

the Practical Theologian

equipping for ministry

“and this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best.”
Philippians 1:9-10A



THE SALVATION ARMY
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A Letter from the Principal

The purpose of the Practical Theologian is to stimulate thinking on Salvation Army theology, and to encourage the application of this theology to practical ministry in the service for our Lord Jesus Christ. With this in mind the large majority of the papers and inclusions in the editions of the Practical Theologian have attempted to bring about this purpose. This new edition is no different. The editors pray that you will find this edition both stimulating and helpful in the extension of ministry to the world that so much needs to know Jesus Christ.

Since the inception of the Practical Theologian, Captain Grant Sandercock-Brown has been both its General Editor and inspiration. Under his guidance the journal has explored new territory in attempting to link theology with practice. Grant has now relinquished his oversight of the Practical Theologian and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his remarkable work over the past four years.

The role of editing the Practical Theologian is now the responsibility of the Booth College Publishing Committee. The General Editor for this particular edition is Major Norman Beckett with assistance from Erin Barrett. We hope that this will be a most interesting and helpful edition.

Whenever theological discussion is entered into, it will by its very nature prove to be controversial. Although the journal has a Salvation Army bias in its theological perspective, it does intend to stimulate discussion and thinking by publishing articles that may not always conform to one particular orthodoxy. This does not mean that the publishers will always agree with what is said, but rather reflects their desire to see stimulating debate and discussion happen on important issues. Thus it is the desire of the Booth College Publishing Committee that future editions of the Practical Theologian include letters and responses relating to the articles written in the previous journal. In the desire to stimulate ongoing debate the opportunity for any person to contribute to the journal is now invited and encouraged for the next publication.

We pray that the Lord will use this journal to grow people in their faith and to forward the ministry and mission of The Salvation Army.

Philip Cairns (Major)

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Leadership in the Holy Catholic Church **Frederick Coutts Memorial Lecture**

Phil Needham
Retired Commissioner US Southern

Phil Needham discusses leadership in the Salvation Army by utilising the four marks of the catholic Church, distilled from the doctrinal formula – The Apostles Creed. He masterfully interprets the marks of the Church to articulate a construct for theological thinking that is mindful of the Army distinctive – governance and practice.

A Salvationist's reflections on spiritual leadership shaped by orthodox ecclesiology

This lecture is the next phase of my continuing preoccupation with Salvationist ecclesiology. In 1984 IHQ asked me to write a Salvationist response to the so-called Lima text of the WCC, entitled *Baptist, Eucharist and Ministry*. It was the WCC's first attempt to articulate at length an 'ecumenical' ecclesiology, or doctrine of the Church. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see why the Army needed to respond. As my response turned out to be much longer than IHQ anticipated, the Army decided to publish it as a book (*Community in Mission: A Salvationist Ecclesiology*).

Over the past twenty years I've had the opportunity to return to the subject via lectures and discussions, but also, and more importantly, as I've reflected on specific issues and challenges I've faced as an officer and as I've strategized with planning teams over the future direction of a corps, division, or territory. Most recently, I delivered the Andrew S. Miller Lecture at Asbury College titled 'We Believe in the Holy Catholic Church'. This phrase is all the Apostles Creed says about the Church, and as the Creed carries the Army's endorsement (It's included in *The Handbook of Doctrine, Salvation Story*). I was interested in seeing if those things essential to a

Salvationist ecclesiology were supported by that brief creedal statement. The conclusion of my study was that they were.

I am now led to ask the leadership question: If we, in fact, believe in the Holy Catholic Church, what are the implications for spiritual leadership and how it is exercised in the Army? What model of leadership will nurture and facilitate the kind of Salvationist fellowship that is embodied in ‘Holy Catholic Church’ as we explore all the implications and outworking of this ecclesiology which we say we embrace? That is the burden of this lecture, and I hope I may say a few things that prove helpful for an ongoing discussion about leadership in The Salvation Army.

I have sought in this presentation to be scripturally guided and informed, though I will not be doing much ‘proof-texting’. I have also drawn from the Miller Lecture I’ve referred to, as a way of defining our ecclesiology or understanding of the Church consistent with Christian orthodoxy. At the beginning of each section in the paper, I will summarize a particular aspect of ecclesiology in order to set the stage for an understanding of spiritual leadership that builds that aspect.

Finally – and perhaps surprisingly to some – I will also utilize a number of interesting insights from Bill George’s book (with Peter Sims), *True North: Discover your Authentic Leadership* (John Wiley & Sons, 2007). Books on leadership constantly flood the market. This one is different from most of the others. It talks about leaders who actually have a moral compass and have discovered their True North, or what their life, as well as their leadership, is really about. It has little interest in position, power, and status. It is interested in character, consistency, and compassion. It discusses the purpose of leadership in terms of a legacy in people’s lives. It is not written from an ostensibly Christian perspective, but it has grown sick and tired of the rampant exploitative leadership in the world, and is pointing the reader toward something far better. Much of what is said is appropriate to spiritual leadership today. Furthermore, I think whatever is taught in Scripture about effective spiritual leadership should resonate with discoveries being made in the ‘secular’ world about leadership that builds community, character, and hope. Truth is

truth, wherever we find it, and sometimes the Lord teaches us from ‘other’, sometimes unlikely, sources.

One final preliminary comment. A few weeks ago I was having a discussion with two officers, both of whom are doing graduate work in Christian leadership. At one point they both expressed their consternation that most of what they were learning about effective Christian leadership seemed to be contradicted by procedures and decision-making processes they were observing in the Army in which they served. I take their concerned comment seriously. Perhaps it pushes us to look more closely and honestly at our approach to leadership at every level.

Let us now move forward to develop an understanding of leadership arising from belief in ‘the Holy Catholic Church’. We shall be discussing **faith-based, community-based, holiness-based, and mission-based leadership.**

Faith-Based Leadership (‘We BELIEVE...’)

Christian faith is not intellectual assent, though doctrines are collateral to faith. It is a life we enter through faith in Jesus Christ. It is saying Yes to a Person with our lives more than with our creed. (Mt. 21:28-32) It is entering into a transforming relationship which redefines everything for us. All that we believe now revolves around

“We lead by faith
when we live it”

this Person, and all that we do is defined and modelled by Him. Saying we believe in the Church means nothing apart from our faith in its Lord. The Church’s legitimacy is that it is

His Body and His mission force.

This means that spiritual leadership, or leadership in the Church, centres on Jesus and is an expression of faith in Him. In fact, one of the most important tasks of the spiritual leader is to *model* faith. The writer to the Hebrews counsels his readers to imitate the faith of their leaders. (Heb. 13:7c) Whatever else spiritual leadership may be, it is first and foremost living out a faith worth imitating. It is modelling life with Jesus. It is leading out of a

passion for Christ. ‘For me to live is Christ’, says the leader of the mission to the Gentiles. (Phil. 1:21a)

A faith basis has profound implications for leadership in the Church. Like the apostle Paul, our orientation moves from a religious meritocracy to the Father’s mercy and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Tom Houston, IHQ Officers Councils, 1999) The key to Paul’s turnaround and what made it possible for him to be a true Christian leader is that he received mercy, he was adopted by ‘the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort’. (II Cor. 1:3b) Every Christian leader could well begin every day singing ‘Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me’.

Whatever meritocracy we have in the Army, whatever means of deciding on organisational promotions – and every denomination has them in one form or another – it does not define the authenticity of our spiritual leadership. The authenticity comes from our faith, our complete trust in the divine grace of the Father that flows to us through Jesus, our allowing ourselves to be completely taken in and adopted by the God of mercy. The authenticity comes from then patterning our lives and our leadership after Jesus, not the latest presumably-successful model from the business world. The authenticity comes from the grace we model, not the rigid procedures and ironclad plans we impose.

Faith-based leadership is out-of-control leadership. What I mean by that is that faith follows down the path which Christ leads, not the professional climb defined and forced by so-called ‘career plans’. (I realize there is something good about our attempts in recent years to project the sequences of an officer’s responsibilities and appointments over time. But there is, I believe, a serious danger lurking underneath it all, and that is taking control of one’s calling from the One who called. Lest I sound far too naïve on this point, let me cite Bill George, who found that every one of the many authentic leaders he studied did not end up going in the career direction they had originally anticipated. He quotes Vanguard CEO Jack Brennan: ‘The dissatisfied people I have known and those who experienced ethical or legal failures all had a clear career plan.’ (George, 15) The ‘career plans’ of authentic leaders, it seems, were superseded by

some higher calling, which, by the way, did not necessarily lead them to greater wealth, power, or position. They discovered the direction of their leadership by discovering their ‘True North’, their moral compass.) Whatever our vocation, let us not become slaves of some ‘career path’ prescribed by ourselves or someone else. We must live by faith here, as well as elsewhere. We must be willing to hold our ambitions and expectations very loosely and be ready for a different and better route our Lord may well choose. Faith-based leadership is out-of-control and into-His-hands leadership.

We lead by faith when *we* live it, when *we* hold loosely the organisational rewards and perks so that we can hold tightly the real substance of leadership, when *we* believe in the Church, the Body of Christ, because it is our true family where grace abounds and compassion rules. Even Lord Hattersley, a confirmed atheist and student of Army history, had to concede that people of Christian faith who believed all these ‘religious myths’ put the ‘enlightened’ non-believers to shame when it came to the practice of compassionate humanity. He writes in *The Guardian*:

The only possible conclusion is that faith comes with a packet of moral imperatives that...influence enough [believers] to make them morally superior to atheists like me. The truth may make us free. But it has not made us as admirable as the average captain in The Salvation Army. (Quoted in Salvationist, 9/24/05)

Spiritual leadership in the Church is faith-based leadership because faith is what triggers compassion. (Gal. 5:6b) This is why spiritual leadership is:

Community-Based Leadership **(‘We believe in the... CHURCH’)**

We are social beings because the Trinitarian God created us in His image. A three-Person God is a God in community with Himself, and because we are like Him, it is simply not good for us to

be alone (Gen. 2:18). We are who we are; we can be human only in community.

The Church is the place where we Christians learn who we are in community. We believe in the Church, not because it is perfect (it isn't!) but because it is Christ's Body, and each of us is an essential member and all of us together make for a complete, healthy, and interdependent organism. (I Cor. 12:12-31) Like the majestic California redwoods with spreading roots systems, we too must stay close together so that our roots can intertwine and we can hold one another up and make each other strong. This is why no spiritual leader can operate independently, nor see his or her calling in career terms. This calling – and any true calling, for that matter -- is community-based.

In the Era of the Ego, this connection with one another is crucial. The norm of pursuing one's own interests, whatever the cost to others, has delivered a generation with too many self-absorbed leaders. We can even find them in the Church and in our Army. Sometimes they are found in various positions of leadership. Their serious misunderstanding of spiritual leadership sends false messages to those with whom they serve and diminishes their leadership.

I was interested to learn some of the results of a recent survey to determine why people leave the US Navy. The person conducting the survey, Capt. D. Michael Abrashoff, thought pay would be the number one reason. It was fifth. The first four reasons were: 1. not being treated with respect and dignity, 2. being prevented from having an impact on the organisation, 3. not being listened to, and 4. not being rewarded with more responsibility. (*It's Your Ship, Too*) In this hierarchical, tiered, bureaucratic, military organisation, the turnover was fuelled by the unmet need for encouragement, affirmation, respect, and empowerment.

I've heard the same comments coming from discouraged or now-resigned officers and local officers in our Army. I believe there are Salvationist leaders who don't understand the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ and therefore malpractice their leadership in it. They don't see that their calling is to build a community, not a career, to advance in relationships, not in the ranks, to shepherd one's flock,

not one's fortunes. Spiritual leadership is an expression of one's life with, in, and for this community, this Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is therefore organic in nature: while recognizing the necessity of institutionalising a church or a Salvation Army for continuity, its primary orientation and reference is to the living, breathing community in which Christ is being formed, compassion is being shared, and relationships are being strengthened.

I want to call this *the opening work of a community-based leader*. The leaders who take the *Church* seriously are the leaders who know how to open people to one another. They do this first and foremost by example. They do not lead by keeping their cards close to their chest; they lead by putting them on the table. They do not lead secretly or act manipulatively; their colleagues know where their heart is and where they stand. Their own humanity is not hidden behind a fake exterior or a closed heart; it reveals itself in the warmth of humility and the disarmament of honesty. There is nothing that encourages others to be open with one another more than a leader who is.

“In the Era of the Ego, this connection with one another is crucial”

One of the examples Bill George gives of an authentic leader is the brilliant young Norwegian conductor, Arild Remereit. Remereit was leading a Dallas Symphony concert as guest conductor. Before conducting Mendelssohn's complex Scottish Symphony, he turned to the audience and said, 'The musicians know within five minutes whether a new conductor is any good or not – and soon you will learn what they think of me as their leader.' Over the next forty-seven minutes the concert hall was filled with heart-stopping beauty and technical brilliance as the orchestra became one instrument pursuing one passion. The audience was stunned by the performance and the applause went on and on. What Remereit did during all this applause told the story of the kind of leader he was. He immediately had the orchestra stand to take the applause and left the stage so that the appreciation would focus on *them*. When he returned on stage (because the clapping would not stop) he did not go to the podium to take a bow but wandered through the rear of the

orchestra, asking the musicians to stand and take credit. When he did move toward the podium, he refused to take it, choosing instead to be recognized only as part of the orchestra. Bill George sees Remereit as a metaphor for the kind of authentic leader he is attempting to define. (George, 169-170) I want to suggest Remereit is also a metaphor for a spiritual leader who is authentically community-based.

