



COMMISSIONER ROBERT STREET
CHAIRMAN OF THE INTERNATIONAL DOCTRINE COUNCIL

DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

SERIES: THE ARMY'S ELEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

Commissioner Robert Street introduces a series on the Army's eleven Articles of Faith, by members of the International Doctrine Council

TWO thousand years ago, when there were no newspapers, televisions, radios, mobile phones, websites, electronic media, or other means of global communication, Jesus said something that may have seemed to some an unrealistic boast. He said: 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away' (Matthew 24:35). He was utterly confident of the eternal quality of the truth he declared. He knew it would endure because, ultimately, it is the standard by which all other truth must be measured.

His words are still with us. Through the centuries people have lived by them and looked to them for guidance. They still do. Practically anywhere in the world today, we are able to read or hear the essence of what Jesus taught, did and said. His words – as recorded in Scripture – are available in countless languages and dialects. They are relevant to cultural settings of all kinds. They speak to all situations. We find them in the Bible.

The Bible provides us with other words too. Its truths are presented in many forms. Its messages, in Old and New Testaments, have been written by a variety of people from many walks of life. Its pages are filled with the recorded experiences of men and women of faith over many centuries. Its divinely inspired teaching enriches our hearts and feeds our souls.

Because God gave humans a part to play in revealing his Word to us, we are given insights into their understanding of faith and the world in which they lived. We see the development of human understanding of God from early days – when faith in *one* God, the *living* God, was new in concept and definition (Deuteronomy 6:4) – to a later time when a wider knowledge of the nature and loving purposes of the Creator were revealed supremely in and by Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, the different ways in which individuals, groups and cultures have interpreted Scripture through the centuries has meant that division, condemnation of others, violence and even murder have taken place at the hands of those who have used the name of Jesus to justify their actions. At times people's convictions have loomed large and grown out of proportion. The chaos and damage caused to the Church has been shameful and tragically unchristlike.

At first, the earliest Christians simply acknowledged one another in the basic confession: 'Jesus is Lord' (1 Corinthians 12:3). At the time it seemed to be all that was needed in the way of creed, but as the Church grew and divisions in belief emerged, it became necessary to formulate agreed statements of faith. It could be said that doctrine is needed to refute error as much as to state the truth about God

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and his will – and today, with the multiplicity of languages involved in translating doctrine, the task of defining or redefining eternal truth in words that can be globally embraced, demands great care. In some ways it is an impossible task because of the unknowable greatness of Almighty God (Romans 11:33-36). We do well to remember when writing doctrine, that no one actually has the capacity to fully express the truth of God in words – and no one life, apart from that of Christ himself, can manage to worthily show it.

In a world of varied intellects, mixed motives and different cultural backgrounds, it isn't surprising that differing interpretations and misinterpretations still occur, bringing dissention and confusion. So it is important to provide a means by which members of a church – especially an international one – can express their basic, united understanding of the faith in ways which honour God. In 1878, when The Salvation Army took its name, its eleven Articles of Faith were written and verified. These beliefs can be found in *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine* or any Salvation Army song book. We call them 'The Doctrines'. They are similar to those of the Methodist New Connexion (1838), the church in which William Booth learned his doctrine, and are accepted as being in the mainstream of Christian belief. Language changes, ways of

expressing truths differ, and the translation of words is not an exact science. There is not always a direct parallel among languages for key words and it is wise to remember that every translation of the Bible is precisely that – a translation. But while these and other difficulties make the 'updating' of any doctrines problematic, they also indicate that the explanation of doctrine in contemporary terms is essential.

The Salvation Army has kept its doctrines comparatively concise. They express the personal faith of Salvationists, whilst sharing a common emphasis with other Christian traditions. They represent the teaching of the Church in general, and play a positive and wholesome part in the life of an Army that promotes, preaches and practises a gospel of love. They are meant to inspire holy living – and ultimately to point us to Jesus.

When John described Jesus as the Word (John 1:1, 2), he was holding him up as the ultimate, eternal standard of truth. John also records Jesus as announcing himself as *the* Truth (John 14:6). The Pharisees refused to acknowledge the validity of Jesus' testimony and wanted evidence from elsewhere (John 8:13). But Jesus knew his own validity. He knew the strength and eternal nature of his words. He knew that what he taught he acted upon. He had no false standards, just as he had no false words. His

teaching would stand the test of time, having a completeness and integrity that is unmatched anywhere. It always will.

Without an eternal standard of truth humankind has nowhere to turn for ratification of what is right or wrong, good or evil. In the sacrificial death of Jesus – who spoke the word with his life – we find good and evil in stark, defining contrast. Whilst it seemed to those around that goodness had been humiliated and vanquished by a corrupt and overpowering evil force, the reverse was the case.

It is possible to deny the truth, to exaggerate it, to ignore, suppress, misunderstand or hide the truth, but we can never destroy the truth. Truth will always be truth. God will always be God. The One who is the Truth is the only one to whom we can look for guidance and are ultimately required to answer. To accept the truth he shares with us about ourselves is to embrace the grace he offers (John 1:12). Whenever doctrine helps us understand this better – and welcome the Word of God to the centre of our lives – it achieves its purpose.



LIEUT-COLONEL KAREN SHAKESPEARE
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR PERSONNEL (DEVELOPMENT),
UNITED KINGDOM TERRITORY WITH THE REPUBLIC
OF IRELAND, AND MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL
DOCTRINE COUNCIL

DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

SERIES: THE ARMY'S ELEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.

FIND myself wondering if the biblical writers ever struggled to find the right words to express their thoughts. Did they, like many authors through the centuries, ponder over initial ideas and carefully plan before writing? And did they ever doubt that they had really expressed, in ways that people would really understand, the depth of their inspiration, knowledge and emotion? These are not flippant questions, nor are they irreverent, but rather they spring from a sense of wonder at the way in which the Bible still speaks so eloquently in the 21st century. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, ordinary human beings recorded their understanding of the nature of God and his actions in history, reflected upon the human condition and wrote their accounts of the relationship between God, individuals and groups.

Many generations later, their work retains the capacity to teach, challenge, inspire and comfort even when translated into languages and cultures that are far removed from the experience of the authors. The deep spiritual and theological significance of the incarnation is summed up in a few words – 'the Word became flesh' (John 1:14); the enormity of God's grace finds expression in a stark statement – 'while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8); and the ultimate benchmark for our life as Christians is described in the beautiful prose of 1 Corinthians chapter 13, with its challenging summary statement – 'the greatest of these is love' (v 13). The text has not lost its meaning and power even when read at great distance from its time and place of origin.

The biblical writers told their story and wrote their message faithfully, speaking of how God, who is essentially mystery, has revealed his character through his actions in history. We read of a God who is both revealed to us and yet is ultimately unknowable; a God of power, majesty, holiness, justice and love, who claims his people's devotion, their loyalty and right living. We see how, throughout history, the people of God began to understand something of God's character and their obligations to him through a pattern of obedience followed by disobedience, repentance, reflection and new insight. Honest about

their own, and their nation's, failure to keep the covenant, the authors witnessed to a God who would not abandon his people and always reached out to them with justice and love, demonstrating how their God not only required the worship, commitment and holiness of his people but provided the means to make this possible, ultimately through Jesus Christ.

But the Bible is more than the history of a people, more than a source of information about God's dealings with humanity. It is a living document which draws us in to the story so that we are transformed by our own encounter with God, and find in it both the foundation for, and measure of, right belief (orthodoxy) and right action (orthopraxy). The influence of the Holy Spirit is not confined to the writers, but also extends to the readers as we discover that it has meaning for our own lives and circumstances, and we are formed into the people of God in our own generation.

As we develop habits of reading, become absorbed in Scripture, and reflect upon it in the light of Christian teaching, our personal understanding of who God is will influence, and to some extent shape, the meaning we discern. At the same time the biblical text will develop and enrich that understanding, becoming a source of information, a factor in our formation and the catalyst for our transformation.

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION:

WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT CHALLENGES FOR CHRISTIANITY IN YOUR CONTEXT AT THE PRESENT TIME?
HOW CAN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE WHOLE MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE HELP YOU KNOW HOW TO ADDRESS THESE?
HOW DO WE APPROACH PARTS OF SCRIPTURE THAT WE FIND DIFFICULT OR ALIEN TO OUR EVERYDAY LIFE?
WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE 'DIFFICULT' PASSAGES?
WHAT DO YOU DO TO MAKE WILLIAM BOOTH'S HOPES A REALITY IN YOUR OWN LIFE?

William Booth commented: 'I want to see a new translation of the Bible into the hearts and conduct of living men and women ...'

We will discover that the more we understand, the more there is to discover and to enrich our lives.

Doctrine is the history of how the Church has reflected upon, and interpreted, faith. It explores and explains belief, and has developed as preachers, teachers, theologians and other Christians have reflected, in the context of their time, upon the meaning of their understanding of the relationship between God, creation and humanity as revealed in the Bible and how this relationship is worked out in everyday life. The biblical revelation provides the foundation for Christian doctrine and the standard against which it is judged.

