for the intimate relationship of sonship—with all its privilege and accountability.

The tragedy of this expression of divine Fatherhood is that the nation is prodigal. Despite God's limitless provision of identity, care, advice, shelter and inheritance, the nation prefers to chart its own destiny:

When Israel was a child, I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called my son.
But the more I called Israel,
the further they went from me (Hos. 11:1-2).

God is imaged as the utterly attentive parent—teaching Ephraim "to walk," healing him, bending over to feed them (Hos. 11:3-4), who nonetheless suffers his child's insolence, watches the suffering which sinful choices bring, and never stops longing for the child's return and reconciliation.

Even so, in what is referred to as the Book of Comfort (Jer. 30:1-31:40), God announces through the prophet his intention to lead his people home:

... beside streams of water
on a level path, where they will not stumble,
Because I am Israel's father
And Ephraim is my firstborn son ...
Though I often speak against him,
I still remember him.
Therefore my heart yearns for him;
I have great compassion for him (Jer. 31:9,20).

The nation as wayward child, waking up to the reality he has chosen through rebellion, expresses his pain:

After I strayed
I repented
After I came to understand,
I beat my breast.
I was ashamed and humiliated
Because I bore the disgrace of my youth (Jer. 31:19).

The Unique Son

If God's fathering of the nation is marked by pathos and disappointment, it is redeemed by the joyous mutuality of the relationship between Father and Jesus, the unique Son. The relationship is announced with pleasure at Jesus' baptism: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). If Israel is revealed as a son who is chronically prodigal, Jesus is the son who perfectly expresses his Father's intentions. He is, as Luther said, the perfect mirror of the Father's heart.

The Johannine account expresses the uniqueness of Jesus' sonship with ever strengthening emphasis.

Jesus is the "One and Only": "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18).

Jesus and the Father are perfectly united in mission: "Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does" (John 5:19-20).

Jesus reveals the Father as one who shares his entire inheritance and glory with the Son: "All that belongs to the Father is mine" (John 16:15).

Jesus declares Him to be the righteous Father, unacknowledged by sinful humankind: "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you" (John 17:25).

He declares that the Father has chosen to self disclose through the Son's words and his works and attests to his authority by miracle and sign: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father ... the words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work" (John 14:9,10).

And yet again, the Father is revealed as a suffering parent, who allows the innocent son to drink a cup of suffering in order to bring his errant brothers and sisters home: "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (John 18:11). As the Father redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt, the Son, as elder brother, redeems men and women from sin's slavery, opening the way for their adoption.

Early Army Imagery

How then, has this prominent biblical imagery been appropriated and preached in the short life of our own denomination? The Salvation Army began

as an evangelistic movement focused on the spiritual needs of the urban poor. Both William and Catherine Booth were first and foremost, revivalist preachers. It is not surprising that the image of God the Father and the prodigal son emerged as a dominant theme in early Army preaching and teaching. The story, as the image reemerged in Jesus' best-known parable was evangelically useful—graphic, relational and full of pathos.

It seems to have been the topic of one of Catherine Booth's earliest sermons, preached in August, 1860 in Gateshead. She wrote home to her mother: "I had a splendid congregation on Sunday night, I took the pulpit very much against my own desire but in compliance with the general wish, W[illia]m opened the service for me and I spoke exactly an hour from the Prodigal Son."¹⁴

William and Catherine make frequent reference to having referred to the parable in their pastoral or street work. When Catherine looked back upon and sought to justify the beginnings of her own ministry ventures outside of her home, she would tell the story of the evening when she was on the way to listen to a well-known preacher and felt compelled to stop and speak with some of the people crowding the evening streets. She met up with a woman whose husband's alcoholism was eroding the fabric of their family life. Catherine entered the home and read the story of the prodigal son. The father was convicted, wept, prayed—and agreed to sign a prohibition pledge.

Early Salvationists believed and consistently proclaimed that they were living in a prodigal culture: that the alienation and deprivation which so often accompanied a move to the city mirrored the universal situation of the human heart.