The Church has no place for the self-absorbed, self-aggrandizing leader. It needs leaders who will open their lives to those with whom they serve. This openness encourages others to drop their defences, open up their own lives to one another, and become a community in Christ.

This is *the unifying work of a community-based leader*. Factionalism has no place in the Church of our Lord, but its insidious impact has weakened the Church's health and credibility from the beginning. (I Cor. 1:10ff.; Phil. 4:2) (I am amazed by how many people in leadership positions in the Church, and specifically the Army, refuse to address factionalism and polarisation, and in some cases even engender it by aligning with one side or the other.) We must ask the question: How do spiritual leaders take the prayer of our Lord for the unity of His Church seriously? (John 17:21-23) How do they lead in such a way as to unite a team, a corps fellowship, or an Army?

I think there are three key steps. The first is to *pray together*. This is so obvious and elementary, so scriptural, and the unifying power of it so clearly demonstrated in vital churches and corps today, that it hardly needs pointing out – except that observation would suggest most Christians don't really believe it has that much effect. There is a huge hurdle to be crossed here, but any group of Christians who does will find themselves strangely warmed and drawn together by the Spirit. The leader who facilitates unity is the leader who calls to prayer.

The second key step is to *fit together*. This requires two things. First, it requires being comfortable with diversity. Unifying leaders appreciate the variety of both personalities and gifting, and

understand that unity only comes through mutual respect for the differences and reliance on one another's strengths and contributions.

The third key step is to *act together*. Bill George calls this alignment. Authentic leaders are able to demonstrate to those they lead that they can fulfil their own purpose and passion while achieving the organisation's mission. (George, 180) In like manner, effective spiritual leaders know both their people and the mission of their Church, and are able to align the two in action.

Community-based leader are unifiers. There is, however, an important key to accomplishing unity. It's called servant-hood. Servant leaders unify because their agenda is neither competitive nor self-serving. It is important, therefore, that we talk about *the servant work of a community-based leader*.

In his insightful and provocative book *Leadership in The Salvation Army: A Case Study in Clericalisation* (Paternoster, 2006), Harold Hill argues that the clericalisation, or professionalisation, of spiritual leadership inevitably creates a tension with the servant-spirit of the diaconate. In the case of The Salvation Army, he shows how the military metaphor which proved to be so helpful in missional warfare became oppressive when the warfare waned, the movement began to decline, and the organisation became more inner-directed, survival-conscious, and bureaucratic. Concurrently, its officers became more career-oriented and status-conscious. (See 288-292) Hill quotes a statement by Ken Booth about ordained church leadership:

Ordination is about apostolic leadership, and you cannot have apostolic leadership in the church without the risk of clericalisation; and the key to overcoming the risk lies in the recovery of the servant (the diaconal) nature of all ministry in the church.... (306)

Leadership that is truly community-based sees the community as people to be served and empowered, not stepped-over and exploited. Phil Wall believes that enough Christians making 'choices daily that are driven by service rather than self-servitude'

will both ‘change the culture and climate within which we, and those we lead, work,’ and ‘make possible the existence of a culture which gives permission to [the level of self-aggrandizing excess so common today among leaders] a thing of history.’ (*Leadership Matters*, 5-03) This could well happen if enough Christian leaders take their cue from the defining attitude and actions of their meal-serving, foot-washing, life-giving Lord.

It is, I believe, a matter of how a leader handles power. The leader who follows Jesus handles power by giving it away and, by doing so, empowers others and strengthens community. Bill George’s research revealed that far superior results ensue when leaders empower those with whom they work, rather than try to get them to be loyal followers. (George, 184) Furthermore, he concluded that ‘the more power one accumulates, the less it should be used.’ (194) A study of the life and teaching of Jesus leads inescapably to the conclusion that power must be held lightly or it will corrupt us. It is no accident that Jesus’ ultimate surrender of His earthly power to crucifixion released the greatest redemptive force in the world, and His turn-over of His mission to the leadership of twelve disciples made the Church possible. Down through the centuries, whenever the Church has been vital, leaders have empowered.

“Pray together
Fit together
Act together”

This is *the empowering work of community-based leadership*. It happens when leaders encourage others toward their future in Christ (I Thess. 5:11), lead by example (I Peter 5:1-4), use their influence more than their positional authority, utilize the wisdom of their mentors and take time to mentor others toward leadership. It happens when leaders form a support team whom they empower and who bring greater breadth and depth to their leadership.

Let us summarize the characteristics of community-based leaders: they are open in relationships with those with whom they serve, successful in uniting people in spirit and purpose, humble in attitude and authentic as servants, and unimpressed by power but successful in multiplying its positive effect by giving it away. Such leadership is possible when it is:

Holiness-Based Leadership
(‘We believe in the HOLY... Church’)

David Gergen has commented that ‘character without capacity usually means weakness in a leader, *but capacity without character means disaster*’. [Italics mine] (Quoted in George, xx) Examples abound, even within the Church. How do we address the character flaws of some leaders? Better still, how do we nurture spiritual leaders who have character?

It begins with something even more basic than character. It begins with holiness, the grace of God changing and moulding our lives in His image: ‘Be holy, because I [the Lord] am holy.’ (I Peter 1:16) It begins with an ecclesiology that believes in the *holy* Church, a community on the highway of holiness, being made complete day by day as they journey together toward the fullness of love, which is holiness. Holiness is the shaping of our character to the image of God in the community called together by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The Church is the Bride of Christ for whom He gave His life to make her holy. (Eph. 5:22ff.) Community-based leadership in the Church must take this holiness of the Body seriously, but not for granted. Sometimes the Bride doesn’t act like a bride. For one thing, she may act like a divided body, and the true Bride is one. Authentic spiritual leaders nurture unity and refuse to defer to polarisation. A holy Bride means a united Bride. Insecure leaders make one or both of two mistakes. They carry favour from, or surround themselves with, sycophants who will give them uncritical praise, isolating them and ushering them into a world of unreality and rank favouritism. Or, they will unintentionally increase factionalism by kindly trying to appease every faction. In doing so, they increase dissatisfaction overall by attempting the impossible and failing to confront compassionately, and to bring the factions together prayerfully and openly. True spiritual leaders understand that the Bride is not divided. They refuse to be resigned to a Body of

factions, whether it is a corps, a staff, or a headquarters. They build the unity without which the Body cannot be a holy people.

The Bride may also act like a sinful body, and the true Bride is holy. Authentic spiritual leaders take seriously the holiness of the whole Church and refuse to succumb to spiritual blindness and lowered expectation. We Salvationists share theologically a Wesleyan optimism about human nature (i.e., ‘it is the privilege of *all believers* to be wholly sanctified...’). This optimism grows a leadership that trusts what the Holy Spirit can do in anyone, it conveys that optimism, gives space and opportunity for people to grow in grace, and calls into question the low expectations of some about their own spiritual capacity.

Spiritual leaders who believe in the holy Church will model holiness in the way they lead. Holiness is the perfection of love, and holy leaders will model this holiness in both their living and their leading. The danger of compartmentalisation, however, often causes spiritual leaders to fail or fall. This happens when the call to holiness is taken seriously in one area of life but not another. A leader may, for example, be diligent in pursuing holiness in his personal life, but when it comes to his leadership responsibilities in the Church he may operate differently, as if his vocation did not come under that same transforming grace. From time to time I have observed, for example, decision-making processes in the Army based entirely on business principles, with no consideration of what we should do as followers of Jesus Christ in this situation. It was as if we were operating within a dualism of a sanctified arena of decision-making here and a secular arena there. Holiness-based leadership honours no such dualism. It strives for *integrity*. It leads by the same principles and values in every situation.

Bill George’s study of authentic leadership grounded in one’s ‘True North’ reveals how essential the integrity of character is for authenticity. Authentic leaders understand that ‘career-driven-ness’ causes a leader to become so obsessed with personal success that he or she loses perspective and compromises

“Authentic spiritual leaders nurture unity and refuse to defer to polarisation”

integrity. Living within the constricted world of a career line, the person loses touch both with his true self and with the larger community. Further, he loses all desire to develop himself, honestly assess his leadership, and improve his leadership style.

George identifies five dimensions of authentic leaders. (xxxii ff.) Let me name them and then comment (in *italics*) on how each correlates with holiness-based leadership:

1. Pursuing purpose with passion. This happens when the leader is in touch with his own life story and is true to it. One leads authentically from the uniqueness of his own capacities, experiences, and influences. No one, says George, can be authentic by trying to be like someone else. You find your purpose by following the passion which your life has enabled you to discover. *Holiness-based leadership is a function of the holy life. Holiness is not the product of a divinely-patented formula applied in the exact same way to all. God works in each of us according to our uniqueness in personality and experience. We travel together on 'the highway of holiness', but our journey is our own. Our purpose is the same: to follow Jesus, live his life, and carry out his mission. Our callings are different, and even though we all share the same purpose, each of us must be true to his or her own calling.*
2. Practicing solid values. These values are shaped by personal beliefs and developed through study, introspection, consultation with others, and years of experience. They must not only be professed, they must be practiced, especially under pressure. *A holiness-based leadership is the fruit of those who have not only studied holiness but have put it in practice. They understand Jesus' teaching that two Masters cannot be loved and served at the same time. (Lk. 16:13) Their attitude and practice has been so transformed that they stand the test of integrity. (Ro. 12:2) They 'live as children of light'. (Eph. 5:8b) They have no hidden agendas or end runs. They walk in the light.*

3. Leading with heart as well as the head. This does not mean a lack of toughness. On the contrary, it means ‘having passion for your work, compassion for the people you serve, empathy for the people you work with, and the courage to make difficult decisions.’ *I am intrigued by the dimension of the heart being mentioned. Holiness, of course, is a heart matter – specifically, a perfecting of the heart, of love. The holiness-based leader leads first with the heart because his purpose, with the apostle Paul, is to ‘present everyone perfect [or complete] in Christ’. (Col. 1:28c) This goal means and requires a love for people and a driving desire to see people find their completion. It does not allow for indulgence or excuses for those who are being led. It requires mentoring and accountability, which are the actions of leaders who care deeply.*
4. Establishing enduring relationships. ‘People today demand personal relationships with their leaders before they will give themselves fully to their jobs. They insist on access to their leaders, knowing that trust and commitment are built on the openness and depth of relationship...’ *We have already discussed this dimension under community-based leadership. Suffice it to point out that holiness is essentially relational and communal. It frees us for the honesty and openness with one another which is foundational to agape love.*
5. Demonstrating self-discipline. Authentic leaders ‘set high standards for themselves and expect the same from others. This requires accepting full responsibility for outcomes and holding others accountable for their performance.’ When the leader falls short of his own expectations, it is crucial for him to admit his mistake and initiate immediate corrective action. *This kind of disciplined and honest leadership is in character for a holiness-based leader. Holy living is not some airy-fairy vacation from the tough tasks of discipleship training and living. Neither is holiness-based leadership the dispensing of sweet indulgences in an anything-goes world. It is grace-full but disciplined, compassionate but answerable.*

How, then, do we nurture this kind of leadership? Let me suggest some of the things that can be done:

1. Help our future leaders understand, not only their gifting, but their stories, their defining experiences, their passions. It will help them find their true callings.
2. Educate them not only in the administrative and technical skills needed for leadership, but also in the ethics of holiness and the specific ethics of their particular vocation.
3. Alert them to the dangers of careerism, private ambition, and a success defined by power, in whatever form.
4. Teach holy living in very concrete, rather than general, ways.
5. Inculcate scriptural values and principles.
6. Help them develop relational skills and personal openness to others.
7. Enable them to place their vocation in the larger context of their calling as a disciple of Jesus, a family member and friend, and an apostle who is called to go into the world and live the gospel.

Our calling to go into the world and live the gospel brings us to the final key aspect of leadership in the Holy Catholic Church. It is:

Mission-Based Leadership
(‘We believe in the... CATHOLIC Church’)

To define the Church as ‘catholic’ (universal) is to say that it exists for the sake of its mission in the world. The Church is ex-centric by nature and purpose. We are the people who not only expand our Kingdom banquet table and invite people to come, but who also go out into the whole world with the gospel of hope and the love of the Saviour.

Believing that we are a *Catholic* Church and living in that belief has many implications. It means that we are an *apostolic* community where all members are called to the apostolate mission of

being the Church in the world. It means that we are an *incarnational* community where we both seek and represent the incarnate Christ and where we allow Christ to become incarnate in us. It means that we are an *exemplar* community, called to model the freedom and compassion of Christ in the midst of an enslaved and self-seeking world. It means that we are a *counter-cultural* community that lives in defiance of the corrupt present world orders. It means that we are an *inclusive* community that opens its doors and sends itself out to the excluded of the world. It means that we are a *hope-driven* Church that lives in high expectation of the coming Kingdom and opens God's future in Christ to those in despair.