The Bible is also the authority against which the Christian life must be measured. What we do as Christians emerges from interaction between our understanding of our beliefs, our personal relationship with God and our experience of living in the world. N.T. Wright states in *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (1992) that the continual task of the Church is to live, in our own place and time, in ways that are faithful to what has gone before, being obedient to the authority of Scripture. But this is not an excuse for the inertia or entrenchment that refuses to accept change in the name of tradition; if there is no openness to change, faithfulness may be no more than a

synonym for slavish re-enactment of the past.

Thus in an act of 'faithful improvisation' we must evaluate fresh insights in the light of Christian tradition. We use the truths of the Bible and the wisdom of Christian history to help us to discern what it means to live authentically as Christians in the 21st century, responding to the challenges of the age in ways that are a proper development of biblical faith. This is not without risk because there is always a danger of misunderstanding and diversion from truth. Christian history provides many examples of times when reflection has led to heresy and untruth. But if the Church is to remain vibrant and living there is no alternative to finding new expressions of the tradition in each generation. In order to do this we must ensure that our reading of the Bible is in itself accurate, consistent with the revelation of God's purposes for all of creation, and is engaged in at sufficient depth for us to truly discern the meaning and its implications for our own situation.

Faithful improvisation requires that, as a community, we address the challenges and opportunities of contemporary society in ways which are consistent with the whole message of Scripture, resisting any attempts to distort the biblical message for our own purposes, to find quick 'solutions' in the form

of proof texts, or simply to ignore biblical truth because it does not explicitly mention the issue with which we are dealing. Just as, through the centuries, the Church has learned to re-evaluate long held traditions and convictions in the light of new insight and knowledge, so we too must learn to be both open and faithful, ensuring that we neither cling to the past without justification, nor compromise the essentials of our faith in the name of progress.

When the Revised Version of the Bible was published in 1885, William Booth commented: 'I want to see a new translation of the Bible into the hearts and conduct of living men and women. I want an improved translation – or transference it might be called – of the commandments and promises and teachings and influences of this Book to the minds and feelings and words and activities of the men and women who hold on to it and swear by it and declare it to be an inspired book and the only authorised rule of life' (*The War Cry* 30 May 30 1885).

The challenge remains. We must stay open to the influence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit so that biblical and doctrinal understanding, personal spiritual experience and reflection upon contemporary society can together 'translate' biblical truth into faith and into the life and practice of the 21st century Salvationist community.



COLONEL RICHARD MUNN
CHIEF SECRETARY
AUSTRALIA EASTERN TERRITORY

DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

SERIES: THE ARMY'S ELEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

We believe that there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of religious worship.

ONE GOD

HUMANS are incurably religious! Despite appearances to the contrary, people today are just as religious as preceding generations. Philip Jenkins, columnist for *The Christian Century*, notes with some insight that from a global perspective it is the predominantly secular humanist Western cultures that are the anomaly; the rest of the world holds religious belief as normative. Even to say, 'I don't believe in God,' by very definition becomes a belief statement. Similarly, to say, 'I don't believe in theory' immediately becomes a theory.

This is not a light issue. What comes to mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Consequently no people are likely to rise above their religion and image of God. If we have a vulgar god we are attracted to vulgarity. If we have a violent god, we tend towards violence ourselves. If we have a loving God, we are drawn to love. Our thoughts may be low

or lofty, but whatever they are we are becoming made in the image of that thought. We move towards that image.

Judeo monotheism – resolute belief in only one God – not only stood in remarkable contrast to the unapologetically polytheistic surrounding cultures of the day, it can be said to have impacted our world like no other religious assertion. It is a defining statement. Jehovah is unwavering in this matter, as much of the Old Testament records. He cannot abide shared devotion and belief with any other entity. He instinctively recoils from any whiff of idolatry; his infinite perfection simply cannot coexist with another. He truly is mutually exclusive. The Decalogue states unequivocally, 'You shall have no other gods before me' (Exodus 20:3) and the *Shema* reinforces, 'Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one' (Deuteronomy 6:4).

CREATOR

We can affirm with certainty that Jehovah is a creative God. We can make a table from wood, but for all our sophistication we cannot make wood. God created the world from nothing – *ex nihilo*. He is the first cause. Scientists increasingly refer to the universe being 'a product of design'. Both astronomers who look outward to the cosmos and molecular scientists who look inward reference what can only be concluded as a divine order.

So supremely paramount is this attribute that the very opening sentence in Scripture calmly states: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (Genesis 1:1).

This unequalled creative force is intrinsically linked to the omnipotence of God – his all-powerful nature. A.W. Tozer noted: 'God the self-existent Creator is the source of all the power there is, and since a source must be at least equal to anything that emanates from it, God is of necessity equal to all the power there is, and this is to say again that he is omnipotent.'

Given our opening belief that people will move towards the attribute of their God, we will naturally want to be characterised as creative ourselves. Thus, Salvation Army ministry is essentially creative and life-affirming. We see those graces in some of the most difficult and desperate terrains; the orphaned child beams again in one of our homes and the recovering alcoholic rediscovers his piano skills. Similarly, when our officership ceases to become creative, it is a dreadfully dull affair; we have strayed from an original mandate.

PRESERVER

Life is not only created by God but is held together and sustained by him. Were God to withdraw from this world all life would cease completely. Paul personalises this in Christ, 'He is before all things,

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION:
WHAT COMES TO YOUR MIND WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT GOD – AND WHY?
WHAT MAKES HUMANS RELIGIOUS?
WHY DO CHRISTIANS BELIEVE THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD?
IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU SEE GOD'S CREATIVE HAND TODAY?

“We can affirm with certainty that Jehovah is a creative God. We can make a table from wood, but for all our sophistication we cannot make wood ...”

and in him all things hold together' (Colossians 1:17).

God is vitally interested in our welfare, even the intimate details of our lives, because he is a personal and living God. We believe he is not a god who made the world like a clock only to withdraw and leave it spinning alone (deism), rather God not only created all we know, and more, but also continually sustains its operation (theism).

Social scientists estimate that there are more than enough resources in our world for all people to be adequately sheltered and fed. The resources expended on diets and pets alone could feed the hungry of the world. In other words, God's sustaining provisions require the cooperation of humankind.

The Salvation Army seeks to preserve life. We counter atrophy and decay, we rebuild countless broken walls and we dig wells to provide water. Just as salt functions as a natural preservative, we seek to incarnate 'the salt of the world', vigorously present amidst blight and breakdown. By serving suffering humanity, we dare to embody the preserving nature of God.

GOVERNOR

Many people struggle with the idea of God as Governor. The original problem of pride means that we want to govern our own lives. Very often it is the existence of evil in our world that evokes perplexity, and causes a rejection of God. How can a loving God, whose creation he described as 'very good' contain

such suffering, sin and injustice? Every one of us has asked the question, 'Why?'

Our *Handbook of Doctrine* helpfully notes: 'Just as all spiritual powers, even those opposed to God, owe their existence to him, so also God is ultimately Governor of all rulers and authorities, even though for the present they may appear to be operating outside the boundaries of his control' (p 32).

Another perspective is to question how human freedom and the sovereignty of God exist together. Chuck Colson answers this with an illustration. An ocean liner departs from New York to London. Its destination is set. On board, however, chains do *not* bind the passengers. They are free to move at will and can eat, sleep and play when they want. They are free. All the time the liner is moving towards its destiny, steadily travelling its course. Freedom and sovereignty are both present without contradiction.

Proverbs says it well: 'Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails' (19:21).

As Salvationists we seek to profoundly engage with people and community. We are militantly opposed to brokenness, sin and suffering. We proclaim the Lordship of Christ, confident that under him grace abounds to rightly govern our lives, especially in the face of injustice. Even in the midst of inexplicable natural catastrophe we are present, immediately seeking to

restore wholeness and order, to 're-govern' as it were.

ONLY PROPER OBJECT OF WORSHIP

Bob Dylan crooned: 'You're gonna have to serve somebody, well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody.' The singer-songwriter icon of counter-cultural revolution had insight that people will serve and worship somebody or something.

The wooing of our hearts is such that even well-intentioned movements and entities will contest for supremacy. And that can include our own Salvation Army. The important realisation that we serve and worship God *through* the vehicle of the Army will save eventual disillusionment and disappointment. The Church is human and divine, and it is the former that will invariably prove lacking. God, however, is 'more than enough' (Isaiah 1:11). He performs 'mighty deeds with his arm' (Luke 1:51).

PAULINE DOXOLOGY

For 11 chapters in Romans, Paul systematically and cogently outlines in precise terms the gospel of God as found in Christ. He then seems to lift his pen in astonishment and let fly a doxology that encapsulates our second doctrine. 'Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments. For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen' (11:33, 36).



LIEUT-COLONEL IAN BARR
LIVES IN RETIREMENT IN THE UK AND SERVES AS A MEMBER
OF THE INTERNATIONAL DOCTRINE COUNCIL

DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

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We believe that there are three persons in the Godhead – the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

The study of Christian doctrine would be considerably less complicated if the Bible contained a straightforward and unequivocal exposition of the Trinity. Instead we have the testimonies of eyewitnesses to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the Early Church's attempts to find words to describe and interpret what it saw and experienced. How, for example, did the Christ who lived, died and rose in their midst relate to the Father and Creator of all things? And how did Jesus and his Father relate to the Holy Spirit? It took centuries for the Church to develop the language, and with it a coherent theology, to explain how God can be Father, Son and Holy Spirit and yet 'One God'.