They described the women who came into their care in the rescue homes as "a class ... friendless and homeless."¹⁵ In *The Deliverer*, the magazine used to promote the work being done in women's social services, the articles frequently played upon images of a distance from home and family. Contributors frequently emphasized the contrast between an earlier Edenic, rural existence versus the corruption of the English city: the innocent fresh-faced country girl seduced by the "real Londoner ... lured from home and family."¹⁶

But they did not limit this analysis to the poor residing in the urban slums. Prodigality was the universal human condition: "In this respect all men are alike under sin ... they are all away in a far country without His consent, contrary to

His wish and in defiance of His authority. They may possess many good qualities and amiable traits; they may be very generous and good natured to their fellow prodigals; but in setting at naught their Father's Will and law, they are prodigals still."¹⁷ Catherine amplified, "There is a time in the history of every sinner (certainly of everyone who hears the Gospel) when he chooses to remain away from God, and the choice to remain away is equivalent to positive departure."¹⁸

Additionally, early Salvationists found in the parabolic figure of the elder brother, confirmation of their perception of the Victorian church as cold and self-righteous. Catherine's West End preaching on this subject was scathing and accusatory. She maintained that "there are thousands of such people, who go to and fro to our churches and chapels every Sunday like a door on its hinges. They say, 'O Lord, have mercy upon us miserable sinners,' but they have no real desire for his mercy, no recognition even of the necessity for the forgiveness of sins, no concern about living to please him, no idea of what repentance or salvation really means."¹⁹

The Victorian Father

What is historically striking are the aspects of "fatherhood" highlighted in the utilization of the parable of the prodigal son as a teaching/preaching device. The "Father" is rarely preached as a figure of intimacy but rather as the source of all legitimate authority and righteous law. To return "home from the far country to the Father" is to approach God, the one deserving obedience and respect, in absolute submission and repentance.

Rejection of the Father's authority was a spurning of proper governance and moral management. To do so was regarded as inviting injury to the entire human family: "By taking his portion prematurely, and wasting and prostituting it, he prevented the increase which would have resulted from his father's wise and judicious management of it; and thus injured the whole family."²⁰

For Victorian Evangelicalism, concepts of intimacy, nurture, protection and safety which a theologian like McFague collapses into the non-gendered image of God as parent, were more characteristically attributed to the mother, and through the use of feminine images and metaphors, to God.

Historian Pamela Walker, in her recently published Army history, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down* notes that the only novel Catherine Booth ever men-

tioned in her prolific writing and correspondence is Susan Warner's *Wide, Wide World* (1850). Walker describes the book as articulating a "feminist theology in which the mother's love is the earthly example of God's love and heaven is imagined as the place of final reunion of mother and daughter."²¹ The Victorian mother, more consistently than the Victorian father, was a common religious symbol of righteous, forgiving faithfulness.

This was powerfully the case in Catherine Booth's thinking and writing, and in the rhetoric of the early Army. Catherine was strongly attached to and spiritually influenced by her own mother—and emotionally "let down" by the backsliding and alcoholism of both her father and her brother.

In both her preaching and in early Salvation Army ministry practice, "deficient mothering" was frequently cited as the reason for a sinner's first fall. Girl G "had no mother and worse than no father, was thrown out on the world at fourteen years old, but is now mothered, happy and proving Jesus able to save."²²

The image of the "rescue" or social service client as a willful, wayward child was met by the image of the rescue officer as firm corrective mother. Case intervention was likened to "the mothering help which does not scruple to take this cleansing process personally in hand."²³

Relativized Relationships

Despite the Army's habitual use of familial concepts and words to convey spiritual reality, it could be argued that Salvationist teaching quickly subverted or relativized the importance of each and every human relationship. The claims and demands of the new spiritual family of the saved absolutely transcended the demands or expectations of natural family life. Hence, early Salvationist converts were heartily supported in their decisions to ignore the resistance put up by their natural families to enlistment in the "salvation war."