This missional ecclesiology is the profile of our early Army. As we look at our Army today, I think we would agree that there has been some dilution of this missional obsession. Some would say we are in danger of losing it completely. Harold Hill has an interesting, and helpful perspective on this change. He says that we are torn

“It is time we took a hard look at our approach to leadership to see if it is delivering the Army's true mission rather than careers and institutional survival.”

today between two ecclesiologies – one based on the Army's original missional, all-laity, anti-clerical ethos, and the other evolving from the Army's hierarchical institutional structure. The latter, in its early form, served the rapidly expanding mission well, so that what are now the

two ecclesiologies were merged, or at least effectively partnered. But over time, and probably inevitably, the two separated more and more and even began to work against each other. Increasingly, attention was focused on the hierarchy and officer careers while the mission waned (at least in the Western world). (See Hill, ch. 20, pp.283ff.)

Hill goes further to say that, consistent with the tendency of theology to follow practice, the rapid hierarchicalisation of The Salvation Army soon became an institutional orthodoxy, not to be questioned. This moved on naturally, says Hill, to the institution

becoming obsessed by and committed to its own survival. Mission becomes maintenance. Function becomes status. A proactive approach is replaced by a reactive one. Prudence outweighs creativity.

At the conclusion of this paper, we shall come back to the contrasting profiles of leadership arising out of these now divided ecclesiologies. But first, let us consider the profile of leadership in the missional Church:

- *The primary motivation goes beyond a personal need for recognition or power, to a humble desire to serve God's redemptive plan for the human race.
- *Missional leaders are focused where the missional Church is focused: the field. They call every member to mission, to be salt and light in a tasteless and dimly-lit world.
- *They are driven by a Christly compassion for all people.
- *They are sufficiently flexible to adapt to the changing contexts of the mission field.
- *They are willing to take creative, proactive risks.
- *They are more interested in helping people on their spiritual journey than operating competent programs.
- *They plan more for long-term, substantive outcomes than short-term, numerical goals.
- *The Bible is their missional Guidebook, Jesus is their missional model.
- *They develop solid competency in aligning the passion of those with whom they serve with the mission of the faith community they lead.

This is the kind of leadership that must be in the forefront of a Salvation Army that intends to reclaim its catholic worldview and field-based mission. It contrasts, and often clashes, with other views of leadership. I conclude this paper by considering these contrasts and potential conflicts. Let me be clear that in doing so, I am not criticizing, per se, approaches that are different from the missional. What I *am* saying is that the missional approach must lead the way

and take precedence over other approaches to leadership. The other approaches and their strengths must be in the service of the mission for which this Army exists. (It is interesting that the authentic leaders that Bill George studied all brought their companies into alignment with the company's mission and closer to the customers outside the company. In many ways, they were a secularised version of our missional leaders.) Here are the contrasts: (many of them suggested by the two officers to whom I referred near the beginning of this paper, and gleaned particularly from works by Kennon L. Callahan and Robert K. Greenleaf).

Missional pastor – Professional minister. Missional pastors follow the model of the Good Shepherd who leaves the sheepfold to seek the lost sheep. They do not ignore the flock, but they grow them into a community that seeks, serves, and welcomes the lost to Christ. Professional ministers follow a model developed in the 1950s and 60s of the spiritual leader as a person professionally qualified to offer and coordinate church programs that serve those who choose to come to church for help and hope. Professional competence is a valuable asset to the Church's mission, as is professional accountability. But it must remain in the service of mission, or it will put career advancement above mission accomplishment.

Leader – Administrator. Leaders grasp the Church's mission, cast a vision of how their group can use its strengths and resources to advance that mission, and then mobilize their fellowship as a missional team. Administrators are skilled in applying guidelines and procedures, ensuring consistency, protecting the organisation, and managing people. They have gifts which the Church needs. What is crucial is that leaders are facilitating the key decision-making processes and are in charge of the fellowship's direction. Sometimes a good leader also has solid administrative skills. Sometimes a leader does not. One way or another, a leader must be supported by those skills, or his leadership will be weakened. Where the key decisions are being made by administrators who are not leaders, the focus of

those decisions will be on the efficiency and survival of the organisation, not the more effective pursuit and accomplishment of the organisation's mission. Thus an effective mission force like a Salvation Army can evolve into a well-oiled and regularized hierarchical military system obsessed with its own internal processes and promotions.

Enablers -- Bosses. Enablers release people from the inhibitions and constraints that impede the use of their gifts for the mission and empower them to follow their ministry passion. Bosses constrain people to act only within the boss's ambitions or the standard operating procedures of the organisation. Enablers nurture confident, creative, risk-taking missionaries. Bosses nurture fearful, unimaginative, safe followers of procedure. Enablers nurture proactive, independent leaders. Bosses nurture reactive, dependent underlings.

Long-termers – Short-termers. Long-termers are interested in contributing substantially to the mission. This is why they think strategically and plan to accomplish what endures. Logically, then, they much prefer longer leadership appointments, without which they cannot significantly influence mission accomplishment. Short-termers are interested in keeping things going and accomplishing what is safe and programmatically measurable and moderate by organisational standards. Just as the authentic leaders whom George studied all had long-term commitments both to the mission of their organisation and to their leadership positions in the organisation, so, for example, Salvation Army officers who will make significant, long-term contributions to our mission are those who exercise missional leadership and remain in their appointments long enough to put their strategies well in place and establish strong missional thinking and commitment. (Anyone who thinks this can be done with 2-3 year appointments is fantasizing.)

We Salvationists are living in interesting times. This Salvation Army has come a long way and must seriously take stock

of itself. It is likely that we may have gotten off track in some ways. It may be that it is the missional leaders – officer and lay alike – who hold an important key to our becoming once again a powerful expression of ‘the Holy Catholic Church’. It is time we took a hard look at our approach to leadership to see if it is delivering the Army’s true mission rather than careers and institutional survival.

One of the officers I referred to earlier left me with the questions she was grappling with herself: ‘How can I be a catalyst for a paradigmatic change in the way we view leadership organisationally and denominationally? How can I use my own sphere of influence and my own leadership to promote the need and mindset for, as well as the development of, missionary pastors and mission team leaders?’

I think it is a question for every person in this Army who has a leadership potential or position.

Four Anchors from the Stern

Major Harold Hill
Retired officer NZ

In the shifting sands of The Salvation Army self-understanding, Harold Hill, in his article, alludes to the fact that there are four anchors that ground us in sound theology as we articulate our self-understanding today.

The Salvation Army as “a Church”: a Dissuasive

You will recall that when the ship in which Paul was sailing had come through a great storm, the sailors sounded a rising sea floor. To save the ship from drifting onto rocks in the darkness, they threw out four anchors from the stern and waited for the morning.¹

While the Salvation Army’s mission statement has until recently described it as “an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church”, there is now a tendency for it to be described as “a worldwide evangelical Christian Church”. Certainly, we are *part* of the Church, members of the body of Christ. That is altogether different from being *a* church. I think the Movement’s drift to “denominationalism” runs onto a shoaling shore in a fog of confusing definitions and I am throwing out four anchors from the stern.

My four anchors are the Salvation Army’s own history, the doctrine and history of the Church, the sociology of the Church and, finally, Scripture.

My first anchor: the Salvation Army’s own history.

We are familiar with the way in which the Army began as what today would be called a para-church agency, assisted by people from diverse church communities. In the manner of such bodies it eventually became an independent entity.

The change probably came about as early as 1867; Sandall calls that year “the turning point”.² In that year the East London

Christian Mission was named, acquired a headquarters, hired a theatre for Sunday meetings and increased its number of “preaching stations” to six, began to hire workers (nine by the end of the year), established a system for processing converts, printed its first documents (combined Articles of Faith and Bond of Agreement), began giving social relief to the poor and issued its first financial statement. It was also the year in which many of the former supporters left and went back to their churches, replaced by new converts and other enthusiasts like James Dowdle, and the year in which members of the mission are first reported as taking the sacrament together. It was becoming an independent community of faith. We might call that “a church”.

But they did *not* call it “a church”. They called it a “Mission”, and, later on, an “Army”. They also liked to call it a “Movement”; that seems a little free-flowing for anything so tightly organised, though there was at first an element of spontaneity about it. In Maud Booth’s words,

“There are sects and denominations enough. This is an Army, a band of aggressive men and women, whose work of saving and reclaiming the world must be done on entirely new lines...”³

And for a century, they stoutly resisted any notion that they might be “a church” although they were happy to be counted a *part* of the Church. At the same time the Army increasingly resembled a conventional church denomination, and eventually, as we entered the 21st century, it finally, unambiguously, described itself as “a church”.⁴ Colonel Earl Robinson plotted the course of this process in his paper for the Johannesburg Theological Symposium in 2006 through a series of quotes.⁵ Major David Noakes has helpfully summarised these, as follows, in his paper for the 2007 Australia and New Zealand Tri-Territorial Theological Forum:

- William and Catherine Booth: Not a church, an army.
- Bramwell Booth: Part of the Church.

- Albert Orsborn: Not a church but a permanent mission to the unconverted.
- Frederick Coutts: Not a church, but implies it.
- Clarence Wiseman: Pointed to the need for an ecclesiology, doctrine of the Church.
- 1969 *Handbook of Doctrine*: Makes direct reference to the term “ecclesia”.
- Philip Needham: The Salvation Army is a true denomination and integral part of the Church.
- *Salvation Story* (1998): Chapter 10: “People of God – the Doctrine of the Church”.
- John Larsson (2001): A watershed had been reached in transition from a movement to a church.
- Shaw Clifton: Emphatically states the Army is a church rather than merely a part of the universal Christian Church.

All of this illustrates that we have not stood aloof from that organising principle which can be demonstrated from every part of the church and in every age: that *doctrine follows praxis*. We like to assume otherwise; that we do what we do because it is principled, or theologically sound, or God’s will. Alas, whatever we do, we eventually come to sanctify it with the belief and claim that this is what God intended, even though we might originally have adopted it for quite pragmatic, or even questionable, purposes. It is called “tradition”, or “the guiding hand of the Lord”. It becomes inscribed on tablets of stone. It sets like concrete.

Of course, when other people do that, and claim, for example, that Jesus ordained the three-fold orders of bishops, priests and deacons, or that the Pope is infallible, that is different. From their vantage point, when we do it with the sacraments, for example, that is also different.

Now who am I to try to turn back the clock? Organisations come fitted with a ratchet clause; they don’t back up. Some people are mildly scathing about those who want the Army to revert to being a Christian Mission. Well, I am not urging that, but through the ages,

every movement for reform and innovation has sought validation from the original Founding Vision, so here goes.

The reasons those founders resisted being a church – are they valid today? Has the wheel turned and their time come again? Here were some of their arguments:

- William Booth said, “We are not and will not be made a Church. There are plenty for anyone who wishes to join them, to vote and to rest.”⁶ Thus he dismissed churches as characterised by democracy and a passive laity, neither of which he intended would have a place in his Army.
- Booth also spoke of not wanting strife with the churches or to be in competition with them. When interviewed by Sir Henry Lunn in 1895 on the Salvation Army’s position on the sacraments, Booth claimed, perhaps a little disingenuously, that “we came into this position originally by determining not to be a church. We did not wish to undertake the administration of the sacraments and thereby bring ourselves into collision with existing churches.”⁷
- In *Heathen England*, George Scott Railton inveighed against sectarianism as ingrown and insufficiently evangelistic:

Shall we ever sink into a sectarian spirit of selfish care about our own, and cease to spend all our strength for the good of others?” Answering the hypothetical objection, “But this is making a new denomination – a new sect,” he responded, “Well, and supposing that it is. Is there any harm in doing so? Is there not a need for just such a ‘sect’ in many cities?... But we deny that we are in any proper sense a sect... We are a corps of volunteers for Christ, organised as perfectly as we have been able to accomplish, seeking no Church status, avoiding as we would the plague every denominational rut, in order perpetually to reach more and more of those who lie outside every Church boundary.”⁸

- Catherine Booth also argued that the clericalised attitudes prevalent in churches meant that the unsaved were left unsaved:

“Yes, thank God, we are teaching the Churches that others besides clergymen, ministers, deacons and elders can be used for the salvation of men. The multitudes have too long been left to these. As a clergyman said to me the other day, ‘There are 35,000 souls in my parish, what can one do?’ What indeed! Set the carpenters and the washerwomen on to them, saved and filled with the Spirit!”⁹

The essential, underlying argument was that of “adaptation of measures” (Charles Finney and Catherine Booth), or “being all things to all men, if by any means we might win some” (Paul). The Army’s target group, those Railton said “lie outside every Church boundary”, the socially disenfranchised British underclass, did not relate to and never had related to the Church or churches, so the founders deliberately chose not to identify themselves in that way.

Now we can say, that was *then* and now is *now* – we have moved on. These early arguments against being a church tended to pillory inadequate kinds of church – and would be refuted and held to be no longer applicable by many evangelical churches today. (In the same way, some of our still-repeated arguments against the practice of the sacraments as “formalism” or dependence on external means might be denied by those practising sacramental worship today...) Despite the concern Booth expressed to Henry Lunn, we had not been deterred by the thought that some churches might see us as competitors in the religious market either.