More recent theologians usually approach the doctrine of the Trinity in two traditional ways. The first is God's successive self-revelation through Creation, salvation history, and in the persons of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The second relates to how Christians understand the

inner nature of God. In other words: What do we learn from God's self-revelation about the inner nature and life of God? And how does this impact upon Christian life, teaching and worship?

THE REVEALED TRINITY

In terms of the 'revealed Trinity' the New Testament demonstrates that the apostles and the Early Church had a strong sense that Jesus was more than a prophet and more than just a human agent commissioned to fulfil God's will and purposes. The first Christians evidently had no doubt that the man Jesus who had walked with them was also divine. John's Gospel (1:1-3) and the letters of Paul (Philippians 2:5-11 and Colossians 1:15-19) describe how Jesus was present and active in Creation, sharing the divine nature and central to the redemption of all things. Thus the great theological themes of Judaism, God's activity in Creation and salvation history, are ascribed also to Christ.

The same can be said of the Holy Spirit. The Bible describes him in terms that clearly take the reader back to the Creation story in which the eternal and pre-existent Spirit is present and active (Genesis chapters 1 and 2) as he is also in the subsequent life and history of Israel and in the life of the believer and the Church (Romans 8:1-17).

Later generations came to speak of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as

'distinct but not separate'. This is how God has made himself known through the revelatory process of Creation, salvation history, Christian experience and the Church. The unity of will and purpose that is at the heart of our understanding of God's self-revelation from the moment of Creation leaves no room for degrees of deity, division of powers, competing wills or any hierarchy of divinity. We speak of 'Three persons', but of only one substance or essence.

THE RELATIONAL TRINITY

In some ways the picture that emerges from the 'revealed' approach to the Trinity is about differentiation and function. In general terms we recognise God the Father as the Creator and preserver of all things. The Son is the self-giving Saviour, and the Spirit is God present in the world today working in and through the Church, both in the lives of individual believers and in the life of the Christian community.

However, we cannot be satisfied simply with having sorted out 'who does what' in the Godhead. The interrelationship of Father, Son and Spirit has to be understood in terms of the inner life of God as well as the apparent function of each of the three persons.

The 'tri-unity' (trinity) of God has been expressed in different kinds of analogy over the centuries: water, ice,

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION:

MANY CHRISTIANS ADDRESS THEIR PRAYERS TO 'GOD OUR FATHER' AND OTHERS WOULD PRAY TO 'JESUS'. HOW DO YOU ADDRESS GOD IN YOUR PRAYERS?
HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE UNITY OF WILL AND PURPOSE IN THE LIFE OF OUR CHURCH/CORPS WITHOUT DENYING THE DIVERSITY THAT IS ALSO A GIFT FROM GOD?
WHAT DOES THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY SAY TO US ABOUT HOW PEOPLE SHOULD RELATE TO EACH OTHER?

“However, we cannot be satisfied simply with having sorted out 'who does what' in the Godhead. The interrelationship of Father, Son and Spirit has to be understood in terms of the inner life of God as well as the apparent function of each of the three persons ...”

vapour; the three-leafed shamrock, and even in terms of the family unit – father, mother and child. This last analogy leaves us with the distinct problem of a hierarchical relationship rather than an essential unity. It also draws us away from the inner nature of God to attempts to reconcile the 'number issues' in the doctrine.

In the fourth and fifth centuries Saint Augustine developed a 'psychological' model of the Trinity according to which Father, Son and Spirit are universally reflected in the human psyche, as the self, the understanding and the will. While this and other analogies are helpful in terms of distinctness, they do not necessarily help us with the problem of the essential unity of the Godhead.

In the 20th century the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann proposed a more relational approach of the Trinity. He taught that there is a parallel relationship between the mutual indwelling of Father, Son and Spirit and the indwelling presence of God in the Church.

Moltmann draws together two particular biblical insights to highlight this principle of mutual indwelling. One is the continued presence of God in the scattered community in the period of the Exile; the other is in the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John chapter 17:

'I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit' (Isaiah 57:15)

AND

'Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:21).

In *The Crucified God* Moltmann explained the distinct yet unifying roles of Father, Son and Spirit in the crucifixion of Christ:

'The son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son.'

The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. At the heart of the inner life of God therefore lies not only divine majesty, but a fellowship of suffering:

'The Son suffers abandonment and death, the Father suffers the death of the Son in the infinite grief of love, and the Spirit is the love that cries out with them and binds Father and Son.'

In all of this the Holy Spirit is the unconditional bond of self-surrendering *agape* (or divine love) that binds both the Father and Son, and enables forgiven and redeemed humanity to be drawn into this fellowship of love.

The Swiss theologian Karl Barth speaks in perhaps more accessible terms when he uses three simple expressions – 'Giver, Given and Gift' – to describe the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit at Calvary.

However, for Moltmann it is the cry of grief that rends 'the silence of eternity': The Son's cry of abandonment on the cross, the Father's cry of anguish as he enters into his Son's sense of abandonment, and the Spirit who is himself the broken-hearted cry of love in the face of this horror. The inner life of God is not merely a serene unity of will, purpose and mission: it is essentially a fellowship of suffering and a community of love, a mutual indwelling into which the earthly community, the Church, is drawn through the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Christian teaching on Creation and redemption highlights the oneness of will and purpose that unites the Father, Son and Spirit. Yet, their unity is not purely functional, it is essentially relational. This helps us to understand better God's intention for the life of the Church. It too is a social organism; people relating to each other, indwelt by God, living in fellowship with him, worshipping, mirroring and participating in his life through worship, prayer and service.



COMMISSIONER WILLIAM FRANCIS
LIVES IN RETIREMENT IN THE USA AND WAS CHAIRMAN OF
THE INTERNATIONAL DOCTRINE COUNCIL 2006-13

DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

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We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that He is truly and properly God and truly and properly man.

THE PERSON

'Who is this man?' No question is more central to the Gospels. The question appears throughout the Gospel narratives.

Jesus' enemies asked the question. The Pharisees and teachers of the law who were in Capernaum witnessed Jesus forgiving the sins of the paralytic man prior to healing him. They began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy?" (Luke 5:17, 21).

Jesus' disciples asked the question. After Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, his disciples 'were terrified and asked each other "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"' (Mark 4:41).

The crowds cramming the Jerusalem streets on the Sunday before Passover asked the question. As the throngs hailed Jesus riding on a donkey, Matthew records: 'When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"' (Matthew 21:10). The crucial turning point of the Gospel story hinges on this question.

About five months before his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus sat down with his disciples at the foot of Mount Hermon near Caesarea Philippi. He asked them,

"Who do people say that I am?" After listening to their responses, he turned and asked, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-22). Predictably, Peter answered first, and with the right answer, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16 *New Living Translation*). From that pivotal moment on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things... (Matthew 16:21).

John makes it clear that resolving the question of Jesus' identity is the primary purpose for writing his Gospel: 'But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' (John 20:31).

Jesus has always been a controversial figure. Unlike all other historic notables, the debate about Jesus of Nazareth does not

“The glory of the celestial God is seen in his Son, the human God-man, Jesus ...”

“Jesus has always been a controversial figure. Unlike all other historic notables, the debate about Jesus of Nazareth does not focus on his teaching or actions, but on his identity ...”

focus on his teaching or actions, but on his identity. Jesus' teaching and actions compel us to progress from understanding his teaching to recognising the essence of his being – his divinity. In Jesus, divinity takes on humanity; he is 'truly and properly God and truly and properly man'. While other great thinkers and achievers generate an abundance of 'good views', Jesus alone is 'good news'. Jesus is God incarnate.

Jesus was a man like no other. He taught the fatherhood of God and at the same time asserted his equality with God. Jesus maintained that 'all things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son...' (Matthew 11:27).

At the conclusion of the final Passover meal (the *Seder*) with his disciples, Jesus comforts his followers. After declaring, "If you really know me, you will know my Father as well", Philip questioned, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:7-9).

The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine (HOD) succinctly answers

the timeless question 'Who is this man?'

'In the person of Jesus Christ the two natures are full and indivisibly united. Jesus in his divine nature is one with God the Father and in his human nature is one with us. Jesus reveals God to us (John 14:9)' (HOD, p 86).

THE DIVINE – TRULY AND PROPERLY GOD

John concisely clarifies the distinctiveness of Jesus: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning' (John 1:1, 2). Underscoring this theological truth, Jesus' own words and actions revealed that he was God.

When the disciples of John the Baptist questioned: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?", Jesus replied: "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Luke 7:20-22).

Isaiah looked forward to the day of the Messiah's coming: 'In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see' (Isaiah 29:18). Later the prophet

described the year of the Lord's favour: 'The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn' (Isaiah 61:1, 2).

Jesus paused after reading these verses from Isaiah in his home synagogue in Nazareth. He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, sat down and proclaimed, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). The *Mashiach* – the Lord's anointed Messiah – the Son of God and Son of Man, had come.

The glory of the celestial God is seen in his Son, the human God-man, Jesus. In the face of Jesus, we experience '...the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ' (2 Corinthians 4:6).