This understanding of the way in which biblical teaching can subvert conventional, cultural family expectations is close to the contemporary explication of Christ's teaching done by New Testament scholar Marcus Borg. He writes:

In that culture [New Testament] the family (which was patriarchal) was the primary social unit, the center of both identity and material security and a "good" family was one of the blessings of God. Yet Jesus spoke of leaving family and even of "hating" family. Indeed his words, "Call no

man on earth your father, for you have one father, who is in heaven” may very well be directed against the patriarchal family, which as the primary social unit in that world was a microcosm of a hierarchical system. If so, this is a fascinating instance of Jesus using the image of God as father in a way that subverted patriarchy.²⁴

When the early Army preached God as “Father” they tended to equate fatherhood with lordship; God, as Father, laid claim to absolute obedience and submission. The movement’s holiness teaching stressed that the Father’s inheritance—spiritual power and full likeness to the image of the unique Son—was available for the asking to any returning prodigal.

Intimacy Supplants Authority

If we contrast 19th century teaching on the parable of the prodigal son with that of a writer like Henri Nouwen a century later, it becomes evident how deeply affected by culture the use of a name, title or metaphor can be.

Henri Nouwen’s 1994 book, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, has already become a contemporary classic. The frequent allusions to this work in publications such as *The Officer* magazine over the past decade indicate the scope of its influence on Salvation Army thinking and spirituality. But the Father in Nouwen’s interpretation of the parable is not a figure of authority but of intimacy.

Over a period of many weeks, Nouwen meditated on the experience of sitting in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, before Rembrandt’s masterpiece, “The Return of the Prodigal Son.” Within the painting, he sees infinite compassion, unconditional love, everlasting forgiveness—divine realities—emanating from the Father who is the creator of the universe.²⁵

The Father dominates the canvas. He is the theme and life of the painting. For Nouwen, Rembrandt managed to capture in this figure a highly nuanced interpretation of the nature of God. The representation is made rich and multi-variant because of the manner in which both masculine and feminine imagery is incorporated. Rembrandt gave the Father a strong, masculine left hand. The right hand however is refined, soft and tender. It is a feminine hand. “He holds and she caresses. He confirms and she consoles.”²⁶

The Father is dressed in an expansive red coat, which, on first glance remind-

ed Nouwen of a tent or place of shelter. As he looked more attentively, he came to see in the shape of the cloak the wings of a sheltering mother bird, reminding him of Jesus' words to a prodigal city: "Jerusalem ... How often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matt. 23:37). Nouwen writes, "What I see here is God as Mother, receiving back into her womb the one whom she made in her own image."²⁷ It is the inclusiveness of Rembrandt's seventeenth century vision which makes it so striking to Christians of our own time.

Nouwen asserts that the image of God as Father in the parable of the prodigal son expresses three central attributes: God is the God of grief, forgiveness and generosity. He points out the fact that in most eastern cultures, for a son to request his inheritance while the father still lived was tantamount to wishing that the father was dead. So, the divine father eternally suffers the grief of the awareness that his beloved children wish him dead and act as if he is.

He is the God who forgives unconditionally; "a heart that does not demand anything for itself, a heart that is completely empty of self seeking ... It calls me to keep stepping over all my arguments that say that forgiveness is unwise, unhealthy and impractical ... It demands of me that I step over that wounded part of my heart that feels hurt and wronged and that wants to stay in control and put a few conditions between me and the one I am asked to forgive."²⁸

And he is the God of barrier-transcending generosity. "The way the younger son is given robe, ring and sandals, and welcomed home with a sumptuous celebration, as well as the way the elder son is urged to accept his unique place in his father's heart and to join his younger brother around the table, make it very clear that all boundaries of patriarchal behavior are broken through. This is not the picture of a remarkable father. This is the portrayal of God, whose goodness, love, forgiveness, care, joy and compassion have no limits at all."²⁹

There is no doubt that the aspects or qualities of God which Nouwen observed in Rembrandt's painting of the Father are powerfully redemptive. Linguistically and psychologically, many have found that Nouwen's approach has "rescued the Father"—making it a palatable, inclusive symbol. But the realities which Nouwen chose to explicate are also predominantly non-gendered—compassion, grief, forgiveness, generosity—and therefore feel quite theologically safe. Few

Salvationists would have difficulty, either, with the way in which he ascribes feminine or masculine traits to God: what he describes as the tender, consoling, feminine hand and the strong, confirming masculine hand. But it is at this point that he is criticized by contemporary feminists, many of whom would argue that there is as broad a range of capacity to express tenderness or strength between woman and woman as there is between man and woman: that the application of such language to God does nothing to liberate women from ways of being in the world which are readily stereotyped and restrictive.

