

Community Transformation, Sunday Discussion - Week 1

Winchester Salvation Army Corps

William Booth's Theology of Redemption | Christian History Magazine - Excerpts

<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/william-booths-theology-of-redemption>

Sanctification

First, William Booth preached the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification. Basically, this doctrine taught that a person's redemption begins with justification by faith. From that moment, the believer begins to grow in God's grace until, by faith, he or she is filled with perfect love and realizes, in the words of Charles Wesley, "that full divine conformity to all my Saviour's righteous will." With this perfect love, the believer is freed from both the power of sin and the agony of constant sinning and is, thereby, both purified and empowered for the work of the kingdom. This view was distinct from both the monastic notion (perfection by separation from the world and by good works) and from the Reformed understanding (sanctification continues after justification but is not completed until death). Booth wanted to raise saints as well as convert sinners.

However, the Booths became convinced that God purified not only individuals, but groups as well, and increasingly after 1878 William called upon his Army, this "creation of the Holy Spirit," to be truly an Army of God. "Cast yourselves upon God," he exhorted his Salvationists in 1892. "Keep on watching and praying and believing and expecting for me, for yourselves, for the whole Army at home and abroad, for the mighty baptism of burning fire!" Only a holy people could do a holy work, and this special divine blessing upon the Army meant power to carry out the final redemptive purpose of God—the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.

The Kingdom of God

The Booths were **postmillennialists**; they believed the Army would usher in a thousand-year reign of Christianity in this world, a perfect society, after which Christ would return. William had a more fertile imagination than Catherine about this coming kingdom. Nevertheless, as desirous as he was for the full realization of this kingdom on earth, he held that such a kingdom was primarily spiritual and could not be created and sustained by human effort apart from God. He knew that many people who made no claim to God or Christianity hoped for some sort of millennium and occasionally even sought to fulfill such longing. But social, educational, or political endeavors apart from God were useless to Booth. In his Darkest England Scheme of 1890, he clearly stated that he was under no delusion "as to the possibility of inaugurating the Millennium by any social specific."

Booth was concerned to steer his theological course between two dangers. On the one hand, he wished to stay clear of perceiving the kingdom of God in strictly utopian dimensions that had no relation to people's struggle for daily existence. On the other hand, he believed the kingdom of God could be established finally only by religious means. Booth was aware of a potential pitfall of his theology, if it were improperly understood: the setting loose of The Salvation Army's social work from its theological moorings. Booth did not want his Army trusting in plans and programs that had no Christian foundation, in order to establish the kingdom.

In Booth's vision for the Millennium, that "good time coming," God would be present, and all people would acknowledge his presence. Personal righteousness would be practiced by people in every aspect of life, yielding righteous businesses, governments, and families. self-sacrificial love would prevail, as well as human happiness. The present miseries of people would be abolished, and people would be happy in the new world. Booth's theology required a resolution to the problem of evil, but it called more specifically to an end to human misery and suffering caused by such forces as the wickedness of parents, crime, vices, evil passions, drunkenness, poverty, hunger, disease, and the infliction caused by selfishness, greed, hatred, jealousies, envying, and revenge.

Salvation for "Both Worlds"

There was work to be done, however, before the complete realization of such a vision. The third aspect of this redemptive theology was what William Booth called, in an 1889 article, "Salvation for Both Worlds." The Booths always preached personal salvation by faith in Christ; that commitment never dimmed. Nevertheless, by 1889 William especially was convinced that salvation also had social dimensions. Redemption meant not only individual, personal, and spiritual salvation, but corporate, social, and physical salvation as well. And just as the message of personal salvation was offered to all, so the new message of social salvation should be universally announced. "As Christ came to call not saints but sinners to repentance, so the New Message of Temporal Salvation, of salvation from pinching poverty, from rags and misery, must be offered to all."

William had always been aware of the physical impoverishment of the people to whom he preached, but initially he saw no remedy. He could save their souls but not their bodies. His experiences with the poor, through the increasing social ministry of Salvationists, had encouraged him to broaden his theological horizons. He gradually came to accept "that the miseries from which I sought to save man in the next world were substantially the same as those from which I everywhere found him in suffering in this, and that they proceeded from the same cause—that is, from his alienation from, and his rebellion against, God and from his own disordered dispositions and appetites."