“
But they did *not* call it
“a church”. They called it
a “Mission”, and later
on an “Army” ”

The fact is, however, that many Salvation Army corps have come to resemble the kind of churches the founders did not want their Army to resemble, and many of us as Salvationists resemble their church-

members. This has come about as part of that same transition which has led us to think of ourselves as “a church.”

My argument, then, from our history, is not just that our founders did not conceive of the Army as a church because it did not appeal to the people we sought to serve and evangelise. It is, firstly, that in our community in our part of the Western world, (I recognise that this is not the case in other parts) the word “church” suffers from the same disadvantage today. And secondly, that our becoming more church-like has not necessarily meant becoming more effective in our mission; sometimes, the reverse. As the Archbishop of Sydney once said to a Divisional Commander, “Mr Salvation Army, you've got it *all* going for you, you lot. Why isn't it happening?” If it isn't happening, might the founders' arguments against “churchliness” still carry some weight with us?¹⁰

My second anchor: the doctrine and history of the Church.

Sometimes the claim is advanced that the Salvation Army exhibits “the marks of the Church” – whether these are the traditional yardsticks of “one, holy, catholic and apostolic”, or more involved criteria such as the no fewer than twenty adduced by Earl Robinson in the paper to which I have already made reference – and that therefore we are a church. Certainly we should exhibit the marks of the Church, if we really are a part of it. Praise God we do! But these are marks of *the* Church, not of *a* church. We can't go from “these are the marks of *the* Church” to “we exhibit these marks” to “therefore we are *a* church”. The syllogism is flawed. We need to define what we mean by “the Church”, “a church” and “a part of the Church”.

Salvation Story defines “*the* Church” as “the fellowship of all who are justified and sanctified by grace through faith in Christ.” It goes on to define “*a* church” as “an evangelistic body of believers who worship, fellowship, minister, and are in mission together”. It affirms that “Salvationists are members of the one body of Christ. We share common ground with the universal Church while

manifesting our own characteristics... [we are] one particular expression of the Church.”¹¹

Salvation Story's definitions of *the* Church and *a* church are good as far as they go, but they do not address the question of the relationship between the two except by implication. They leave unexamined the fact that there is in practice another level of entity between the two – that of separate associations or families of churches. We are on safe Biblical, theological and ecclesiological ground when we speak of *a* church as a local congregation and of *the* Church as the whole Church, but it is more difficult to justify the denominational entities except as the product of history. They are a concession to *realpolitik*, rather as Jesus spoke of Moses permitting divorce “because of your hardness of heart.”¹²

Sometimes the view is expressed that the “real” Church is spiritual, and quite independent of human, sociological structures, so it is unimportant how it is structured. The Army has never subscribed to that theory; the body of Christ is clearly incarnate and has structure and organisation. Further, the Army accepts that the Church’s unity is manifest in diversity (“with other Christian denominations and congregations”, as *Salvation Story* puts it) rather than in uniformity, and the Booths very early forbade criticism of any other body.¹³ The difficulty lies in making this paradox work. Lack of uniformity would not be such a worry, but unhappily too often the diversity is displayed in disunity. We do not maintain the Lord’s Table, so unlike the Roman Catholics we cannot refuse any one access to it – but I do know senior officers stripped of their soldiership and rank *after their honourable retirement* for accepting ordination in “another denomination”. To adapt G.B. Shaw’s Bill Walker in *Major Barbara*, “Wot prawce unity nah?” Sometimes our actions speak louder than our words.¹⁴

Since fairly early times there have been rival factions of Christians: witness the great schisms which took place over discipline and doctrine, setting rival Donatist and Catholic, Arian and Catholic, Nestorian and Catholic, Celtic and Roman Catholic and eventually Orthodox and Roman churches squaring off against each other over the centuries. They could be compared with

“denominations” in our modern sense in that they were rival associations of local churches, in some cases occupying overlapping territory and each claiming to be more correct than the other – the *true Church*.

Most of what we now call denominations are a comparatively recent phenomenon; the heirs of the Reformation. Although the Pope still claims that all save the Roman Catholic Church are “defective” in some respect,¹⁵ these churches seldom anathematise one another today, being usually content with a slightly smug assumption of superiority. It is difficult to generalise about the origins of these groups – personal disagreements, social and national interests, theological controversies have all played a part.

In the now-ebbed high tide of ecumenism in the mid-twentieth century, it was held by many that the history of denominationalism in the Church demonstrated the “scandal of disunity”, a betrayal of Jesus’ prayer “that they may all be one”. To my mind that still is a dissuasive against it. Claiming to be a denomination consciously buys into that disunity. It attempts to sanctify that status quo. Our doctrine meekly follows our praxis.

We make no apology for not practising the sacraments. We happily swim against the tide of general Church doctrine and practice in positing our own spiritualised interpretations of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, on the grounds that they represent a valuable witness to the rest of the Church. So why are we unable to hold the line on this no more peculiar but equally important distinctive mark, that we are not a “denomination”? Probably because it is the line of least resistance. We resist conforming to something arguably derived from the Scripture but collude with something evolved in the era of the Enlightenment. In this we pass up the opportunity to maintain a witness to another great principle – the unity of *the Church*, a refusal to accept the divisions of the Church as final.

Obviously I am not claiming that our choice of vocabulary will heal the divisions amongst God’s people; only that this take on the doctrine of the Church gives us an opportunity to bear witness to something important. Have we ever claimed more than that for our stand on the sacraments?

My third anchor: the sociology of the Church.

My third anchor is the pattern of decline and renewal, repeated at intervals throughout the history of the Church. Evangelicals might explain these in terms of the waxing and waning of evangelical faith and fervour. Sociologists examine more objectively the patterns of human behaviour, and can also help us to make some sense of the Church's past.

The life-cycles of organisations, including religious ones, follow a sigmoid curve from movement to institution as they grow. They tend to plateau and enter a period of decline, from which they may or may not recover. Commonly, with the onset of decline, some schismatic or renewal movement strikes out upon a new trajectory of growth before eventually repeating the pattern.

In the Catholic Church, various orders and groups, from monasticism in the second century to Opus Dei in the twentieth, as well as heretical fringe movements, have been the loci of such renewal. In Protestantism, itself such a movement in origin, sectarian groups have flourished. Such reactions against the institutionalisation of the original movements seek to recover their founder's vision and validate their new departure by the past. The original theorist of sectarianism, Max Weber, referred to their adherents as "spiritual virtuosi", the athletes of spirituality. They make the rest of us feel somewhat uncomfortable. Usually the sectarian offshoots themselves institutionalise in due course – in Protestantism such groups are usually known as denominations. Sometimes, usually in response to the new offshoot, a large segment of the Church experiences a measure of rejuvenation, as in the sixteenth century Counter-Reformation or with the "third wave" of the charismatic movement of the twentieth century.

Bryan Wilson summarised the characteristics of the sect as:

A voluntary association; membership is by proof to sect authorities of some claim to personal merit – such as knowledge of doctrine, affirmation of a conversion experience, or recommendation of members in good

standing; exclusiveness is emphasized, and expulsion exercised against those who contravene doctrinal, moral or organisational precepts; its self-conception is of an elect, a gathered remnant, possessing special enlightenment; personal reflection is the expected standard of aspiration...; it accepts, at least as an ideal, the priesthood of all believers; there is a high level of lay participation; there is opportunity for the member spontaneously to express his commitment; the sect is hostile or indifferent to the secular society and to the state.¹⁶

The Salvation Army would admit to many, though not all, of these descriptors and it can be readily seen that the movement fits this pattern in origin and development. Some sociologists have described it as a “conversionist sect”¹⁷ on account of its over-riding sense of mission, or an “established sect”¹⁸ because it seemed to retain many sectarian characteristics long after it might have been expected to discard them. (Real life is seldom as tidy as the sociologists prescribe.)

I find this sociological analysis helpful in trying to get a handle on what has happened and is happening to the Salvation Army. The Army, like most renewal movements, has gradually institutionalised and its leadership has become clericalised. At the same time it has retained some of its sectarian character, and some of its soldiers have to some degree retained, or attempted to recover, its earlier revivalist ethos. The institution has of course moved inexorably in the direction of accommodation to the world and assimilation into the generic church, both in representing its officers as “clergy” and more recently by describing itself as a “church”. So now the wheel has turned full circle, and we have our own renewal movements, our *virtuosi*, the neo-primitive Salvationists, the 614 movement, seeking to recover the original vision.

General John Larsson, addressing a 2001 International Theology and Ethics Symposium in Winnipeg, Canada, stated that “A key question for us is how we make the transition from a

movement to a church in such a way that we do not lose the original dynamic that brought the Army into being. Or if we have lost something of that dynamic, how do we regain it?”¹⁹ Unfortunately “loss of original dynamic” may describe an essential difference between “movement” and “church”. Werner Stark quotes Bramwell Booth writing to Railton, “I am convinced that we must stick to our concern, and that we must also keep up its so-called extravagances. They and they only will save it from drooping down into a sectarian nothing.”²⁰ Stark comments, “What Booth wanted was precisely what Trotsky wanted: a permanent revolution.”²¹ Finke and Stark comment, “When successful sects are transformed into churches, that is, when their tension with the surrounding culture is greatly reduced, they soon cease to grow and eventually decline.”²²

In this “watershed in its self-understanding”, as General Larsson has called it,²³ the Salvation Army’s leaders have a choice as to what traits in its DNA they will promote as dominant and what aspects will be relegated to the status of recessive genes. The “neo-primitive” ideals call for an emphatic rejection of clerical status and a turning away from the trap of denominational identity. Those directions offer a chimerical security, whereas the Army’s true vocation is as an egalitarian, counter-cultural movement. This sociological analysis of the Army’s role in *the Church* therefore argues against its being content to be called *a church*.

My fourth anchor is Scripture.

Is denominational diversity acceptable? Some would argue that there is no reason to suggest that the disunity manifest in these separate denominational groups, cooperating at best and competing at worst, is contrary to God’s intention. This applies to ecclesiology the dictum of Wallenstein, “Anything not forbidden is permitted,” rather than the reverse, laid down by Calvin (and George Orwell). If our first doctrine, that Scripture is the “Divine rule of Christian faith and practice”, is to be maintained, then denominational diversity might be judged by Scripture.

Does Scripture have anything at all to say about denominational diversity? In the New Testament, the word “Church” is used in more than one sense. It meant the local community of faith, and also the whole company of those who name Jesus as Lord, wherever they might be. Early on, there were varieties of local church; Hebrew-speaking and Greek-speaking. Then Paul wrote to churches in various geographically scattered places, meeting in the homes of their leaders. They even had local variations in pattern of government until gradually the three-fold orders of bishop, priest and deacon became general in the second century.

However, unlike so many of today’s churches, these churches recognised each others’ ministries and shared the one table. They were all *the* Church. That is the New Testament, Apostolic, sub-Apostolic picture, and it persisted long after the canonical ink had dried. The only way in which the expression “a church” could be used of New Testament times is with reference to a local congregation of “the Church”. The concept of some local congregations being associated in a bond that excluded some other local congregations simply would not compute. When eventually that unity fell apart in schism, they viewed that as a scandal to be resolved rather than an achievement to be celebrated.

In Scripture the solitary example of a literally denominational situation is that which Paul cites in 1st Corinthians 1:10-17. There he condemns the division into sects claiming over against their rivals to be followers of Paul or of Apollos, of Cephas or of Christ! Paul specifically *accused* them of being, literally, “denominations”. That sounds more like a forbidding than a permitting – a binding rather than a loosing. Tested against Scripture, denominations are a confession of our sinfulness, borne with shame, to be repented of rather than aspired to.

To offer one further Biblical reference, an analogy rather than an injunction, it seems to me that our aspiration to church identity and clerical status is like the elders of Israel begging Samuel to give them a king so that they could “be like the nations round about”.²⁴ According to at least one strand of Biblical history, that didn’t turn out too well.

A Proposition

Do all these arguments fly in the face of reality? All right... I admit it. There is no doubt that legally (in most countries) and sociologically we *are* “a church” in that we exhibit all the marks of a denomination. It looks like a duck, walks like a duck, quacks like a duck... so why do I still resist calling it a duck? Because I believe that names still have some power. They represent meaning. We tend to be shaped by the discourse we adopt. It’s the collective application of Proverbs 23:7: “As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.”

Since I’m attempting to propose an alternative reality, what might we call that reality? General John Gowans recalls the Methodist historian Gordon Rupp saying to Salvationists in the 1960s, “You are our Franciscans. We Methodists began as a mission. We have become a church. May the Army always remain a mission.”²⁵ “Mission” may not be a term to conjure with but the evidence tabled from sociology suggests that we could make a claim to be a Protestant “order”, which would be one way of defining that missional, not-a-denomination, state.