THE HUMAN – TRULY AND PROPERLY MAN

Jesus voluntarily and temporarily gave up some of his divine attributes while on earth. This is known as *kenosis*, from the Greek word for emptiness *κένωσις*, *kénōsis*. It refers to the 'self-emptying' of Christ's human »

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

WHEN YOU WALK THROUGH THE CROWDED STREETS OF CITIES AROUND THE WORLD, YOU HEAR THE NAME OF JESUS MORE OFTEN THAN ANY OTHER NAME. UNFORTUNATELY, THE MAJORITY OF THE TIME JESUS' NAME IS USED AS A CURSE. WHY DO YOU THINK IT IS SO EASY TO USE THE MATCHLESS NAME OF JESUS AS AN EXPLETIVE?

WHEN YOU PRAY TO JESUS DO YOU FOCUS ON HIS HUMANITY (YOUR BROTHER) OR HIS DIVINITY (YOUR SAVIOUR)? TRY FOCUSING ON THE OTHER ASPECT OF HIS UNIQUELY INTEGRATED PERSONHOOD.

WHEN YOU CONSIDER JESUS' HUMANITY, ARE THERE ANY HUMAN TEMPTATIONS THAT YOU FIND HARD TO BELIEVE THAT JESUS ENDURED? IF SO, WHY?

IN ADDITION TO THE REFERENCES IN THE ARTICLE TO JESUS' HUMAN QUALITIES, CAN YOU IDENTIFY OTHERS?

We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that He is truly and properly God and truly and properly man.

» will and becoming entirely receptive to God's divine will.

For example, the most obvious *kenosis* was Christ's temporary laying aside of the divine characteristic of omnipresence – the ability to be present in all places at all times. As a human being, Jesus was never in two places at the same time.

Paul clearly describes the divine and human dimensions of Christ Jesus: 'who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!' (Philippians 2:6-8).

Jesus was fully human. He experienced all characteristics of the human condition, including temptation. The writer to the Hebrews underscores this amazing maxim: 'Therefore, since we have a great high priest...Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin' (Hebrews 4:14, 15).

Jesus was joyful (John 15:9-11); Jesus loved (John 11:3-5); Jesus was hungry (Mark 11:12); Jesus became angry (John 2:15, 16), and Jesus wept – for his friends (John 11:35), over his enemies (Luke 19:41) and for himself (Hebrews 5:7).

Jesus was also humorous. While it is not recorded that Jesus laughed, the allusion to attempting to remove a splinter from another's eye, while a beam protrudes from one's own eye (Matthew 7:4), and the reference to straining out a gnat, yet swallowing a camel (Matthew 23:24), are packed with humour.

The magnificent, resplendent reality is that Jesus is our human brother and our divine Saviour. To this we joyfully respond – *Hallelujah!*



COLONEL JOHNNY KLEMAN
TERRITORIAL COMMANDER
FINLAND AND ESTONIA TERRITORY

PERSPECTIVES OF A DISTORTED IMAGE

DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

SERIES: THE ARMY'S ELEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocence, but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness, and that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.

Sin can be very physical and concrete in the way it appears in an evil world, but the reasons behind sin are often much more theoretical – so we use metaphors, symbols and images to try to formulate what is spiritual and abstract. We also need to look at the reasons for and consequences of sin from different viewpoints to get a more complete understanding of what it is.

Scripture is full of historical events and stories that give us these different perspectives. They paint complementary pictures that we are able to interpret into knowledge, and into theology, which help us to understand God and ourselves better. They have been interpreted and understood in various ways by men and women in contrasting cultures over the centuries.

This is also true when we try to understand man's broken relationship with God. The British evangelical, John Stott, shared some helpful wording in his book, *The Cross of Christ*:

The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone.

Based on the creation story, the apostle John and, later, other apologists like Irenaeus and Origen, proclaimed that all humans were created completely good and in the image of God: 'God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them...' (Genesis 1:27-28). However, the first generations of Christians also communicated with others and sometimes argued with philosophers, sceptics and members of other religions about their faith – just like us.

Thinkers like Plato, and religions like the different branches of Gnosticism, had dualistic views of human existence. They argued that the human body was evil, but contained a divine spark or an image of God embedded in the soul of man. We find similar dualistic arguments today, when people say that we are basically good and do not need salvation, or that we are 'just human', with the conclusion that no one can blame or change our human nature.

“ It is important that, in studying the Scripture, we communicate ... with others from different contexts and cultures ... ”

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- * WHAT ARE THE ATTITUDES REGARDING HUMAN NATURE IN YOUR CULTURE?
- * HOW DO THESE COMPARE WITH THE BIBLICAL PICTURE?
- * HOW CAN WE HELP PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SIN?
- * WHAT WORD PICTURES ARE HELPFUL IN THE 21ST CENTURY WHEN DESCRIBING OUR SEPARATION FROM GOD AND THE NEED FOR RECONCILIATION?

“ When the doctrine says we are all ‘totally depraved’ it means that sin affects all dimensions of our existence ... ”

Although we are created in the image of God, it is also true that this image has been distorted. In Genesis chapter 3 the story continues, and Adam and Eve become sinners. The Greek term the New Testament uses for sin, *αμαρτία* (*amartia*), means that we are missing the mark and have not reached our goal; our fullest potential. This already gives us new illustrations and perspectives to help us understand the doctrine.

Other pictures that concern the alienation of man include images of humans who are: fallen, naked, enslaved, guilty, indebted, captured by sin, blind, in darkness or spiritually dead. These illustrations help us think wider and create broader associations in relation to the images we use. These metaphors also give us a broader understanding and provide answers to the questions of why we are sinners, and what the nature of sin is. Images and stories can also lead us to extend our thinking in a wrong direction and arrive at false conclusions. Therefore it is important that, in studying the Scripture, we communicate with God, and with others from different contexts and cultures and learn the lessons of history, so that we are able to better understand God's love and the nature of sin.

At different stages of the history of the Church, theologians like Tertullian, Augustine of Hippo, Luther and Wesley have interpreted the

story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They all understood that the essence of man was changed when they disobeyed God's command, and our doctrine formulates, '... that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved.' The reason for this change is understood by Augustine, Luther and the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth as human pride. Barth writes in his book *Church Dogmatics* (Volume IV.1):

What is sin? The sin of man is the pride of man. Pride is the disobedience of man and, more specifically, the unbelief of man. The sin of man is the human action which does not correspond to the divine action in Jesus Christ but contradicts it.

This is true from one perspective, although some theologians argue that sin is the opposite; to lack pride and self-esteem. This illustrates why we need different perspectives and experiences – as Paul writes to the Ephesians: '... that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God' (Ephesians 3:17-19 NKJV).

Despite the distorted image and the sinful nature of man, there is hope for change through faith in Christ

and through his death on the Cross. Although we have broken the law, Christ's suffering and death justify us and make us blameless (Romans 3:21-26). Through his death we become alive from our spiritual death (Romans 6:4) and are set free from our bondage to sin (Romans 6:16-18). Through his death the ransom is paid and we are released from slavery. Our guilt has been paid and we have no more debt (Matthew 6:12; 18:21-35; 20:28). The good news is, therefore, that through Christ's salvation, God's image in us can be restored. (This will be considered further in another article).

When the doctrine says we are all 'totally depraved', it means that sin affects all dimensions of our existence. The spirit of love has been replaced with a spirit of selfishness and pride. This affects our mind, feelings and self-image. Our mindset is revealed in our behaviour and shows itself in our actions. It is not a sin to be sick, but sin can make us sick. It is not a sin to be alone, but sin can make us alone. Our sins affect also our relationship with others. The spirit of sin, through our mindset, affects the community body that we belong to and, consequently, the body of our society. That is why we proclaim salvation, not only for men, women and children. We proclaim salvation for the neighbourhood where we minister; the community where we serve; the society of which we are part. We proclaim salvation for the world.



LIEUT-COLONEL WENDY SWAN
COMMAND PRESIDENT WOMEN'S MINISTRIES
HONG KONG AND MACAU COMMAND

AMAZING LOVE — WHOSOEVER WILL MAY BE SAVED

DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

SERIES: THE ARMY'S ELEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

[Doctrine 6]

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has by His suffering and death made an Atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved.

THIS sixth statement of faith forms the centre point of Salvation Army doctrine. Placed where it is in our eleven *Articles of Faith*, it is as though all of the other doctrines move into it and then away from it. The Atonement of Jesus Christ must always be seen in relationship to his Incarnation. What Christ did is inseparable from who he is. The Atonement as an aspect of the Incarnation was initiated by God to reveal his love and grace towards humanity, separated from God by sin, in order to bring us into a relationship with him, individually and as a member of his community (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 8:32). But only by destroying the power of sin could this communion be regained and perfected.

Essential to the Early Church was the belief that Jesus, the Christ, had died and risen to deliver humanity from sin by a sacrifice of himself in order to establish a new covenant relationship between man and God. While it is acknowledged that there is no one comprehensive way to interpret the Atonement, there are helpful images, when taken together, that provide insight into its meaning and help us understand this theological truth in a contemporary sense.