How William Booth's ideas on poverty continue to shape The Salvation Army today

by [Christopher Doughty](https://caringmagazine.org/how-william-booths-ideas-on-poverty-continue-to-shape-the-salvation-army-today/) <https://caringmagazine.org/how-william-booths-ideas-on-poverty-continue-to-shape-the-salvation-army-today/>

Passion born of beliefs

Booth's passion for assisting the lowest strata of society stemmed from a set of personal beliefs that gradually evolved over the course of his ministry. For one, he came to adopt the view that God's will isn't exclusively to prepare souls for the next life, but also to improve conditions and right injustices in this one—a role the established churches of his time had seemingly abandoned. "Why all this apparatus of temples and meeting-houses to save men from perdition in a world which is to come, while never a helping hand is stretched out to save them from the inferno of their present life?" he bemoans.

Another concept we find in the text is that of "soup, soap, salvation"—the idea that people cannot rationally comprehend or receive the gospel while experiencing the pangs of severe deprivation, which bears an uncanny resemblance to the fundamental premise of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, decades before that

pyramid was conceived in the 1940s. While Booth doesn't use this exact phrase, he does ask the question, "But what is the use of preaching the Gospel to men whose whole attention is concentrated upon a mad, desperate struggle to keep themselves alive?"

Finally, we see that Booth's conception of holistic ministry regards practical service to others as an intrinsically spiritual act. When asked whether the social activities of The Salvation Army detracted from the spiritual as part of an interview for the *War Cry* in 1893, he remarked, "I know what you mean; but in my estimation it is all The Salvation Army proper. We want to abolish these distinctions, and make it as religious to sell a Guernsey or feed a hungry man as it is to take up a collection in the barracks. It is all part of our business, which is to save the world body and soul, for time and for eternity!"

- "You cannot warm the hearts of people with God's love if they have an empty stomach and cold feet." ~ William Booth
- "Faith and works should travel side by side, step answering to step, like the legs of men walking. First faith, and then works; and then faith again, and then works again--until they can scarcely distinguish which is the one and which is the other." ~ William Booth
- "To get a man soundly saved it is not enough to put on him a pair of new breeches, to give him regular work, or even to give him a University education. These things are all outside a man, and if the inside remains unchanged you have wasted your labor. You must in some way or other graft upon the man's nature a new nature, which has in it the element of the Divine." ~ William Booth
- But what is the use of preaching the Gospel to men whose whole attention is concentrated upon a mad, desperate struggle to keep themselves alive? - William Booth

ORDERS AND REGULATIONS

FOR RESCUE HOMES

1892

CHAPTER I.

SALVATION PRINCIPLES.

Section I.—General Remarks.

In the course of our Salvation Army warfare, we cannot fail to discover that there are various groups of evil-doers for whom ordinary methods of assistance are practically useless, such as Thieves, Drunkards, Prostitutes, and all who are sunk so low as to be continually hovering on the borderland of gross and open sin, if not actually entangled in its meshes. For these, character being gone, and with it the means of earning an honest livelihood, special aid is required. Hence the necessity for Rescue Work.

In his book entitled 'Darkest England and the Way Out,' pp. 36 and 85, the General says:—

' To attempt to save the lost, we must accept no limitations to human brotherhood. As Christ came not to call the saints but sinners to repentance, so the new message of Temporal Salvation must be offered to all. . . . We who call ourselves by the name of Christ are not worthy to be His disciples until we have set an open door before the least and worst of those who are now apparently imprisoned for life in a horrible dungeon of misery and despair.'

There is no gainsaying the immensity of the problem. It is appalling enough to make us despair. Those who do not put their trust in man alone, but in One Who is Almighty, have no right to despair. To despair is to lose faith; to despair is to forget God. Without God we can do nothing in this frightful chaos of human misery; but with God we can do all things: and in the faith that He has made in His image all the children of men, we face even this hideous wreckage of humanity with a cheerful confidence that if we are but faithful to our own high calling He will not fail to open up a way of deliverance.”