This argument has been rejected on the grounds that “order” pre-supposes a subordinate relationship with some other ecclesial body – like that to which the Salvation Army might have been reduced had the Anglican-Salvation Army talks of 1882 succeeded.²⁶ That of course is the status of most existing orders, though Taizé has established itself with general acceptance in the ecclesial no-man’s land between the great confessions. So how about the suggestion that the Salvation Army is an order of the *whole* Church, the Catholic Church, rather than of any particular denominational branch of the body? That would involve no concession of independence. That is in fact what our traditional claim to be a “part of the Church” has amounted to; we’ve just never used that particular word to describe it. Why have we given it away? We fit the criteria exactly. Now I am not arguing that we should use the word “order”

“Paul specifically *accused* them of being, literally, ‘denominations’”

ourselves. We already have a perfectly good word, a proven “brand”, to borrow the ubiquitous advertising jargon: we are an *Army*.

This is not a conservative response, a reluctance to let go of what we’re used to, but a radical response, in the true sense of going back to our roots – which means back to the future. It can be dismissed as “make-believe” – except that believing does indeed make it so! On the other hand, we are shaped by the discourse we buy into, and I believe we have bought into denominationalism at the cost of our mission-focus.

In summary, we are an example of a revival movement which has institutionalised and settled down, finally coming to claim status as a “church”, a denomination. This is seen as appropriate, an achievement, a reason to congratulate ourselves, and necessary in order to maintain and consolidate our status. I suggest otherwise. If status is what concerns us (and if so, that’s a worry in itself), our claim to be an *Army*, a permanent mission to the unconverted, has not involved any fatal disability or disenfranchisement in the eyes of the “churches” or the community over the past hundred or more years. Safeguarding some degree of ambiguity on the question has not threatened our integrity.

So I argue that the *Army*’s own history, the history and doctrine of the Church, the pattern of sociology, the Word of Scripture, all testify against any great need to be “a church”. Our own history provides us with a clear precedent for retaining our identity without resorting to denominationalism; the history and doctrine of the Church provide an ecclesiological and theological base, the sociology of religious movements provides a rationale, and Scripture provides a mandate.

In the morning the sailors cut the ropes and drove for the beach. Well, we’ve already done that: my dissuasive is too late. But I’m still perched in the stern, trying to yell above the wind that beached vessels seldom set sail again.

¹ Acts 27:29. I borrow the title from Alan Richardson who used it for his riposte to Alec Vidler’s *Soundings* and John A.T. Robinson’s *Honest to God* in 1963.

² Robert Sandall The History of The Salvation Army Vol. 1 (London: Nelson, 1947) 72

³ Maud B. Booth Beneath Two Flags (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1889)271

⁴ Salvation Story (London: 1998) 100

⁵ Word and Deed Vol. 9 No. 1 (November 2006) 13-17, 28-31

⁶ Orders and Regulations for The Salvation Army (London: Salvation Army, 1878) 4

⁷ Harold Begbie, Life of William Booth, Founder of The Salvation Army (London: Macmillan, 1920) I, 468-9

⁸ George Scott Railton Heathen England 2nd edn (London: S.W. Partridge, 1878) 143-4

⁹ Catherine Booth The Salvation Army in Relation to Church & State (London: Salvation Army, 1889) 75

¹⁰ Quoted by Lt. Colonel John Major, former Divisional Commander in Sydney. Have I shot my own argument in the foot with this quote? Nothing could be more churchly than the Archdiocese of Sydney and Nothing more successful! However, *our* constituency is those who will not have a bar of the church. Those who *do* want church can be left safely in the hands of the Archdiocese of Sydney. What about the others? I rest my case.

¹¹ Salvation Story 100-1.

¹² Matthew 19:8

¹³ Orders and Regulations for Field Officers (London: Salvation Army, 1886) Part XVI Chap. I

¹⁴ Though here's an interesting story about Peter Cullinane, RC Bishop of Palmerston North, speaking recently to a group of priests and laity about who might receive communion from the hands of a priest. Said the Bishop, "I will give communion to any Catholic in good standing and, if a Salvation Army member in uniform was to come to receive communion, I would not hesitate to offer the host." (The context was that those who were not Catholics should not receive the host.)

¹⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, "Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church," document issued July 10, 2007

¹⁶ Bryan Wilson An Analysis of Sect Development *American Sociological Review* 24 (February 1959) 3-15.

¹⁷ *Ibid* 5

¹⁸ B. R. Scharf, The Sociological Study of Religion (London: Hutchinson, 1970)

¹⁹ Quoted in background papers to the 2006 International Theology and Ethics Symposium, Johannesburg.

²⁰ To clarify the terms, by "sectarian" here Bramwell Booth meant what we would describe as "denominational".

²¹ W. Bramwell Booth, Letter of 6 October 1874, quoted from Th.F.G. Coates, Prophet of the Poor 98, in Werner Stark The Sociology of

Religion Vol. 2 *Sectarian Religion* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967) 284-5

²² Roger Finke and Rodney Stark The Churching of America 1776-1990 (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 148.

²³ John Larson, Opening Address to the International Theology and Ethics Symposium May 2001

²⁴ 1 Samuel 8:5.

²⁵ Quoted by Denis Hunter, While the Light Lingers (privately published 2005) 36

²⁶ For example, by General Clifton in *The Officer*, (January-February 2007) 3

United Front?

Janice Rees
Miranda Corps

With so many differences in the Christian church today, how can we speak of unity? Maybe a look at contemporary missiology can help us consider this important question. Janice Rees explores the concepts of Missio Dei and Contextualisation as pathways to a greater unity in the church today. Read on to find out more....

It must be said that ecclesiology was not a major issue for the early church. Most Greek patristic writers of the first five centuries contented themselves with describing the church using recognizable spiritual images, without choosing to probe further: (of course the church had many other political and theological concerns to contend with at this stage)²⁷. However, at the Council of Constantinople of 381 AD, the formalized creed of Nicaea-Constantinople confirmed claims to the church's essential nature²⁸; "*We believe... [in] the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church*". This solitary statement was a breakthrough for the theology emerging on the mysterious issue of the church and has, over the centuries, stood the test of time in providing a framework for ecclesiological discussion. Of these four 'marks' or 'notes', the oneness of the church has prompted greatest discussion.

The 'oneness' of the church

To describe the church as 'one' seems a great challenge to post-reformation believers who are perhaps, in many respects, only able to envisage a theoretical oneness of the church. In fact division amongst the church seems to be a constant since inception and so the creedal formula's affirmation of unity is a difficult one to comprehend²⁹. In the New Testament we often read of controversy amongst the early believers and after the first council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) there is a distinct sense of unsatisfied compromise

amongst the Jewish delegates³⁰. Controversy continued to divide the church on many issues and during a one hundred year period historians record over 50 documented ‘councils, creeds and schisms’³¹. During the Dark Ages the Catholic and Orthodox schism of 1054 seemed to permanently sever the possibility of ecclesial unity. If that was not enough, the Protestant uprising of the Reformation again demonstrated the great challenge of Christian unity: (it must be said that this was despite the reformer’s great desire to preserve unity within the western church). The fact remains that the Salvation Army emerged as a denomination because of the great breakdown in church unity³² and the continuing post-Reformation schism. Indeed, the existence of multiple denominations is in itself an apostasy in the eyes of both the Roman Catholics and the reformers³³.

“Schism denies unity and unity is a central theme to the existing ecclesiology.”

Today the Episcopalian Church of North America, the Uniting Church of Australia and many churches around the world are facing the momentous task of achieving unity amongst their communion. In light of this it seems the unity of the church is of greater concern than ever (hence the rapid rise of the ecumenical movement), and few would argue today that any denominational churches should be denied ecclesiality³⁴. What remains, however, is for these ‘different’ expressions of church to develop a systematic ecclesiology that provides a framework for unity amongst all members of the body, and with a revision on theological method it is apparent that reflection of missiology can and must in some way inform this process. Thus the question becomes - how does contemporary missiology bring fresh vision for a unified church?

Missio Dei

In recent years Michael Frost and Allan Hirsch (amongst many others) have highlighted a necessary revision of the theological framework that informs our practice³⁵. Noteworthy is the clarification that Christology must inform mission, and missiology

must inform ecclesiology: (in the past this order was often reversed and ecclesiology informed missiology). With this in mind there are three crucial elements of contemporary missiology that could certainly help the church in its effort for ecclesiastical unity. This is the concept of *Missio Dei*, the move to greater contextualisation and a pragmatic shift in missiological reflection.

Over several decades the tenets and strategies relating particularly to missiology have been reconsidered, reconstructed and re-communicated. As society and culture has undergone the observable shift from modernity to post-modernity the western Christian church has found itself in what has been called a ‘post-missionary era’. Conceptually, an understanding of what mission is, what context mission finds itself in, and issues of diversity and dialogue have been at the forefront of mission-related discussion. One of the key shifts has been the understanding of mission itself.

In his breathtaking book ‘Transforming Mission’, David Bosch articulates the paradigm shift that occurred over the last century which ultimately led to the consensus of mission as the activity of God³⁶. Perhaps starting, as Bosch suggests, with the words of Karl Barth at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference,³⁷ this shift moved mission into the context of the trinity and not ecclesiology or soteriology³⁸. Mission was no longer seen as a function of the church but instead intrinsic to the very essence of the Godhead. Bosch goes on to point out that this change was taken to quite extreme positions (as change often is) by some who said that *missio Dei* was not only much larger than the church (with which this writer would agree) but that it excluded the church³⁹. In response, some like Hoedemaker have challenged the usefulness of the *missio Dei* concept but as Bosch himself declares, ‘*missio Dei* has helped to articulate the conviction that neither the church nor any other human agent can ever be considered the author or bearer of mission’.

Bosch in particular shows great clarity in elucidating this transforming perception of mission, and it is clear how widely his ideas have influenced the world of missiology⁴⁰.

So how does this speak about unity?

The consensus of modern missiology towards the primacy of *missio Dei* calls all those involved in mission, and indeed the entire Christian church, to a greater humility. *Missio Dei* is applied as the church drops any presupposed ideas of superiority and realigns itself as a servant of God's mission and nothing more. Thus we must strive for fellowship and unity amongst all ecclesiastical expressions. We must love the church more than we love our tribe. We must love a united bride more than we love a flourishing denomination. In short we must love the 'catholic church'⁴¹, more than we love the Salvation Army. This is confronting for those amongst us who hold tightly to a 'us and them' mentality, but if we are to show respect and humility before the position of contemporary missiology the *Missio Dei* will most definitely call us to a unified submission before God.

Contextualisation

The great emphasis upon contextualisation in contemporary missiological circles provides for opportunity to accept and embrace changing expressions of church throughout the globe. Sadly, many of the rifts amongst Christians over the previous millennia have been regarding supposed heresies, many of which became accepted at later dates: (such as the shift relating to women – at one time the church voted on whether women were actually human beings who possessed souls!⁴²). It seems our unwillingness to accept that which is different or that which threatens the norm ('that's what we have always thought' or 'how we have always done it') has caused unnecessary disunity. The role of contextualisation is to allow a freedom of expression that not only maintains the essential nature of the church but allows it to truly flourish.

Christians believe that the good news of the gospel and the principles of the kingdom of God are valid for all times and all cultures. However the church also recognizes the need to communicate these 'truths' through culturally-appropriate

methodology. The process by which the message becomes appropriate is called contextualisation. Contextualisation is a process of extreme importance to the church as it relates to everything we do and all that we are.

“Contextualisation fights to protect the place of culture”

Over the last fifty years missiology has contributed a great deal of insight into the future of contextualisation and how this underrated concept demands greater attention amongst the church⁴³. Contextualisation means that the “Word must dwell amongst all families of humankind today as truly as Jesus lived amongst his own kin”⁴⁴. Surely this prerogative would be considered of utmost importance to the church? The sad reality is that when supposed proponents of heterodoxy or even heresy have been excommunicated throughout the history of the church, the roles of social, political and social factors were not recognized. Contextualisation fights to protect the place of culture, and indeed the esteemed role of culture, within the kingdom of God. In failing to recognize the importance of this endeavour, the church has in fact failed to recognize the vast ingenuity of God’s creation; a creation that includes culture. What is proposed then is not simply a loosening of accepted liturgy or ‘worship behaviour’ but something far more radical. We are talking about more than language, lifestyle, values, and ethos (but certainly these things are to be reconsidered). Contextualisation is the means by which the incarnation remains an ecclesiastical reality, and the good news is communicated in a way that it remains just that; good news.

A New Reality

Thus some central tenets of ecclesiology must be open to question. For instance, does an institutionalised church truly demonstrate the dynamic life of Christ’s bride in a world that currently seeks to abandon the institution in favour of the organic? Or what kind of leadership will remain as the systems of hierarchy

are challenged and perhaps forgotten? If we are not willing to ask these questions, we more than risk denying the church its place in contemporary society and we will continue to bicker about anything that does not align to our often-antiquated models. If we are not willing to ask these questions we may even deny the church its basic dynamic reality.

Clearly, the Christian church is called to respond to the great need of contextualisation if we are to be truly Christ in the world as Christ was to the world. And finally we will do well to consider the pragmatic shift that is taking place amongst missiologists. In ecclesiastical terms this has been described as the inception of the emerging church. Back in 1994 Carles Van Engen declared the call for a ‘new paradigm in ecclesiology that sees the missional church as an “emerging” reality’⁴⁵. He went on to list seven stages of ‘emerging’ within missionary congregations and called his readers to comprehend a profound reality. “The missionary church cannot become more than what it is. The missionary church cannot be more than what it is becoming”⁴⁶.