It is striking to observe the deep level of anxiety at moving beyond the most tentative use of female gendered language for God. I am told of widespread denominational dismay over the use of female gendered language in this year's Canadian World Day of Prayer liturgy.³⁰ This indicates a need for much broader historical study of the use of the trope of God as Father/ Mother in the history of the church. Just as there is a significant difference in how our Victorian founders understood God's Fatherhood, so many contemporary evangelicals would be profoundly squeamish with the "God-talk" of the High Middle Ages.³¹ Our innovations are old ways indeed! It was Julian of Norwich who wrote:

In this I saw that all the debts we owe, by God's command, to fatherhood and motherhood by reason of God's fatherhood and motherhood, are repaid in the true loving of God. This blessed love God works in us.³²

In a similar manner, Anselm of Canterbury prayed:

And you, Jesus, are you not also a mother? Are you not the mother who, like a hen, gathers her chickens under her wings? Truly, Lord, you are a mother; for both they who are in labour and they who are brought forth are accepted by you. You have died more than they, that they may labour to bear. It is by your death that they have been born, for if you had not been in labour, you could not have borne death; and if you had not died, you would not have brought forth. For, longing to bear sons into life, you tasted death, and by dying you begot them. You did this in your own self, your servants by your commands and help. You as the author, they as the ministers. So you, Lord God, are the great mother ...

Christ, my mother, you gather your chickens under your wings; this dead chicken of yours puts himself under those wings. For by your gentleness the badly frightened are comforted, by your sweet smell the despairing are revived, your warmth gives life to the dead, your touch justifies sinners.

Mother, know again your dead son, both by the sign of your cross and the voice of his confession. Warm your chicken, give life to your dead man, justify your sinner. Let your terrified one be consoled by you; despairing of himself, let him be comforted by you; and in your whole and unceasing grace let him be refashioned by you. For from you flows consolation for sinners; to you be blessing for ages and ages. Amen.³³

Again, we are forced to revisit an earlier question: "Who sets the rules for the believing community?" If, even within a single century, very different emphases can be drawn from the image of God the Father for the edification of the Church, what do we make of two thousand years of Christian engagement with scripture? How can evangelicals understand the role of tradition in shaping theology?

Evangelicals are committed to a theology that is rigorously biblical. This emphasis on the centrality of God's revelation in scripture is one of a constellation of priorities which characterize what Anglo-American church historians term classical evangelicalism.³⁴ Biblicism, along with an emphasis on the necessity of individual conversion and the Cross, functions as a kind of touchstone for this theological approach, an approach which our international mission statement asserts that we share.

Consequently, although evangelicals value tradition as a source of theological guidance, they do so in a qualified manner. For example, while the mystical experience and lush language of a writer such as Julian of Norwich is regarded as devotionally helpful, it remains suspect or at least secondary as a source for theological formulation. Evangelicals tend to favor the engagement with the thinking, writing and language of those Christians of antiquity who have made an emphasis on textual revelation primary.

It is recognized that Christians of every period are fallible. We live within webs of presuppositions we fail to even see as time-bound and partial. But, from an evangelical perspective, the fundamental way in which the Church can understand God the Father remains the teaching of the Son. Jesus reveals the Abba of intimacy, the Lord to whom utter obedience is owed, the Suffering One with a heart ripped with pain at his beloved Son's suffering. If historical emphasis can become one-sided, Jesus' revelation is multifaceted; it speaks to the child of the alcoholic father needing to glimpse the Divine intimacy, to the cavalier politician needing to confront the depth of his accountability to the Lord of the Universe:

even, dare it be said, to a faithful, obedient Jewish community struggling for ways to reformulate faith by acknowledging a suffering, agonized God.

Methodologically, it seems that to be evangelical is to “do theology” within the exclusivist camp.