SACRIFICIAL

Christ's dying was a sacrificial death. Paul and the Gospel writers connect his death with the Old Testament sacrificial ritual. For them his death

was a sacrificial act by which a covenant was ratified between God and a New Israel, just as the old covenant was ratified in the blood of the sacrificial animals on Mount Sinai. By the cross of Christ, God made a new covenant with the New Israel to replace the neglected and broken covenant of Sinai. Frequent references to the blood of Christ (Romans 3:25; 5:9; Ephesians 1:7; 2:13; Colossians 1:20) and the emphasis of the Book of Hebrews that Jesus Christ is the mediator of a 'better' covenant, establish the connection between the death of Christ and the sacrificial renewal of the covenant. John the Baptist calls Jesus 'the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). Paul refers to him as 'the Passover Lamb' (1 Corinthians 5:7). In offering himself as the perfect sacrifice, Christ gave himself in perfect obedience to God. Only such perfect obedience is victorious over sin. What does this mean for us today? Christ's death changes the attitude of God toward humanity. God's right assessment of sin as

“ The Atonement of Jesus Christ must always be seen in relationship to his incarnation. What Christ did is inseparable from who he is ... ”

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- * THIS DOCTRINE TALKS ABOUT 'WHOSOEVER' WILL MAY BE SAVED. WHO ARE THE 'DIFFICULT' INDIVIDUALS IN YOUR COMMUNITY THAT THIS MIGHT INCLUDE?
- * OF THE DIFFERENT IMAGES USED TO DESCRIBE ATONEMENT, WHICH IS THE MOST HELPFUL? WHICH IS THE LEAST HELPFUL?
- * HOW IS THE WORD 'ATONEMENT' UNDERSTOOD IN YOUR CULTURE?

“ ‘Amazing love! how can it be That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?’ (SASB 283) ... ”

deserving of his wrath is vindicated and fellowship with him is restored when we repent and identify with Christ's work in faith. *'When I survey the wondrous Cross On which the Prince of Glory died' (SASB 136)* surely expresses this truth.

VICARIOUS

The New Testament evidence about the death of Christ expresses the conviction that Christ died 'for us', 'on our behalf' or 'in our stead' (Mark 10:45; Romans 8:32; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 5:2). To describe Christ's death as vicarious is to say that in some way he experienced or exemplified something that was due us in a way that brought the benefits of his suffering to those who were not able to gain those benefits themselves. It is important to remember that the subjective realm of Christian experience cannot be ignored. Salvation Army teaching rightly stresses that humanity has a part to play in salvation. It is true that the sacrifice of Christ accomplished what we could not do for ourselves. The integrity and justice of God could not allow him to establish a righteous relationship with a sinful humanity, although his love constrained him to forgive. The obedience of Christ took the place of our weakness and rebellion and effected a reconciliation for us (2 Corinthians 4:21). Christ demonstrated the appropriate attitude of obedience to the Father and rejection of sin. His offering of himself as a sacrifice of obedient

worship to God prefigures the response that each of us must make to God in faith. Because of what God did through Christ and his obedience, we too are to follow Christ's example and by faith die to self and become living sacrifices who are transformed from sinful creatures to obedient servants (Romans 12:1, 2). Jesus was not a sinner yet bore our sin in his body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). By identifying interpersonally with sinners and in conformity with God's intentions concerning redemption, Jesus made it possible for us as sinful humanity to identify interpersonally with God through him. His incarnation, suffering and obedient death avail to you and I on the basis of our obedience to him. We acknowledge this truth when we sing *'Amazing love! how can it be That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?' (SASB 283)*.

UNIVERSAL

The sacrificial offering of Jesus' death met the requirements of God's justice as to make salvation available to *all* humanity. The Atonement was sufficient to deal with the whole of sinful humanity and with the whole of sin in sinful humanity. God's heart desire is to draw all humanity to himself – men and women, boys and girls. We unhesitatingly affirm Scripture presenting salvation as provided for all on the condition of acceptance of the Atonement by faith. We believe in a boundless salvation able to

reach and redeem the last, the least, the lost. It is this belief that propels us into the world and every hell in it to share the good news of reconciliation asking: *'Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?' (SASB 417)*.

TRIUMPHAL

Not only does the Atonement of Christ release humanity from the guilt and power of sin, and establish a new relationship with God, it also proclaims Christ's victory over the evil powers in the world (1 Corinthians 15:2-25; Colossians 2:15). Through God's own power living in us by his Spirit (which we call holiness), we are able to say: 'In all this we are more than conquerors', and 'no power can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8:37ff). What an encouragement to know and experience here and now the One who reigns in his lordship over all creation!

Such a reality of 'At-one'(ment) with the living God surely must continue to challenge and shape our values and behaviour as we engage with each other and a suffering world.

Further helpful reading:

The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine (Chapter 6 'Atonement')
Convictions Matter – The Function of Salvation Army Doctrine (Major Ray Harris)



MAJOR AMY REARDON
CORPS OFFICER, SEATTLE TEMPLE
USA WESTERN TERRITORY

REPENTANCE, FAITH AND REGENERATION DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

SERIES: THE ARMY'S ELEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

[Doctrine 7]

We believe that repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, are necessary to salvation.

OUR seventh doctrine is a product of New Testament teaching. While repentance, faith, and even regeneration are evidenced in the Old Testament, they come into full light through the saving work of Jesus Christ. According to Hebrews 10:1, under the Law Israel had 'a shadow of the good things that are coming'. The perfect sacrifice of Christ brought those 'good things'. A history of salvation, from the initial sin to the resurrection of Christ, is enriching for both mind and soul, but the nature of salvation that is described in doctrine seven – and its pertinence to our lives – is decidedly a New Testament teaching, contingent on Christ's saving work.

The wording of this doctrine draws attention to each person of the Godhead, as well as each step in the salvation process. The first two steps – repentance and faith – are taken by the human being in equation. Before investigating any part of the doctrine any further, the immediate question is, 'What causes a person to become aware of his/her need for reconciliation with God?' How can he/she be sensitive to spiritual things while still in his/her 'natural' state?

The first work of the Holy Spirit in the act of salvation is to convict the sinner. John Wesley is credited for coining the term 'prevenient grace'. Prevenient is simply an old-fashioned word for 'preceding'.

The grace-filled act of the Holy Spirit is to prod us, to alert us to our sinfulness and need for a Saviour. While those in the Calvinist/Reformed tradition have understood God's grace as something a chosen person could not refuse, we in the Wesleyan tradition believe that we can reject the conviction brought about by the Holy Spirit. Just as our first parents had a free will and chose sin, we have a free will and may choose to accept or refuse the wooing of the Holy Spirit.

REPENTANCE TOWARDS GOD

Those who respond to the prevenient grace brought by the Holy Spirit experience an unselfish desire to repent. Theologian Millard Erickson said that repentance is 'godly sorrow for one's sin together with a resolution to turn from it'. A sinner's behaviour becomes distasteful to him, not because of a fleshly desire for self-improvement, but 'because of the wrong done to God and the hurt inflicted upon him'.

In Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, the son's offence is against his father. Similarly, we understand ourselves as having offended the Father God. We realise our offence against him both as our eternal parent and as the one who is known as the judge of humanity (Hebrews 12:22-23). And like the prodigal son, we do not return to him with ulterior motives. We come with genuine understanding of and regret for our offences, simply

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- * HOW IS THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION COMMONLY TAUGHT IN YOUR CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENT?
- * ARE REPENTANCE, FAITH AND REGENERATION EACH GIVEN THEIR DUE?
- * HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND AND EXPLAIN THE ROLE OF EACH PERSON OF THE TRINITY IN SALVATION?
- * WHAT DOES BRENGLE MEAN WHEN HE SAYS THAT 'THE POWER OF EVIL HABITS' IS BROKEN BY REGENERATION?

hoping for mercy. Thanks be to God, his mercy is abundant (Ephesians 2:4-5)!

FAITH IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

The Greek New Testament word that is translated as 'faith' has at least two meanings, as pointed out by Erickson. As a verb (*pisteo*) it means, 'to believe what someone says, to accept a statement (particularly of a religious nature) as true' (Bultmann, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*). As a noun (*pistis*), it can mean 'personal trust as distinct from mere credence or belief' (G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*). These definitions are important to our understanding what faith in Jesus is, especially in this age in which the word 'faith' is often used carelessly. Faith is not simply a matter of aligning oneself with Christ as opposed to another religious figure. True faith in Christ means accepting his teaching as both irrefutable and personally applicable. A true believer in Christ says, 'This doctrine affects my life'.

Jesus taught that he was the reconciler between God and men (John 14:6). Faith in our Lord Jesus, then, requires accepting him as Saviour – the only one capable of restoring the broken relationship between ourselves and God. The repentant person finds in Christ the forgiveness he/she craves, as well as access to God the Father (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Romans 3:25-26 says: 'God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his

righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.'

While other concepts can be teased out of these verses, there are two key points relevant to the subject at hand: the sacrifice of Christ is to be received by *faith*, and faith in Christ results in God's *justification*.

Theologian Donald Bloesch has written, 'We are not redeemed in fact until we rise to claim our pardon ... His redemption on the cross is our redemption in fact if we are united to it in faith! What an amazing responsibility is ours! Christ has completed the saving act. Yet, this salvation can only be appropriated to us by our act of faith! Once we have truly believed, God grants us his justification. 'For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law' (Romans 3:28).