Thus Missiology always lead to a question of pragmatism, always asking what we will become and what we will do next. God’s activity becomes the primary concern for those who wish to participate in the work of the divine. This means that, as essential as theological concern regarding the nature of God, mission and the church are, pre-eminence is given to what they amount to in practice. The questions became concerned with how we live out our role in God’s mission (that is as the church). As Erwin McManus demonstrates “Much of our religious language has been focused on the don’ts rather than the dos. In the same way, we act as if the primary word from God is stop rather than go”⁴⁷. A pragmatic shift such as this brings unity to the church as it allows itself to become increasingly focused on ‘being’ the church and less concerned with differences in denominational nature. Such a shift would imply a committed discipline to partnership in action and would no doubt ensure a greater stewardship of (shared) resources. It would most probably ensure a greater influence amongst communities as the lights on the hill become resourced as streetlights in the community.

This of course is only an opportunity for a church willing to accept the primacy of God's mission over the fragilities of the church. Our own Phil Needham has said it quite eloquently;

*The church exists primarily for the sake of mission in the world. Because of this essentially missionary nature and calling, the focus of its life and structure is the world for whom Christ died. This purpose is carried out, not by allying with the present world order, but by proclaiming and demonstrating the life of the Kingdom that has come in Jesus and by calling the world to this radically new order*⁴⁸.

The Opportunity

The truth is that we are in a time of great ecclesiastical reflection. As we have seen the move to ensure missiology informs ecclesiology, we are presented with a great opportunity to learn from and implement the ideas of contemporary missiology. In fact, this is more than an opportunity. As we face a new millennium this is our great responsibility of partnering in God's mission. As we strive to continue the ministry of Christ our Unity will become paramount. The primacy of the *missio Dei*, the continuing challenge of contextualisation and the pragmatic shift or theological reflection are all means which could enhance the unity and influence of the church in our communities and throughout the world. The choice, of course, is ours; we can choose to accept these insights or to reject them and continue as we have in the past but most of us sense the need for action. Perhaps the opening chapter of Brian McLaren's book 'The church on the Other Side'⁴⁹ sums it up best. "If you have a new world, you need a new church. You have a new world."

²⁷ However the Church Fathers did make some claims of the church and since Ignatius of Antioch, the question of ecclesiality has justifiably been answered through reference to the presence of Christ ("Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the universal church") a sentiment echoed by Hippolytus as he challenged people's belief in the Holy Spirit activity in the church.

²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann The Church in the Power of the Spirit Translated by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1977) 340

²⁹ In defense of this idea Hans Kung suggests the 'oneness' of the formula is not in relation to the externals of the church. He comments; *The unity of the Church has nothing to do with the mythological magic of the number one and the intrinsic fascination of oneness. The unity of the Church is not simply a natural entity, is not simply a moral unanimity and harmony, and is not just a sociological conformity and uniformity. To judge it by externals is to miss the point completely. The unity of the Church is a spiritual entity. It is not chiefly a unity of the members among themselves; it depends finally not on itself but on the unity of God, which is efficacious through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.* See Hans Kung The Church (London: Search Press, 1968). Nevertheless these comments do not justify the constant schism and obvious disunity amongst the world's believers.

³⁰ FF Bruce New Testament History (New York: Double Day, 1971) 288

³¹ J Stevenson Creeeds, Councils and Controversies Edited by J Stevenson (London: S.P.C.K, 1966) 372-377

³² This is not to question the motive or intent of the Booths but said to highlight the ease at which breakaway movements commenced after the split during the Reformation.

³³ The Roman Catholic Church and all eminent reformers such as Luther and Calvin argued for the necessity of a unified church. This position has been held by contemporary Catholic and Protestant theologians such as Karl Rahner, Jurgen Moltmann, John Macqarrie and others.

³⁴ Miroslav Volf After Our Likeness: The Church as the image of the Trinity (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998) 133

³⁵ See Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2003)

³⁶ David J. Bosch Transforming Mission (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991) 389-393

³⁷ *ibid* 389

³⁸ *ibid* 390

³⁹ *ibid* 392

⁴⁰ If one was to skim through the bookshelves of any library missiology section they would likely find that most texts written in the last decade rely heavily upon ideas purported in 'Transforming Mission'.

⁴¹ This term is used to describe the Church Universal and not the Roman Catholic Church.

⁴² In 581 BCE this was debated at the Church Council of Mâcon. Ironically the affirmative vote only won out by a single vote!

⁴³ During the 1960's many cross-cultural linguists, anthropologists and missionaries were involved in experimental approaches to communicating certain messages or meanings to a variety of cultural

settings. However, (with a perspective on mission) the word contextualisation didn't appear until 1972 in "Ministry in Context" a publication of the Theological Education Fund. Here contextualisation was described as "the capacity to respond meaningfully to the gospel within the framework of one's own situation". Consequently a renewed focus and respect for the differing worldviews of culture emerged.

⁴⁴ Source unknown

⁴⁵ Charles Van Engen 'The Impact of Modern Ecclesiology on the Local Church' in New Directions in Mission and Evangelisation 2 Edited by James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994, 55-63) 59.

⁴⁶ Van Engen 61

⁴⁷ Erwin Raphael McManus, Seizing Your Divine Moment, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc, 2002) 155

⁴⁸ Phil Needham Community in Mission: A Salvationist ecclesiology (St Albans: The Campfield Press, 1987) 52

⁴⁹ Brian McLaren The church on the Other Side (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000)

Is the Cart before the Horse?

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For many years most Salvationists have considered mission as a 'come to us' activity attempting to bring people into our meetings and to participate in our particular form of 'church'. This paper challenges this notion by suggesting that both the New Testament and the most effective contemporary churches have a 'go to them' approach. This thought-provoking paper presents a new paradigm for thinking mission in the 21st century.

The Corps Council has gathered and the discussion is in full flight about the goals, plans and dreams for the coming year and beyond. We'd love to see the Sunday meetings grow, have a vibrant Sunday school to which more kids come than they do now, and we'd love to have more people from the community coming to our Alpha course. Corps leaders so often feel the compulsion to attract people to the corps, and then, we hope, they will hear the gospel and the claims of Jesus Christ and come to have a relationship with him. In response to this compulsion we often reach for a new programme, a new style, a new idea which we hope will grow or revitalise our ministry. This is our mission strategy.

It seems that we believe that if we try a new programme or start a new course or find a more funky image or offer better coffee or be more contemporary and have four good looking singers out the front or have a high tech audio visual system installed or wear different clothes or brand ourselves in new and trendy ways ... then we just might attract new people to come to our corps or our church.

So often these programmes and ideas come from fast-growing churches, often in the US and with staggering references and testimonials. How many have you and I seen in our time in the church? Basically the message is, "try this approach to ministry so that people will want to come to your church". Often the goal of

doing mission is getting people inside our doors, and once they are there we will have the opportunity to share Jesus with them.

This approach to doing mission could be called the ‘Build it and they will come’ approach, as made famous by Kevin Costner in the movie “Field of Dreams”, where he was instructed by a disembodied voice to build a baseball field for past ‘greats’ of the game, and assured that “If you build it, they will come”⁵⁰.

The ‘Attraction’ approach

In missional circles this approach has also been called the ‘Attractional’ model of mission. This model assumes that people would come to our churches, and in fact to faith in Christ, if only we would get the product we are offering (mainly on a Sunday) right.

The problem is that if we approach things this way we are putting the cart before the horse.

Deciding on a form of church, an activity or a programme and then advertising and trying to get people to come to it is, as Andrew Hamilton says, “Mission in reverse”.⁵¹ He suggests that “Pagan Aussies don’t want to come to church, and simply making the Sunday event more attractive is not the answer to the problem”.⁵²

“We often reach for a new programme, a new style, a new idea which we hope will grow or revitalise our ministry”

Stuart Murray helps identify the ‘cart’ and the ‘horse’ which we might find have been placed in the wrong order in our attempts to undertake meaningful mission in the church today. Murray says that too many churches have seen mission as a programme or added extra which is bolted onto the church, rather than being integral and foundational to its very nature. He says that “missiology must precede ecclesiology and missional theology must precede both”.⁵³

We must therefore engage with our missional theology and let that shape both our mission and our ecclesiology. By this I mean that we must engage with what we believe the Bible teaches us about mission (our missional theology) and then let it shape how we respond

in the world (our mission) and in turn, let that be what determines the nature of our churches (ecclesiology).

Central to this missional theology, I believe, is a fresh understanding of mission as Missio Dei.

Mission does not belong to us, but to God. It is not *our* mission, but *God's* mission; his activity in the world in which he invites us to partner with him. Mission is not something the church does, but rather it is a characteristic of God. He has a mission to redeem all peoples and in fact, all of creation for himself. And we, the church, are invited to be part of that mission.

David Bosch has been vital to our recent understanding of *Missio Dei*. He says “Our mission has no life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission. Not least since the missionary initiative comes from God alone.”⁵⁴

As someone once suggested to me, we are invited to look for where God is working in the world and to join him there. This approach is in contradistinction to the attractional model of mission which sets us up in our little corner and invites people to come and join us here.

This is quite a challenge to the traditional view of mission as activity or programme. It turns the notion of mission, as something we do to try and bring people in, on its head as it pushes us out of our spaces and changes our focus from bringing ‘unchurched’ people in, to sending Christian people out.

Mike Frost even goes so far as to claim that the ‘Come-To-Us’ stance taken by the attractional church is unbiblical. It is not found in the Gospels or the Epistles. Jesus, Paul and the disciples, the early church leaders all had a ‘Go-To-Them’ mentality.”⁵⁵

This is not to say that we shouldn’t be ‘attractive’ to people outside the church; the New Testament church was obviously very attractive to many who joined them in following Jesus. Rather, the ‘Come-To-Us’ stance should not be our missional model or paradigm: that place should be taken by the ‘Go-To-Them’ approach.

This ‘Go-To-Them’ approach may also be called the Incarnational model of mission. “The missional church recognises that it does not hold a place of honour in its host community, and that its missional imperative compels it to move out from itself into that host community as salt and light.”⁵⁶

Salt and Light

These are metaphors Jesus used which help us understand our incarnational missional calling. In Matthew 5: 13 – 16 he told his followers:

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

Salt and Light. These are metaphors which call us to direct, meaningful, and constant contact and engagement with the society and culture in which we live. We are true to this calling when we are immersed in our society, not remote and distant, staying in our halls, our homes, our spaces, and trying to entice others to come and join us there. We are true to these metaphors when we move out of our buildings, our spaces, our spheres, and into those of our neighbours and friends.

John Olley, the former Principal of the Baptist Theological College of Western Australia, says that the way of Christ is:

- “Not the Constantinian model of imposition (which sadly the Church has used and some Christians still desire)

- Not the model of withdrawal, since light is to shine in darkness and salt is to be spread around.
- But a pattern of incarnation, a model of participation, living different values with sacrificial service despite opposition, being like Christ.”⁵⁷

Putting the Horse before the Cart – the ‘Incarnational’ Approach

If we put our missional theology horse before the ecclesiological cart, then what will change for us? If we allow an incarnational approach to guide us, then what will the implications be?

Well, to start with we can let go of clever marketing plans and the search for talented singers. We can stop trying to emulate some other church down the road which seems to have it all together. We are off the hook of trying to find the ‘magic’ programme, activity or behaviour which will see people flooding into our services. In fact, we will stop making the goal of our corps having people flood in at all. We will see our corps as places that equip and encourage our people as missionaries to the world in which we live.

It is, as Hamilton says, refreshingly simple. “It requires us to live amongst the people in our communities, to love them, to share the good news of the kingdom both in action and in speech with them, and then as they become followers of Christ, to invite them into our communities of faith... in incarnational mission that gathering exists to support the believers as they move out in mission rather than being seen as the place to bring people to... an incarnational approach to mission takes both the gospel and the context seriously and sends Christians out as missionaries rather than calling pagans to come and attend church.”⁵⁸ This is a particularly potent call to Salvationists who have a strong incarnational heritage on which to draw.

From our very foundation The Salvation Army adopted an incarnational approach to ministry. As one stark example of this many of us will know of the “Slum Sisters” who moved into poor neighbourhoods and lived their lives amidst the poverty and despair.

They were Jesus to those communities, not necessarily running programmes or club-style Salvationist gatherings, but rather being in their communities as salt and light, cleaning houses, having cups of tea, building relationships and sharing hope.

Today there are still Salvationists who have a strong incarnational approach to ministry. They are moving into communities where they simply live alongside the people as Christ amongst them. They join local interest groups, volunteer at Meals On Wheels, serve on the local soup run, help with the reading programme at the local primary school, or set up coffee tables in the family store and talk to the people who come to shop but really want a chat.

As we respond to the call of incarnational ministry our gatherings will stop being the prime focus of our corps, and our ministry in the communities in which we live and work will be our focus. I believe this is how our missional theology can guide our ecclesiology. This incarnational approach will lead us to deep and meaningful encounters with people who are outside the church, and what happens when we gather will be a response to a group of people looking for sustenance, support and equipping for the ministries that they are involved in for most of their time.