Again, the General adds (“D.E.” Preface):—

My only hope for the permanent deliverance of mankind from misery, either in this world or the next, is the regeneration or remaking of the individual by the power of the Holy Ghost through faith in Jesus Christ. But, alas! with many that moral nerve which takes hold of the rope thrown for the rescue, and keeps its hold amidst all the resistances that have to be encountered, is wanting. It is gone. The general wreck has shattered and disorganized the whole man. Their vicious habits and destitute circumstances render it certain that, without some kind of extraordinary help, they must hunger and sin, and sin and hunger, until, having filled up the measure of their iniquities, the grim fingers of death will close upon them and terminate their wretchedness. The Rescue of the soul from the eternal consequences of sin is the chief object we have in view. But for the present consequences of sin, in their bearing upon this life, special agencies are needed to restore hope and the means of subsistence to these otherwise hopeless ones, and these our Rescue Work seeks to supply.

Salvation the Source of all Reformation.

1. This comes first and foremost, because without salvation the result will be mere outward reformation. Never can it be too strongly insisted upon that change of heart produces change of life; that a new heart always means a new life; and that this new birth is a Divine and not a human work. "Make the tree good and its fruit good." Our work is for Eternity. It is the reconciliation of men and women—through the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost, by means of human instrumentality—to the God Whose laws they have broken, and before Whose Judgment-Seat they must appear.
2. Therefore we cannot and ought not to be content with making the law-breakers law-keepers, the drunkards sober, the vicious and degraded outwardly respectable, the idle and useless good citizens; with restoring prodigals to their homes, and as regards this world, generally improving humanity. All this is good as far as it goes, but unless originating in the right source—Salvation—it stops short at the grave. When men and women are properly saved, they get right with God, and this must include the right with man. The greater of necessity includes the less.

Interpretations of the return of Christ

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1. The Parousia

The return of Christ is often referred to by the Greek term, parousia. This is usually translated as ‘coming’ but literally has a sense of ‘presence’ as opposed to ‘absence’. Throughout the centuries some parts of the Church have emphasised Christ’s return in glory, making it a priority in theology and worship. The Salvation Army has avoided speculation about details of the return of Christ.

Salvationists prefer to emphasise the Christian responsibility to live in a state of expectation and hope. We should be constantly open to the presence and judgment of God in Christ, and fully involved in the mission of God for the

salvation of the world.

2. The millennium

The millennium refers to the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth which is mentioned in Revelation 20:2-7.

Although explored at various times in Church history, it does not have universal acceptance among Christians, nor is there a common interpretation.

3. A-millennialism

Some Christians interpret the millennium symbolically to mean not a period of time as such, but Christ's reign on earth through his people. It is a symbol of perfection and completeness but has no implications of time. This is usually known as a-millennialism.

4. Post-millennialism

Post-millennialists teach that there will be a period of the Kingdom of God on earth, or a thousand years of 'power for the gospel' followed by the return of Christ. The implication is that this will be a period in which universal acknowledgement of Christ is pursued and established. Supporters suggest that this is implied by Matthew 28:19, 20 and by the notion of the triumph of the Church (Matthew 16:18). However, it is difficult to reconcile with verses which suggest times of persecution and unbelief before the end (Matthew 24:6-14; Luke 18:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12; Revelation 13) and with Jesus' warning that his return will be unexpected (Mark 13:32-37).

5. Pre-millennialism

In contrast, pre-millennialists teach that Christ will return to earth to reign for a thousand years before Satan's final overthrow. Although evil will still be present, it will be restrained and both humanity and creation will enjoy a time of blessing. However, this will be followed by a final battle in which Satan is defeated before the universal judgment and the inauguration of the new creation. The major source of this belief is Revelation 20 (but see also Isaiah 2:2-5; Zechariah 14: 9, 16-21) but interpretation is not straightforward and other meanings are possible.

6. Dispensationalism

Dispensationalists take the pre-millennial view further. They see the millennium as a further dispensation, or period in God's dealings with humanity. In their understanding, the coming of Christ will be preceded by the 'rapture' of the Church. This concerns the expectation that the believer will be taken up 'in the clouds' to meet Christ at the time of his return (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). The millennium itself will be the time of the literal fulfilment of the Old Testament promises to Israel.

The differing interpretations suggest that the Bible leaves us with the mystery of God and his purposes for us, which are finally beyond speculation. Our best response is to be silent before the mystery, confident in the good purposes of a loving God and in the redemption offered in Jesus Christ.