REGENERATION BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

The salvific work of Christ is so preeminent in our understanding of salvation that the action of the Holy Spirit is often overlooked. It is critical that we feel remorse for our sins and understand that Christ's sacrifice is the only remedy for them. But the picture is not complete until we are actually changed. Our doctrine book says: 'Regeneration means that we die to our old life and come alive to Christ (Romans 6:2-4; Colossians 3:3). The Spirit is the one who regenerates. He is the one who empowers us, bears fruit in us, and guides us in holy living. He is the one who turns our lives around.

Titus 3:4-7 puts it this way: 'But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us,

not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.'

The phrase 'rebirth and renewal' is simplified by the *New Living Translation* as 'a new birth and new life'. In this new life, the reign of sin has ended. This is, according to Samuel L. Brengle, the point at which 'the power of evil habits is broken, the tide of corruption is stayed, the central purpose of the will is changed, and new affections are planted in the soul' ('The Meaning of a "Clean Heart": How to Obtain a Clean Heart and to Know It', as quoted by R. David Rightmire in *Sanctified Sanity: The Life and Teaching of Samuel Logan Brengle*).

THE COHESIVE WORK OF THE TRINITY

The verses from Titus quoted above are densely packed, but they are a beautiful expression of the concerted work of the Trinity. God the Father declares us as saved, because he is merciful. The saving work of Jesus Christ – which is inestimable – enables the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. In turn, the Holy Spirit redesigns us, making us into the image of Christ. All of this is to the glory of God, prompted by his love for us. We are undeserving and we are limited in our understanding of the great mystery of salvation; however, we are privileged to be the recipients.



DR JAMES E. READ
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SALVATION ARMY
ETHICS CENTRE IN WINNIPEG
CANADA AND BERMUDA TERRITORY

JUSTIFIED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

SERIES: THE ARMY'S ELEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

[Doctrine 8]

We believe that we are justified by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself.

FOR FURTHER READING:

Harris, Ray - *Convictions Matter: The Function of Salvation Army Doctrines* (2014)

Lutheran World Federation, Catholic Church - *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 1999 (<http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html>)

Read, Edward - *In the Hands of Another: Memoirs of Edward Read* (2002)

Wright, N.T. - *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (2009)

I GREW up hearing my Dad tell stories of his first days in The Salvation Army. When he was just a teenager his mother died, and shortly after that he moved to a nearby town to live with an older brother and his wife. She belonged to the home league and through that connection my father was invited to come to Parrsboro Corps, Canada.

Dad had gone to church as a child and had read his Bible. He knew Hebrews said: 'It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment' (Hebrews 9:27 KJV). So he was surprised and curious when he went to the Army and heard people testifying that they were saved and going to Heaven. 'How could they know that?' my father wondered. Especially when he observed that their lives were anything but morally perfect. But he didn't scoff and he didn't leave – largely because of Captain Jessie Haliburton, the young corps officer. As Dad wrote in his memoirs: 'I knew I did not have what the captain had. There was radiance, and joy, and something more; the gospel looked wonderfully attractive, dressed in that flesh-and-blood embodiment of it' (Read 2002).

As our eighth article of faith puts it, my father could see that Captain Haliburton had 'the witness in [herself]'. But what exactly is it that her life was giving witness to? Our

doctrine uses language that feels dated or awfully technical to many – justification, grace, faith.

I think it is hard to see, in this day and age, why people would go to war over such words. But that is what happened. In the 16th century, the 'doctrine of justification' split the Western European church apart. Martin Luther and fellow Protestants condemned Catholicism in general; the Roman Catholic Church reciprocated in equal terms. Lutherans produced popular literature that portrayed the Pope as the Antichrist; Catholics cartooned Luther as the devil. The vitriol makes it all the more remarkable that some 400 years later, in 1999, Roman Catholics and Lutherans signed a 'Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification' (Lutheran World Federation; Catholic Church 1999).

At its heart, I think the fight was over a deep paradox – to say someone is 'justified by grace' verges on a contradiction.

'Justify' and 'justification' are not terms of theology alone. In everyday life it's not unusual for people to want a justification for what they think or what they do. 'She was justified in being outraged,' one person says. 'He attacked her.' The speaker means to say that the alleged victim had morally good and sufficient reason for her reaction. Afterwards, when the

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- * DESCRIBE A MOMENT OF GRACE IN YOUR LIFE WHERE YOU KNEW BEYOND ANY DOUBT THAT PUTTING YOUR TRUST IN JESUS WAS THE RIGHT DECISION.
- * WHAT KEEPS PEOPLE FROM HAVING DEEP FAITH IN JESUS TODAY?
- * IN 2006 THE WORLD METHODIST COUNCIL OFFICIALLY ADOPTED THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION. IS THIS A DECLARATION THE SALVATION ARMY COULD ALSO AGREE WITH?

court does not convict the alleged attacker, the speaker says: 'The judge was *justified* in her ruling; there wasn't enough evidence.' Philosophy says inferences are justified only if certain principles of logic are followed. In other words, 'justification' doesn't have only one context of usage. Morality, law and logic use the same word but appeal to different criteria because different things count as good reasons.

If we go to the Greek of the New Testament we find that *dikaiois*-rooted words (words translated as English 'just/justification') similarly carry the implication that a good reason is supplied or needed. Often a context of judges and standards of legal reasoning is in mind as in Luke 18:1-8 (the Parable of the Persistent Widow), but not always, as in the famous story in Luke 10:25-37 (the Parable of the Good Samaritan). Luke's Gospel says that the Torah expert who asked Jesus for a definition of 'neighbour' was trying to *justify* himself (v 29). He had come initially hoping to embarrass Jesus or somehow show him to disadvantage, but instead had been thrown off by Jesus' first answer, and so the Torah expert was left scrambling to find a face-saving follow-up.

When your behaviour is justified you can hold your head high because you acted with good reason; acting without justification should leave you feeling guilty or ashamed.

Now, how about 'grace' (Greek New Testament *charis*)? 'Grace' signifies a pure gift. One person gives another

something without anything about the recipient that necessitates the gift. When my employer gives me my pay, it's not an act of grace; I have earned what I get. But when I give my grandchild a toy car, there's nothing he has done to earn it or deserve it. He couldn't claim to be wronged if I don't give it to him. It's because I love him and think he will enjoy it that I grace him with the toy.

No wonder that crushing these two concepts together as 'justification by grace' provokes puzzlement. The human mind thinks, either I am justified or I am granted a grace. The biblically shaped mind knows that, paradoxical as it is, this is God's way with humanity.

Jesus' parable of the father receiving his prodigal son is the most easily accessible expression of the idea. The son starts towards home, knowing that he has no justification for his earlier waywardness and no claim to be welcomed back. He decides he will bargain for a big favour – to be hired as a farmhand. But the father will have none of it. He cuts his son off mid-speech and says: 'Welcome home. You're my son. I don't want you to grovel or feel ashamed.' It's a pure gift – grace – that re-establishes a relationship in which the son is not to feel defensive or in the wrong. Grace is the divine antidote for disgrace.

For the apostle Paul, justification *through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ* – the remaining element in our eighth doctrine – was as important as justification by *grace*.

God graciously makes a welcome home possible for sinful humanity, but God does not *force* anyone home, Salvation Army teaching says. People need to receive God's offer in faith.

The 'faith' in question is a matter both of the head and the heart, of cognition and a disposition to behave. On the one hand, faith is a synonym for trust – the Christian is one who readily lives as a *dependent* creature rather than pretending he or she could be self-sufficient. But that's not the whole of the story. It's a big mistake to teach that human self-confidence and scepticism needs simply to be replaced with a more trusting attitude. The Christian says it matters very much, indeed it matters eternally, who the object of one's trust is. People should ask: 'Is the person or organisation or philosophy I trust one that warrants my trust?' The Christian life is a life grounded in informed trust in a very specific person – Jesus. To know him is to realise that, if anyone deserves our trust, he does. In fact, he alone deserves our allegiance as Lord.

Back to my father. He converted because this is what he saw: a young officer whose very self gave witness to the truth that by trusting Jesus one could live confidently, assured of God's gracious acceptance.

Justification, grace, faith: all embodied in one human witness. Wouldn't it be wonderful if everybody lived like that?



LIEUT-COLONEL GABRIEL ADEPOJU
PROGRAMME SECRETARY
NIGERIA TERRITORY

CONTINUED OBEDIENT FAITH DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

SERIES: THE ARMY'S ELEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

[Doctrine 9]

We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ.

IT IS an encouragement to sincerely desire a serious commitment to the way of the cross – the symbol of man's salvation.

It is necessary here to put on record the meaning of salvation in the context of Christian experience. According to *Webster's Universal Dictionary and Thesaurus* (2010), salvation in Christianity is 'the act of saving someone from sin or evil: the state of being saved from sin or evil'. In ordinary terms, there are many things from which one could be saved, such as an accident or death. But it can also mean to be delivered from circumstances or situations: for instance, the Israelites' Exodus was salvation from captivity or oppression; the Jews' return from Babylonian exile was salvation; as was the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire in 1807.

Within the frame of this study, salvation refers to the deliverance from the power that holds a human being hostage or captive to sin. Even when we know what is right and wrong, the power to say 'no' to wrong that has previously been elusive, becomes ours when we are saved. In this instance, I define salvation as the presence of Jesus Christ in any life. When Jesus is present in a life, the power to say 'no' to wrong and say 'yes' to right is always there.