⁵⁰ And in the movie, of course, they did!!

⁵¹ Andrew Hamilton [How not to pick a Fight](http://www.the-next-wave-ezine) www.the-next-wave-ezine September 2005

⁵² Ibid 1

⁵³ Stuart Murray [Church After Christendom](#) (Milton Keynes UK: Paternoster Press, 2004) 132

⁵⁴ David Bosch [Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission](#) (New York, Orbis, 1991) 390

⁵⁵ Michael Frost [The Shaping of things to come](#) (Massachusetts, Hendrickson, 2003) 19

⁵⁶ Ibid 19

⁵⁷ John Olley [Light and salt: Christian participation in society](#) www.evangelicalalliance.org.au

⁵⁸ Hamilton 2005

Perspectives on Perfection

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This article attempts to define the terms, ideas, and misconceptions relating to the Wesleyan understanding of Christian perfection. It argues that perfection, as employed by Wesley, is not that of a place of static sinlessness at which a believer arrives, but rather is a sincerity of heart and intention to love as Christ loves. Thus perfection is a way of naming the emergent qualities growing out of the process by which the believer is engaged, supported and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

He who defines the terms wins the argument. Christian Perfection based on the meanings imputed, is achievable and desirable, as well as diabolical and impossible. The former is the position of John Wesley and those in his tradition. The latter is the position of the bulk of the western Church, which regards 'Christian Perfection' with the same scepticism as 'Military Intelligence' - a logical impossibility. Christians acknowledge their sinful nature and trust in Christ and his completed work to save. How can self-confessed rebels - guilty, vile, and helpless, claim perfection for themselves? And sinless perfection? The tautology is complete. Yet Wesley, a logical and intelligent scholar, clung to this teaching throughout his long ministry. His defence was simple. A Christian can be perfect, and without sin, for a given meaning of 'perfect' and 'sin'. They are not the meanings credited by the plain understanding of 21st (or 18th) Century English speaking peoples, but they are close representations of the original intention.

This article will explore the doctrine of Christian Perfection in four movements. Firstly, a brief examination of the validity of referring to the idea as a "Wesleyan Doctrine." Secondly, a description of what Christian Perfection means, followed by a brief discussion of what Christian Perfection is not. Finally, how individuals may appropriate this perfection.

A Wesleyan Doctrine?

Wesley was deeply suspicious of new doctrine⁵⁹. If after seventeen centuries of human interaction with the resurrected Christ and his Spirit a brand new foundation of the faith emerged there must be something wrong. His quadrilateral examination of the Christian faith placed great emphasis on this combined experience of believers through tradition. Wesley must have found Christian Perfection to predate his generation or he would not have accepted its validity. Christian Perfection was not a term of Wesley's invention - indeed it comes from the title of a book Wesley read in his early twenties⁶⁰. Similar to the Orthodox doctrine of deification, it also bears strong resemblance to the Roman Catholic sacrament of confirmation, although Wesley was able to bring the concept out of the mystical and symbolic and teach its practical application for his time⁶¹. Nor was the idea alien to Anglicans, as the official communion prayer demonstrated⁶².

Christian Perfection is not a Wesleyan Doctrine. It is a doctrine of the Church, taught in Scripture and practiced by the primitives. Despite this historical precedence, Wesley and those he influenced were and are strongly criticised by the wider Christian fellowship. Primarily due to his choice of words, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but calling them 'stinkweed' would be less commercially viable, and individuals would be less inclined to place one near their nose. Unfortunately for Wesley his branding of the doctrine did not meet with public acclaim.

"The very sound of it is an abomination to them. And whosoever preaches perfection - that is, asserts that it is attainable in this life, runs great hazard of being accounted by them worse than a heathen man or a publican." (Wesley's emphasis.)⁶³ He experimented with different names, but was obliged to stick with Perfection; a thoroughly biblical, though often misunderstood term⁶⁴.

“The word *perfect* is what many cannot bear”⁶³

Wesley's doctrine of perfection comes from the command of Jesus in Matthew 5:48 "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."⁶⁵ Every commandment is also empowerment, for God does not command that which is impossible to obey. This command is given in a context of love, 5:46 "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans do the same?"⁶⁶ Jesus' command links this perfection with love. Jesus' disciples are to be perfect in love even as the Father is perfect in love. And this is Wesley's simple definition of Christian Perfection. "...loving God with all our heart and serving Him with all our strength. Nor did I ever say or mean any more by perfection than this loving and serving God."⁶⁷

One Word, Many Meanings

The 'perfect' of Matthew 5:48 is the Greek word *teleios*, which has its roots in the word *telos*, meaning from a distance, or a goal, aim, outcome. Broadly speaking, the world of ethics is divided into two distinct branches, the deontological and the teleological, representing the distinction between doing right because it is right, and doing right because of the outcome, or result, that right action produces. The deontological is a study of duty and obligation and divine writ. The teleological is all strands of ethics that base the right or wrong of an action on its result. For example, Utilitarianism is a teleological ethic. Interestingly, the deontological command to "be perfect" has outcome-based intentions. It is duty to produce an outcome of love.

Teleios is a perfection of intended results, a completion of intention⁶⁸. Strong defines it as signifying "having reached its end."⁶⁹ Jesus' command may well mean "be ye therefore 'complete in your intended goal' even as your Father which is in heaven is 'complete in his intended goal'". The intended goal from the context is clearly love.

This is a different kind of perfect. The same word can have many different meanings, often only determined by context or verbal

emphasis. Say the word out loud, and give it different meaning. *Perfect. Perfect. Perfection. Perfection.*

Consider the Olympic Gold Medal winning sprinter - victorious, supreme, chiselled muscles and peak physical efficiency. Now consider an overweight individual on the treadmill, sweating, straining, and struggling. Which of these is an example of Athletic Perfection? Both. The Gold Medal winner is the best in the world, the example, the picture, the goal of all athletes. The fellow on the treadmill is also athletic perfection, where perfection is the process, not the end product. Physical wellbeing is the goal, and the fellow on the treadmill is moving towards that goal. Perfection is the verb, not the adjective.

Even in English we cannot define Perfection perfectly - it is at one and the same time "the highest or most perfect degree of a quality or trait" and "the act or fact of perfecting"⁷⁰. It is both the goal and the process of achieving the goal. 'Perfect' (with a rising inflection) means to bring nearer to perfection, to improve.⁷¹

Consider Jesus - Holy, Righteous, Son of God, Prophet, Priest, King. Now consider a follower of Jesus, sincere in his desire to be like Jesus, praying, meditating on Jesus' words, responding in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Which of these is an example of Christian Perfection? Both. Jesus the goal, the zenith, the ideal. The follower a long way short of the goal, but growing⁷², improving, perfecting. Perfecting perfection, rather than perfected perfection.⁷³ The Christian is not perfect. But the Christian's intention, goal, purpose, can be.

A Sincere Intent to Love

In Acts 11:26 we learn that in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. A name given to those who follow 'the way' of Christ, who express the desire to be in Christ, and for Christ to be in them. Christians want to be like Christ, to be Christlike. Anyone who desires to be Christlike is already Christlike in at least one dimension: they are like Christ in that, like Christ, they desire to be like Christ.

The issue becomes one of sincerity. How sincere can totally depraved sinners be? Will not some part of their sincerity be tainted and spoilt by evil and selfishness? Almost certainly. Yet even tainted sincere faith is effective for Justification. The call of Jesus in Mark 1:15 is to sinners to 'repent and believe the good news.' Such repentance and belief cannot be absolutely perfect and without blemish. No faith is perfectly perfect at first. Yet it suffices for God to count us righteous. Abraham must have had reservations as he led Isaac to the mountain, yet his faith was sincere. For Wesley, perfection is the purity, the sincerity, of intentions⁷⁴.

And the highest and holiest of intentions must be love. Love to God, and love to our neighbour. The *teleios* of Matthew 5:48 in the wider context of the Sermon on the Mount, is a counter-cultural message highlighting the inherent differences between the Kingdom of Heaven and the fallen nature of humanity. Those things that God values (meekness, peace, patience in persecution) are set in direct contrast to those things that humanity in its rebellious state values (revenge, pride, power).

The immediate context of the *teleios* is love, a counter-cultural love from 5:44-45 "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."⁷⁵ Loving those who love you back is not sincere love. Loving those who treat you well isn't real love. Real love is how the Father loves - just because.

"Be ye therefore perfect (sincere, genuine, real) as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (sincere, genuine, real)."

Wesley's perfection is sincerity of intention, and for Wesley the highest intention is love. Love for God, love for our neighbour. This is the fulfilment of all the commandments, and more. It is also the

fulfilment of the 'new' commandment, to love one another as Christ has loved us⁷⁶. Our actions and behaviours are to mimic and reflect

“It is both the goal and the process of achieving the goal.”

the behaviour of our Father in Heaven. Christ taught us to pray "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We are to imitate God in forgiveness of trespasses. Freely we have received, freely we are to give. "Have a pure intention of heart, a steadfast regard to his glory in all your actions."⁷⁷ "A spark from the fire is like the fire."⁷⁸

A Deliberate Intent to Sin

The Lord Jesus also taught his disciples to pray "deliver us from evil", and it is this aspect of Christian Perfection that draws the most criticism, but again, primarily due to the definition of terms. If perfection is sincerity of intention then it is also freedom from sin for a given value of sin.

"I answer, it will perfectly well consist with salvation from sin, according to that definition of sin, (which I apprehend to be the scriptural definition of it), *a voluntary transgression of a known law.*"⁷⁹ (Wesley's emphasis)

Wesley's definition of sin is a deliberate, chosen, transgression of a known law of God. A sin is a sin if you know it's a sin when you do it. If an individual is convinced, for example, that Madrid is the capital of France and testifies to this fact in a court of Law, is he lying? He is mistaken, certainly. But lying? No. If, after being fully appraised of the facts and being convinced that Madrid is in no way the capital of France and yet insisting on his original position, or failing to make appropriate amends for his testimony, then he is lying. For an action to be a sin it must be intended, and deliberately intended in spite of God's law. And Jesus' teaching on the Law is quite plain - the fulfilment of the Law is love.

If sin is an intentional decision not to love and perfection is sincerity of intention to love, it must follow that Christian Perfection is without sin. For how can one sincerely intend to love God and neighbour and intentionally act contrary to love? The individual is presented with a choice: God's way or my way? Choosing God's way is the path of Christian Perfection. Choosing my way is sin. The

presence of sin as wilful transgression is evidence of insincerity, and therefore the absence of perfection. QED.

But only for a given definition of sin.

Not all Christian Traditions would understand sin in the same way as Wesley⁸⁰. To many, sin is more than a deliberate transgression of a known law of God, but also a failure to conform to the standard of God, a principle within man, rebellion against God, and wrongful acts toward God and man⁸¹. Incidental actions, such as mistakes and ignorance, could still be considered sin. Other definitions of sin would make it possible to be on the path of Christian Perfection and still regularly sinning. That doesn't make much sense, so Christian Perfection is misunderstood to reflect a different definition of sin.

The doctrine of Christian Perfection then rests on our understanding of sin. Is every action of humanity tainted and depraved? Or are we only culpable while choosing disobedience? An analogy from the Garden of Eden may assist. In Genesis 3, Eve has a conversation with the Serpent during which she misrepresents the commands of God. God's instruction to Adam in Chapter 2 was quite clear "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof you shalt surely die." When Eve quotes this commandment to the Serpent, she adds "Neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." At some point God's words have become garbled. Adam passing the message along or Eve remembering the message has led to confusion. Eve is here guilty of a terrible mistake - distorting the Word of God. Yet there is no Fall at this point, there is no sin. There are only two commandments in place at this time - 'be fruitful and multiply' and 'don't eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil'. Eve (and possibly Adam before her) misrepresented God's word, but it is no sin. Only consuming the fruit; a deliberate transgression of a known law, results in sin and the fall. This argument is inconclusive, but it gives an indication of the nature of sin.

Having discussed Christian Perfection as a sincerity of intention, those things that Christian Perfection is not should be readily apparent. Indeed Wesley himself spent the majority of his time and writings on Perfection outlining what he didn't mean by the term.

The Human Response

Perfection is not absolute 'Perfectionism'. It does not discount mistakes or ignorance. Human nature remains intact. "Perhaps the general prejudice against Christian Perfection may chiefly arise from a misapprehension of the nature of it. We willingly allow, and continually declare, there is no such perfection in this life, as implies either a dispensation from doing good, and attending all the ordinances of God, or a freedom from ignorance, mistake, temptation, and a thousand infirmities necessarily connected with flesh and blood."⁸²

Nor is Christian Perfection a merely moral system of behaviour. It is not attained through strict obedience of the 'jot and tittle' of the law. Christian Perfection cannot be confused with legalism, though it often has been⁸³. Christian Perfection claims love as the utmost expression of obedience. Christian Perfection should not be confused with the Pharisaic holiness of ties and hats and shiny shoes. It is rather the ultimate expression of biblical holiness of freedom expressed through love and concern for the welfare of others. It is 1 Corinthians 13 in action.