Notes

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6. *Salvation Story: Salvationist Handbook of Doctrine* (London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1998), p. 16.
7. Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. viii.
8. Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 33.
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11. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
12. Cited in *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim*, ed. Michael Morgan (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), p. 233.
13. Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, p. 103.
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18. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
19. Catherine Booth, "A Mock Salvation and a Real Deliverance from Sin," *Popular Christianity* (London: The Salvation Army, 1887), p. 41.
20. Catherine Booth, "The Prodigal," *Life and Death*, p. 88.
21. See Pamela Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
22. Marianne Asdell, "A Loose Leaf," *The Deliverer* (1 July 1889).
23. Major Mrs. Reynolds, *The Deliverer* (1 January 1890).
24. Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 81.
25. Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (New York: Image Books, 1994).
26. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
30. Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, *World Day of Prayer 2001: Informed Prayer, Prayerful Action* (Toronto: Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, 2001). Website: www.wicc.org.

31. See for example Caroline Walker Bynum. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992).

32. M.L. Del Mastro, trans., *Revelations of Divine Love of Juliana of Norwich* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), p. 193.

33. St. Anselm, "Prayer to St Paul," *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1973), pp. 153–156.

34. The seminal work is D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989). See also *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700–1990*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Ecology in a Damaged World

Cornelius A. Buller

Introduction

In his forward to a recent collection of essays on ecology, John Stott states what we all know is too true: "Christians have been slow to respond to the imperatives of creation care, and we evangelical believers in particular have been even more laggardly."¹ Reasons for this deficiency are wide ranging. Already in the beginnings of the contemporary environmental consciousness Christianity and Judaism were blamed for the environmental crisis. The seminal essay of Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," pointed the finger of blame at the Christian (and Jewish) hierarchical notion of creation.² The idea of human dominion over the rest of the created world (an idea founded on the creation of humans in the image of God) was identified as the root of the current ecological crisis. This interpretation was picked up by many people, including those who are not Christians and who were content and perhaps even gleeful to have such a seemingly powerful charge against one of the most foundational beliefs of Christianity.³

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised, although it is certainly disconcerting, that many Christians simply have accepted this analysis of and charge against their faith. For example, the World Council of Churches concluded its series of

Dr. Cornelius A. Buller is an Ethicist on the staff of The Salvation Army Ethics Center, Canada.

consultations on this issue by accepting these charges and in fact adapting their conception of creation by jettisoning the biblical idea that humanity is created in the image of God and has a special role to "fill the earth and subdue it."⁴ R.J. Berry states that it seems likely that many people appear to have been "diverted" from Christianity to other belief systems as a result of this one issue and how Christians have responded to it.⁵

My argument in this paper is that it is precisely in its biblically shaped understanding of reality as the creation of God that Christianity's strength for an environmental ethic is found. As will become clear, the charge by modern and post-modern interpreters against an ancient text and tradition, is a charge that, at least in part, is hypocritical and self-serving. Furthermore, unless some very fundamental misconceptions are exposed and corrected, all the talk of ecology will not fundamentally change the course of our culture's destructive ways.

Before launching into these arguments, I need briefly to return to the problem raised by the opening quotation. Perhaps it is a kind of rear guard action they are engaged in that many evangelical Christians have been seen to be laggardly in responding to all that pressures them to become environmentalists. If the solution to the crisis is presented as an option between faithfulness to God and a theology and ethics that is faithful to Scripture on the one hand, and an ecotheology which readily jettisons any parts of the historical Christian faith that do not fit the latest politically correct notions on the other hand, then it is no wonder that many devout Christian people resist the pressures of popular culture. However, there is an additional concern that affects all people, regardless of creed, who prize autonomy. If environmentalism is, as it appears to be, a heteronomous ideology, set of principles, rules and commands that are imposed by external forces, then too, many people will resist their adoption. Both of these can be seen to be true of the ecological movement and of western culture's hesitant responses to the movement. It is, after all, not only Christians who have been slow to take up the cause. Ecofundamentalism can be oppressive and even abusive of the right and need of individuals and communities to act as mature moral agents. When the end of ecoradical action reduces others, human and non-human alike, to means only, then its narrowly defined utilitarian calculus allows them to trump the rights, freedoms and properties of others.