According to the ninth doctrine, no one can remain saved (though previously saved) without a

corresponding continuous obedient faith. Obedient faith – the very foundational faith that brought a soul into union with Christ through repentance and regeneration – must necessarily be a continuous experience. By this declaration, the Army has put the basis of our faith in the Wesleyan tradition. John Wesley was influenced by what is known as Arminianism. This teaching, associated with the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), is essentially rooted in the rejection of the concept of predestination taught by Calvin (Calvinism), whereas Arminianism went further to affirm the freedom of human will.

According to Arminianism, a human being has free will or the ability to choose. At the Fall, human nature was seriously affected and left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. As the sovereign God graciously enables every sinner to repent and to believe but does not interfere with a person's freedom, every sinner possesses a free will on which their eternal destiny depends. Man's freedom exists in his ability to choose good over evil, which means his will is not enslaved by his sinful nature. The sinner has the power to either cooperate with the Spirit of God and be regenerated or resist God's provision and perish.

Christ's redemption makes it possible for everyone to be saved but does not actually secure the salvation of

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- * LOOKING AT YOUR CHRISTIAN JOURNEY SO FAR, WHAT OBSTACLES HAVE PREVENTED YOU FROM LIVING IN A CONTINUOUS OBEDIENT FAITH?
- * WHAT ARE THE LIFESTYLE IMPLICATIONS OF A CONTINUOUS OBEDIENT FAITH?
- * WHAT STEPS DO YOU TAKE WHEN YOU REALISE THAT YOUR OBEDIENCE IS AT STAKE?

anyone. For faith is the condition to man's salvation. There is no controversy that Christ died for all and for every individual, but only those who believe in him are saved. His death enables God to pardon sinners on the condition that man believes. Christ's redemption becomes applicable only if man chooses to accept it. The Holy Spirit can be resisted.

Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to maintain their faith. This is the premise that influenced our doctrine that 'continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ'. The faith God's people should continually exercise is of the same nature as saving faith.

Another great thinker who had great influence on the Protestant Church during the Reformation of the 16th century was John Calvin. He strongly believed in predestination and election. He was of Augustine's tradition and thought that 'a believer's salvation is due solely to God's free choice (election) and depends on the action of this irresistible grace' (John Coutts, *This We Believe*, IHQ, 1990). This thinking led to the doctrine of the final 'perseverance of the saints', otherwise known as 'once saved, always saved'. Or in a more contemporary language, it is called 'eternal security'. According to David Stewart, 'If mankind has nothing to do with saving himself, then why would

God require men to do something to maintain it?' (*Eternal Security: You CANNOT Lose Your Salvation*, 2014).

Stewart failed in his analysis of the above quoted phrase. God appeals to our will/volition: 'Whoever...' (see e.g. Mark 8:34-38, 16:16; John 3:36, 6:35). This is not an imposition. It is a condition that allows us to choose. Yes, the necessary procedure for pardon has been obtained through the death of Jesus, but we must accept and believe this before we can be saved. If our salvation is based on the acceptance of the offer, the sustenance of the offer requires a corresponding cooperation from us. Jesus emphatically taught this in John 15:2. If someone who is truly saved does not bear (continuously) corresponding fruit, such would be plucked out of the vine. Verse 6 talks of the obstinate person who refuses to remain and will inevitably be eternally lost.

Neither was John Calvin right in his postulation. If God had predestined some for eternity, he would not be justified to send or subject the erring ones (whom he destined so) to any punishment since, in the first instance, he was responsible for their action. And if he does, it would be a contradiction to his very nature and person. *God did not choose to save anyone against his/her will.* The plan of action for man's justification is provided by God, yet man must be ready to accept it.

Our filiation in the family of God is that of adoption, that is his plan for mankind. Therefore, to sustain that Father-child relationship between God and us, this continued obedient faith must necessarily be observed. God is faithful and thus he requires a certain level of faithfulness from his grafted children. Anything short of this may neither be sufficient to face the tide of time nor the demand of Scripture.

If 'once saved, always saved', why would Jesus tell his disciples to 'watch and pray'?

When someone becomes saved, the sinful nature has decisively been dealt with at the conversion. However, before long, sin will again begin to attempt resurfacing in our life and if it's not dealt with, through continued obedient faith, we may find ourselves in a state worse than before conversion.

Continued obedient faith entails diligently studying the Word of God, living it both in attitude and lifestyle, manifesting in prayer an utter dependence on God, and not relying on the provision of political authorities or social settings.



MAJOR GEOFF WEBB
DIVISIONAL COMMANDER, WESTERN VICTORIA DIVISION
AUSTRALIA SOUTHERN TERRITORY

IT'S THE WORK OF A MOMENT, IT'S THE WORK OF A LIFETIME DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

SERIES: THE ARMY'S ELEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

[Doctrine 10]

We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*It's the work of a moment,
It's the work of a lifetime,
It begins in an instant,
It may take eternity.
But the work of the Spirit,
Of the world changing Spirit,
Can begin at this moment in me, in me!
(From Glory, a musical by John Gowans
and John Larsson)*

IN THIS Gowans/Larsson song, the writer maintains creative tension between contrasting aspects of holiness. In the Army, we have sometimes wrestled with varying understandings, with many writers contributing helpfully to holiness teaching – each seeking to bring clarity within the context and language of their own time.

Holiness theology developed along differing lines in the North American context from that of Europe. Consequently, there have sometimes been debates around various concepts: Crisis or process? Purity or maturity? Brengle or Coutts? Some key 'themes' within Army

holiness teaching may also have fuelled controversy. Among such themes are those of holiness as the blessing of a clean heart, as growth in Christlikeness, and as perfect love.

THE BLESSING OF A CLEAN HEART

Holiness as the blessing of a clean heart is often considered to be 'purity' teaching and associated most closely with 'crisis' (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The instantaneous element encompasses two 'crisis' moments that are restorative in focus:

1. Justification – restoring the relationship with God and the believer.
2. Entire sanctification – restoring the image of God within the believer.

But the concept of 'second-ness' or 'subsequent-ness' has frequently proven to be a more contentious element within holiness theology. There would appear to be two reasons for this: firstly, the tendency to elevate experience above Scripture as determinative (If I cannot identify such a crisis in my life, maybe it doesn't exist); secondly, the problem of 'the language of crisis' itself (If it is a crisis, it must be dramatic).

GROWTH IN CHRISTLIKENESS

Holiness as growth in Christlikeness is often considered 'maturity' teaching associated with 'process' (2 Corinthians 3:18). But this could appear to be like being on a spiritual escalator that moves us inevitably to our destination. Maturity teaching might also suggest that holiness is only attainable for those who have been on the spiritual escalator long enough.

PERFECT LOVE

Holiness as perfect love was connected with Jesus' call for us to be perfect (Matthew 5:48) in the context of:

- loving God supremely,
- loving others sacrificially, and
- loving ourselves sincerely (Matthew 22:37-39).

But 'perfect' is often taken to be absolute, and how can anyone be perfect? The New Testament concept of 'perfect' (telos) relates more to 'fulfilling its intended purpose' – much like a rosebud may not be absolutely perfect (if viewed under a microscope), but is perfect if a man presents it to his sweetheart indicating his love.

WHOLLY SANCTIFIED

To further complicate matters, a problem presented itself in the mid-20th century: holiness teachers defined sin more narrowly, while the understanding of 'infirmities' – the expression of our human frailties – was broadened. This was important, because if infirmities were considered to be sin, then clearly it was not possible for us to be wholly sanctified, or be kept blameless, in this life. There was a growing realisation, however, that there was an apparent distance between the promise contained within entire sanctification and the actual experience of those who claimed to have received it.

Given the confusion, it is perhaps unsurprising that article 10 became neglected by some, and became the source of tension for others. Are there ways to overcome the differences? How can we understand the concept

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- HOW HAS HOLINESS BEEN DESCRIBED AND EXPLAINED IN YOUR PART OF THE WORLD, OR HAS IT BEEN LARGELY IGNORED?
- WHICH OF THE HOLINESS THEMES (CLEAN HEART, CHRISTLIKENESS, PERFECT LOVE) HAS BEEN EMPHASISED MORE?
- HOW MIGHT THE CONCEPT OF 'QUANTA OF HOLINESS' RELATE TO HOLY LIVING INDIVIDUALLY AND CORPORATELY?

of being 'wholly sanctified' and being kept blameless? The following are some tentative ways forward that will hopefully prompt further discussion.

Holiness could be defined as a work of grace that operates instantaneously (the work of a moment), progressively (the work of a lifetime), and synergistically (a dynamic relationship of cooperation with God who provides the grace needed for holy living). While debate has often centred on the first two, we have not always focused much on the third aspect.

GRACE-MOMENTS AND GRACE-WORK

Part of a possible solution was tentatively suggested by Major Kalie Webb (in Carolyn Knaggs's *In Her Own Words: Candid Conversations on Holy Living*), where she redefined 'crisis' as 'grace-moments' operating within a larger 'grace-work' (process). With such terms, progressive and instantaneous elements are embedded within the element of cooperation with God's grace.