Christian Perfection does not require good works as a guilt response to the saving actions of God. 'God has done all this for you, now you must pay him back' does not fulfil the intention of love. Christian Perfection is a response of choice and joy, not obligation. We are called to be perfect as our Father is perfect not because we are obligated to obey, but because we want to be like him. Christian Perfection is to be preached through drawing, never driving.⁸⁴ Christians are called to an obedience of choice, not guilt.

Christian Perfection is not a replacement for Salvation by grace through faith. It does not teach good works as the path to

salvation. Rather it is a working out of faith to logical conclusions. It is not achieved through rigid obedience, or with the intention of working your way into God's favour or having your prayers heard more readily. Christian Perfection is simply an expression of the work of a lifetime of faith responding to grace through obedience⁸⁵.

Christian Perfection is not characterised by Wesley's great fear: enthusiasm, a problem that is terrifying to a mature Churchman. A more contemporary phrase to describe enthusiasm is 'God Drugs', describing those who are fanatical to the point of irrationality. An exciting exuberance that can so easily mishear or ignore the gentle instructions of the Holy Spirit⁸⁶. Wesley was well aware of his own early enthusiasm - his good works, the holy club, studying for the ministry, signing on as a missionary - and all before he had a real experience of forgiveness or a genuine relationship with God. Wesley was well aware that enthusiasm can be faked, and represent a temporary passion as opposed to passionate commitment.

"But almost as soon as I was gone enthusiasm broke in. Two or three began to take their own imaginations for impressions from God and thence to suppose that they should never die; and these, labouring to bring others into the same opinion, occasioned much noise and confusion. Soon after, the same persons, with a few more, ran into other extravagances; fancying they could not be tempted; that they should feel no more pain; and that they had the gift of prophecy, and of discerning of spirits."⁸⁷ Christian Perfection is the steady intention to love God and the daily submission to His will. It is the work of a lifetime.

Christian Perfection is not anything beyond which the Bible describes, nor is it so meant⁸⁸. "But he does not come up to my idea of a perfect Christian.' And perhaps no one ever did, or ever will. For your idea may go beyond, or at least beside, the scriptural account. It may include more than the Bible includes therein, or, however, something which that does not include. Scripture perfection is, pure love filling the heart, and governing all the words and actions. If your idea includes anything more or anything else, it is not scriptural; and then no wonder that a scripturally perfect Christian does not come up to it."⁸⁹

Toward Perfection

Having investigated what Christian Perfection is, and what it is not, the question that must arise is how? How does one achieve Christian Perfection? The simple answer, of course, is that one doesn't. Christian Perfection is a work of grace. It is God's work, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. "...especially as we were clear on justification faith, and careful to ascribe the whole of salvation to the mere grace of God."⁹⁰ But God's grace is not without conditions. The conditions of redemption are repentance and faith. God calls, individuals respond, God works. The same is true with Perfection. The Holy Spirit calls, believers respond in obedience, the Holy Spirit works, and then calls again. Christian Perfection is no more or less than being a 'living sacrifice', and choosing to remain on the altar. It is less a line to cross than a zone of obedience to remain within. It is a walk of hearing and responding to the voice of God, one step at a time.

It is the work of an instant in that at a specific point individuals decide to live in submission to Christ and consecrate themselves to this purpose⁹¹. It is the work of a lifetime as individuals continue to learn and grow and respond to grace.

Christian Perfection is a work of grace and makes use of the means of grace: prayer and communion, relationship with God and other believers, meditation and study. It is a life marked by consecration, devotion, and commitment to God and his purposes. It is an ongoing sincere intention to be the person God is making you⁹².

Christian Perfection, Sanctification and Holiness all have to do with submission of the human will to the Lordship of Christ. Christians are happy to call Jesus 'Saviour'. Fewer are truly happy or able to call him 'Lord'. "Christ must be Lord of all, or not claimed as Lord at all."⁹³

A sincere intention to fulfil the law of love, a rejection of selfish desire and consecration of all that an individual has, a moment by moment relationship with Christ and response to the leading of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is Christian Perfection.

⁵⁹ M. B. Wynkoop Christian Perfection (Beacon Hill) 272

⁶⁰ John Wesley A Plain Account paragraph 4

<http://gbgm-umc.org/UMhistory/Wesley/perfect.html>

⁶¹ L.W. Wood Thoughts upon the Wesleyan doctrine of Entire Sanctification with Special Reference to some similarities with the Roman Catholic Doctrine of Confirmation *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Spring, 1980) 94

⁶² H. Carter The Methodist Heritage (Epworth Press, 1960) 83

⁶³ John Wesley Sermon #40 paragraph 1

<http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-040.stm>

⁶⁴ W.E. Sangster, 'His idea of Perfection' The Path to Perfection (Epworth Press, 1943, 1984) 78

⁶⁵ The King James Bible

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Sangster 77

⁶⁸ T.C. Oden John Wesley's Spiritual Christianity: A plan Exposition of his Teaching on Christian Doctrine (Zondervan Publishing House, 1994) 320

⁶⁹ J. Strong Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words (Thomas Nelson, 2001) 1408

⁷⁰ The Macquarie Concise Dictionary.

⁷¹ L. R. Marston The Crisis-Process Issues in Wesleyan thought *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Spring, 1969) 9

⁷² R.L. Maddox, John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences Convergences and Differences *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 1990 (1990) 40

⁷³ D. B. McEwan Imperfect Perfection: How Shall we Articulate the Wesleyan Position in Australian Society Today *Aldersgate Papers* (Kingsley College, October 1994) 14

⁷⁴ Wesley A Plain Account paragraph 2

⁷⁵ KJV

⁷⁶ Wesley A Plain Account paragraph 6

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ S.L. Brengle The Way of Holiness (Salvationist Publishing, 1951) 1

⁷⁹ John Wesley Sermon #76 paragraph ii.9

<http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/76/>

⁸⁰ McEwan 6

⁸¹ Moody 310

⁸² Wesley A Plain Account paragraph 15.1

⁸³ McEwan 14

⁸⁴ Wesley A Plain Account paragraph 17

⁸⁵ Oden 327

⁸⁶ Sangster 80

⁸⁷ Wesley A Plain Account paragraph 20

⁸⁸ Wynkoop 277

⁸⁹ Wesley A Plain Account paragraph 17.

⁹⁰ *ibid* paragraph 11.

⁹¹ Murray, in Wynkoop 296

⁹² W.M. Greathouse Sanctification and the Christus Victor Motif in Wesleyan Theology *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Spring, 1972) 52

⁹³ Wynkoop 273

For further reading:

R. Burtner & R. Chiles A Compend of Wesley's Theology (Nashville: Abingdone, 1964) 178-191

Wynkoop A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism (Beacon Hill, 1972) 368 - 401.

P. Enns The Moody Handbook of Theology (Moody Press, 1989)

**Hannah:
God uses the faithfulness of His people
to achieve His purposes.**

Narrative Sermon

Cadet Joanne Smith

This sermon outline, based upon the text of 1 Samuel 1:1-2:21, offers its readers and hearers an insight into the life of one who stands in the long tradition of Old Testament women whose faithfulness was integral to the unfolding actions of God. This sermon offers a powerful and moving portrayal of the life of one woman, who, through attending to God in moments of deepest despair discovered comfort and ultimately the blessing of God according to the cultural patterns of the period.

The family bustled about, a flurry of activity as they tried to prepare for the upcoming feast. Bags needed to be packed, the camels organised, sacrifices prepared. Everybody had something to do and no one minded doing it. The work would surely be worthwhile once they were enjoying the festivities at the Temple.

No one seemed to notice Hannah. She did her best to stay out of the way. Another tear ran quietly down her face as she thought about the festival. It was always the same, three times a year, since Elkanah had taken his second wife. Peninnah had given him children. Hannah felt that she had no right to complain. It was perfectly legal for him to take a second wife when she had failed so miserably to provide him with an heir. At least he hadn't abandoned her. He did love her but one had to be practical about these things. It seemed obvious to her that she must be cursed by God. But she couldn't understand why? She had obeyed the laws, attended the festivals, and served her husband well, but still she remained barren.

The time came for the journey to begin. Reluctantly she joined the entourage and allowed herself to be carried along by the joyful throng. Head down, dragging her feet, she didn't notice

Peninnah approaching until it was too late. A child was wriggling on her hip, another pulled at her cloak as she pranced along, full of her own self-importance. “All alone again, Hannah? No children to keep you company? Would you like to borrow one of mine, I have plenty to go around? But then, I wouldn’t want you touching them. No telling what you’ve been up to in order to earn God’s displeasure. Maybe if you were prettier my husband would actually want to lie with you. Maybe then you would finally bring honour to him. At least I know that you won’t be producing his first born, I’ve already done that...” She was merciless, incessant, Hannah tried to ignore her but the words sliced deep into her vulnerable heart.

Hannah received a merciful reprieve when one of the children insisted on their mother’s attention. The remainder of the walk was uneventful as she lost herself in the crowd. However, her dismay was evident when she realised that Penninah would recline beside her at the feast. The relentless attack soon wore Hannah down. As the food was served she began to weep. Sickened by the hatefulness of Penninah she was unable to eat.

Elkanah glanced across the room and saw Hannah’s distress. He took her aside and whispered gently. “Hannah, my love, what is it?” Sobbing, she refused to look him in the eye, ashamed of her inability to provide him with children. He knew the grief that she was facing without her words. “Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don’t you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?” His kindness, his love, was more than she could face and she ran from the feast.

[Hannah cries out to God. Move 1. Often we wait until we are in despair to take our deepest sorrow to God.]

Despair and grief drove her to do what she should have done many years before. She turned to God and poured out her sorrow, she humbly begged Him for a child and made a vow in His presence. The years of mourning and shame that she had suffered were presented to God as her lips silently moved and she swayed with the agony and relief of the moment. As she poured out her heart with much

weeping she heard a harsh voice rebuke her. “Woman, for how long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself?” Horrified that the priest, Eli, would think her capable of such disrespect she shook her head and wiped a hand across her eyes. “No, my lord, I would never act in such a disgraceful manner. I haven’t been drinking. I’m deeply distressed and I have been pouring out my soul to God.” His eyes softened as he heard her words. He realised the sincerity of her prayer and spoke gently to her, sending her on her way with the comfort of his blessing upon her.

Quietly she left the priest and returned to join her husband.

“For the first time in many years, Hannah felt at peace.” She thought about the reason for the change in her feelings. She didn’t know that God would grant her request in the way that she hoped for. Perhaps He would give her a son, perhaps He would not. Either way, Hannah knew that God had heard the deepest cries of her heart. She knew that He had listened. She knew that He cared and that He was capable of carrying her through her grief. Her only regret was that she hadn’t brought her anxiety to God sooner.

[Samuel is born. Move 2. God is faithful when we cry out to Him.]

A few months later Hannah again found herself weeping and crying out to God. She fell to her knees, head bowed, and thanked her Lord for the baby she now carried. The moment had come. Hannah slowly approached her husband. He smiled and drew her into his arms. She had been so different since the last feast. She had shared with him the prayer that she had prayed and the vow that she had made. Now his eyes began to dance as she whispered the news that he had waited so long to hear. One of the servants lost her balance and nearly fell as he let out a loud cry and twirled Hannah around. This was worth dancing over. His beautiful, gracious, godly wife would finally be blessed with a baby. God had heard her cries. God was indeed faithful. He had answered her prayer and He had answered in the way that they so deeply desired. Soon another child would be added to the family.

*[Hannah dedicates Samuel to God's service. Move 3.
Acknowledgement of God's faithfulness leads to a thankful heart.]*

Three years later, the family bustled about, a flurry of activity as they tried to prepare for the upcoming feast. Bags needed to be packed, the camels organised, sacrifices prepared. Everybody had something to do and no one minded doing it. The work would surely be worthwhile once they were enjoying the festivities at the Temple.

No one seemed to notice Hannah. She sat in a corner, cuddling her boy, Samuel. He was a delightful child. He was handsome and joyful. He wriggled and squirmed, anxious to play with his brothers and sisters, but she was reluctant to release him. The time had come for her to fulfil her vow.

She remembered now the words that she had prayed when she had begged God for a son. "Father, if only you will give me a son then I will dedicate him to your service for life. He will be set apart for you. If you bless me with a child, in gratitude I will hand him back to you." With determination, she stood and taking him by the hand, she began the journey back to Shiloh. Elkanah stood by her side as the sacrifices were presented to the priest. Head held high, smiling for the sake of her young son, Hannah hugged him and left him in the care of Eli. Samuel would spend his life in God's service, just as she had promised.

Hannah's heart was filled with gratitude. She began to pray. Her prayer was one of thanksgiving. Her faithful God had answered her prayers and restored her dignity by giving her the son that she had so longed for. She acknowledged His goodness and His presence in her life. She had remained faithful to God and He had remained faithful to her. Hannah's faithfulness in keeping her promise placed Samuel in the place that God had prepared for him.

Each year when she went to the feast, Hannah would make a little linen robe and take it to her son. She continued to love and support him as he ministered in the temple. The boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favour with the Lord and men.



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