The grace-moment associated with being wholly sanctified is intended to give us clean hearts and a life of victory over sin. General Coutts reminded us that 'if this short and simple sentence, "Whosoever abides in him sins not" (1 John 3:6) means anything at all, it means that we are intended to enjoy a life of victory ... [and] continually sinning and repenting is no more normal spiritually than a life of falling ill and getting well again is normal physically' (*The Splendour of Holiness*). However, grace-moments are not necessarily emotionally vivid – they may be moments of quiet dedication that may not be readily recalled subsequently.

But how do grace-moments connect within the larger grace-work? The following analogy may be helpful.

Early in the 20th century, Einstein had explained the photoelectric effect – that light travelled as discrete bundles of energy. Thus light is not continuous, but comes as a stream of elementary particles (quanta) that behave as both particles and waves.

QUANTA OF HOLINESS

What if the grace-work of God in the life of a Christian is not simply a continuous process? What if that which appears to be continuous, is actually comprised of a 'stream' of discrete grace-moments? Each discrete grace-moment could be considered a 'quantum of holiness' involving an intervention of God and our cooperative response in grace-enabled obedience. Growth within the grace-work exists only within the continuous stream of quanta of holiness. This returns holiness to the concept of a work of grace operating progressively, instantaneously and synergistically.

In *Authentic "Fair Dinkum" Holiness for Ordinary Christians* (Geoff and Kalie Webb), a habit-track diagram illustrates the possibility of choice when faced with temptation. What is not mentioned there is that people who have been overtaken in significant sin can usually not only identify the triggers, but also can discern where the Spirit of God was at work. There is a kind of 'circuit-breaker' moment of clarity when the Spirit makes the person aware that they are about to embark on a 'slippery slope'; and that, had they responded differently in that circuit-breaker moment, they might not have succumbed to the temptation.

The circuit-breaker moment could be considered as one type of 'quantum of holiness'. John Larsson (*Spiritual Breakthrough*) helpfully describes a variety of moments of spiritual breakthrough, which he categorises

as moments of feeling, perception and reception. Perhaps there needs to be careful consideration given to other types of 'quanta of holiness'.

Each quantum of holiness operating within God's grace-work builds incrementally toward the full renewal of the image of God within the individual; at which point the person can be free from 'besetting sins' – the habitual patterns that result in repeated failure – but can experience victory over temptation, and growth in conformity to Christ. The grace-moment of entire sanctification may be theologically normative, but it may not be experientially distinguished from other grace-moments.

The concept of 'quanta of holiness' relates not only to individuals but to holy living in community, and how we operate corporately. Corporate holiness is an area that has not been widely discussed in the Army (although see Geoff Webb, Rowan Castle and Stephen Court, *Holiness Incorporated: Living and Working Beyond Corporate Integrity*). It is a dimension of holiness that needs further discussion.

The key to holy living involves continued growth in the fullness of salvation, which depends on continued grace-moments of obedient faith in Christ expressed in response to, and cooperation with, divine interventions of grace. It is therefore possible to experience the blessing of a clean heart, growing in Christlikeness expressed in quanta of holiness in which we show perfect love to God, others and ourselves.



LIEUT-COLONEL ELSA A. GALANG
LITERARY SECRETARY, EDITOR THE WAR CRY
AND ASSISTANT PERSONNEL SECRETARY
THE PHILIPPINE TERRITORY

LAST THINGS: THE SALVATIONIST'S STATEMENT OF FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

DOCTRINE FOR TODAY

SERIES: THE ARMY'S ELEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

[Doctrine 11]

We believe in the immortality of the soul; in the resurrection of the body; in the general judgment at the end of the world; in the eternal happiness of the righteous; and in the endless punishment of the wicked.

IN HIS foreword to *Salvation Story*, General Paul Rader wrote: 'What Salvationists believe has never been incidental to how we live out our life in Christ as individuals, or as a global spiritual movement. Our faith, grounded in Scripture and validated victoriously by personal experience, has been the motive force of our obedience in mission.'

The previous 10 discussions on doctrines in this series categorically declared that The Salvation Army's statement of faith reflects the primacy of the divine truths of the Scriptures and the glaring testimonies of history and human experience. However, the 11th doctrine takes

us to a more challenging level in our faith journey as individuals and as a church. For who among us can validate by experience the truths concerning the 'things to come'? Diversity of eschatological teachings among Christians show how human finitude and curiosity wrestle and discuss with scant biblical declarations on the subject. Others delve on apocalyptic details and so widen the gap and multiply the diversity of teachings. They also reveal how our particular context and era influence our beliefs on the divine hope that is ours in Christ. Understandably, this curiosity may cause a tension and a discord in our eschatological views. At times, we even struggle with our own beliefs.

NOW I KNOW IN PART

It is from this approach that I begin by using the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:12-13: 'For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.'

This passage is part of a long discussion on spiritual gifts. Here, Paul presents his argument about the supremacy of love in the light of eternity. Love should be the supreme ingredient and the prime mover of every spiritual gift. All other gifts are imperfect and will eventually pass away. Even our understanding is imperfect. Some Bible scholars believe the words

'then we shall see face to face' refer to God the Giver of spiritual gifts. Other scholars believe they talk about our understanding of spiritual truths which will become full when Christ returns. The differences in theological views and biblical interpretations are enough proof to say that, for now, we only know in part.

FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

Paul ends the chapter with a strong punchline: 'And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.' A closer look into Pauline soteriology and eschatology reveals that, for Paul, faith, hope and love are indispensable in the believer's journey from earth to glory. For Paul, our divine hope must define and describe our lives and proclamation. In Colossians 1:5, he pictures a believer's faith and love as springing forth from the hope that is stored up in Heaven. This hope is founded on Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:3) and believers are exhorted to 'be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet' (5:8).

Apparently, hope is forward looking, anticipating and patiently waiting and working for the consummation of the believers' full and final salvation. 'For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently' (Romans 8:24-25).

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- WHAT HOPES AND BELIEFS DO WE HAVE REGARDING THE 'THINGS TO COME' OR THE LAST DAYS?
- HOW DO OUR HOPES AND BELIEFS AFFECT OUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY AND RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PEOPLE?
- IN THE LIGHT OF OUR ETERNAL HOPE IN CHRIST, HOW DO WE JOIN GOD IN HIS MISSION TO ESTABLISH HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH?

MAY YOUR KINGDOM COME

The motif of faith, hope and love reverberates in the eschatological teachings of Jesus. He taught his disciples to pray, 'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10) and in verse 12 described how the rule of God should impact their lives: 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.' What a radical challenge to the established norm of eye for eye, and tooth for tooth' (Matthew 5:38), and love confined to friends and hatred to enemies (v.43).

In the kerygma of Jesus, the Kingdom of God is 'already here but not yet'. Referring to himself, Jesus said 'the kingdom of God is in your midst' (Luke 17:21). In the next chapter (v.17), Jesus refers to receiving the Kingdom of God like a little child (that is, now) as the condition to entering the same (in the future). To receive the Kingdom of God is to allow the rule of God in every area of the believer's life: 'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness...' (Matthew 6:33); loving and blessing our enemies (Matthew 5:43-47); and considering the 'least' as the embodiment of his presence, appealing for justice and mercy (Matthew 25:40).

The essence of inaugurated eschatology is evident as Christ calls the Church to become the present reality of the Kingdom of God on earth. He empowers the Church when he declared: '...and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 16:18-19). The Church will only find

the true meaning of its existence as it endeavours to partner with God in the realisation of his Kingdom on earth so that some day 'People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God' (Luke 13:29).

OUR RESURRECTION HOPE

Salvationists believe that we are pilgrims on a journey. Because Christ rose from the grave, we too can look forward to our glorious resurrection (John 11:25). There are nearly 40 songs under the heading 'Eternal hope' in our newly published songbook. Themes such as the eternal beauty and happiness in Heaven, the crown of glory that awaits the saints, the white robe of the pure in heart and the 'well done' greeting of God awaken in us a divine anticipation. Our faith rises above the struggles of life. Death is therefore regarded as a river to cross not a road end to dread.

However, Salvationists should remember that even our most profound imagination could not fully grasp and describe the eternal life with God; not even what a resurrected 'body' looks like. God in his wisdom has kept the gift wrapped in mystery so that the consummation will be far beyond what our human minds can fathom.

LOVE AGAINST BELIEF

At every commissioning, the recitation of the Army's statement of faith is always punctuated as the cadets reach the 11th doctrine with either a sigh of relief or a shout of 'Hallelujah!'. The congregation will then respond with a loud 'Amen', Amen to the immortality of the

soul, the eternal happiness of the righteous – but what about the endless punishment of the wicked?

As the commissioning ceremony comes to the prayer of dedication, the reality whispers again – each cadet is commissioned to a life of service, to snatch the wicked from the mouth of endless punishment. Just as we cannot fully understand the beauty of the eternal happiness of the righteous, we cannot also fully comprehend the meaning of the 'endless punishment of the wicked'. Both are in the hands of Almighty God. The diverse eschatological beliefs regarding the destiny of the wicked should never obstruct the urgency of the Salvationist's calling to bring people to a knowledge and experience of God so that wickedness will not rule.

It is with this calling that the Salvationist's passion for souls works against the fulfillment of his/her belief. Our service and proclamation reflect our struggle against evil on personal, relational and societal levels. In this battle against evil, we express our undaunted faith by our acts of compassion fuelled by the blessed hope we have in Christ.

May God's Kingdom come, may his will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.