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William Booth is popularly known as a nineteenth-century English social reformer, but this aspect of his later ministry does not sufficiently explain him. To fully understand him and The Salvation Army, it is necessary to grasp his theology of redemption (much of which was shared by his wife, Catherine), and the elements that gave rise to it.

Shaping Forces

Three forces shaped the life, ministry, and thinking of the first General of The Salvation Army.

Wesleyan distinctives. First, William Booth was evangelical. His loyalties were, nevertheless, not only to the broad evangelical tradition of Victorian England that had crossed denominational lines, but also more specifically to Wesleyan distinctives.

Beginning with his early associations with the Wesleyans (under whose ministry he was converted in 1844, at age 15), and continuing throughout his life, William Booth had a great appreciation for John Wesley. "I worshipped everything that bore the name of Methodist," he wrote. "To me there was one God, and John Wesley was his prophet. I had devoured the story of his life. No human compositions seemed to me to be comparable to his writings, and to the hymns of his brother Charles, and all that was wanted, in my estimation, for the salvation of the world was the faithful carrying into practice of the letter and the spirit of his instructions."

Booth preached a doctrine of redemption that included not only salvation by grace, but also the distinctive Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification by grace. For this he had the examples of such people as American revivalist Charles Grandison Finney and American Methodists James Caughey and Phoebe Palmer. Booth likewise considered himself a worthy successor to John Wesley in principles of organization, and there is no question that Booth acquired organizational and administrative gifts.

Urban England. Booth developed his theology in urban England. He experienced poverty in his childhood, and he knew the insufferable misery and deprivation that were the dark side of the Industrial Revolution. After living in Nottingham for twenty years, he moved to London in 1849, and his theology took shape as he attempted to comprehend how he could reach the urban masses with the gospel. His ministry was finally

focused in 1865 as he and his wife of ten years founded The East London Christian Revival Union, the forerunner of The Salvation Army.

Ministerial associations. Lastly, Booth's theology was influenced by his various associations and tasks up to 1865. As an evangelical revivalistic preacher—from 1849 to 1861 with both the Wesleyans and with New Connexion Methodism, and from 1861 to 1865 in an independent ministry—Booth's theology was articulated in terms of personal conversion and personal sanctification. It was later, especially after the inception of The Salvation Army in 1878, that noticeable changes entered his theology. Booth continued to preach salvation and sanctification for the individual, but he broadened his doctrine of redemption to include corporate sanctification, social salvation, and even the redemption of the whole world with the establishment of the Millennium.

From these shaping forces emerged a theology. One word summarizes the theology of both William and Catherine Booth: redemption. That redemptive theology included three interwoven aspects: sanctification, the kingdom of God, and salvation.

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.

Called by whatever name—holiness, perfect love, the pure heart, the clean heart, baptism of the Holy Spirit, full salvation—sanctification was a second, definite work of grace in the believer, who could thereby be kept free from actual sin in his or her life (although there never would be an escape from the manifold temptations, trials, sufferings, and sorrows that are part of the fallen human condition). The Booths claimed sanctification as the "forefront of our doctrines," and in 1902 William wrote his definitive work on the subject, *Purity of Heart*.

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.

With the marriage of Catherine Mumford and William Booth in 1855 came the union of like minds and a noble partnership. Catherine was more theologically astute than William and was an equally gifted preacher. Likewise reared in the Wesleyan tradition, she also had an appreciation for John Wesley and embraced his teachings about sanctification. After her public ministry began in 1860, she preached the doctrine, defining holiness as “being saved from sin in act, in purpose, in thought.” She wrote in *The Highway of Our God*: “We are told over and over again that God wants His people to be pure, and purity in their hearts is the end and purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Eventually Catherine also understood sanctification as both personal and institutional. She not only shared William’s thinking about sanctification, but she helped to shape it as well.

The Kingdom of God

The Booths’ redemptive theology included a concept of the kingdom of God, the final triumph over all evil. Hoping for the ushering in of the kingdom gave purpose to the very existence of The Salvation Army, which the Booths and others were increasingly certain had been chosen by God as the chief agency to finally and fully establish such a kingdom. This theology of the kingdom also provided vision, direction, and ultimate hope for the work of social reformation (inaugurated in an organized fashion with the publication in October 1890 of William’s book *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, written with the able assistance of journalist W. T. Stead). A vision for a perfected world was part of what drew the General and his Army into social reform on a broad scale.

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.

Finally, the earth would be transformed. As a loyal British subject, Booth demonstrated national as well as theological fealty. In this new world, London would be the New Jerusalem, the capital of the millennial kingdom! "Oh London, that ought to be the New Jerusalem in this lower world," he wrote. And what might that New Jerusalem look like? The General imagined in an article entitled "The Millennium; or the Ultimate Triumph of Salvation Army Principles" that "First, we should have Hyde Park roofed in, with towers climbing toward the stars, as the WORLD'S GREAT GRAND CENTRAL TEMPLE. Only think what this would mean. And then, what demonstrations, what processions, what mighty assemblies, what grand reviews, what crowded streets, impassable with the joyful multitude marching to and fro."

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."

By the time of the publication of *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, The Salvation Army had already demonstrated both the willingness and the capability to engage in many social ministries. Booth's Salvationists began to recognize the complexity of their ministry, and there dawned an awareness in many

of them that it was not enough to preach the gospel to the poor, but that preaching had to be complemented by taking care of the physical needs of the poor to whom they preached.

The organized social work of The Salvation Army did not begin at the initiation of William Booth in East London; in 1883 Salvationists in Melbourne, Australia, established a halfway home for released prisoners. The following year a rescue home for prostitutes was opened at Hanbury Street, Whitechapel, in London at the instigation of a Salvationist named Mrs. Cottrill, and later a day care center was established in one of the “slum posts” of London. The crippling London dock strike of 1889 caused the Army to open a food and shelter center for the homeless in the West India Dock Road. Indeed, a multitude of social ministries sprang up in all places of the world where the Army operated. What was needed was organization of the many ministries of mercy, and by 1890 the Social Reform Wing of The Salvation Army had been established. Moreover, William was convinced of the theological justification for a doctrine of salvation that included both personal salvation and social salvation. With the writing of *In Darkest England and the Way Out* he committed his Army to a war on two fronts—the war for souls and the war for a rightly ordered society.

While Catherine helped to shape the first two aspects of redemptive theology—sanctification and the kingdom of God—it is impossible to assess completely her understanding of salvation as both personal and social. Her husband consulted her on the writing of *In Darkest England* and dedicated the book to her. However, Catherine died of cancer on October 4, 1890, and it remains a moot question of precisely how critical she would have been (since she was never one to demur from expressing her convictions) of the new dimension of salvation once she saw the practical implications of such a theology.

Theology in Three Acts

By 1890 the stage was set for a fully inaugurated redemptive theology to be played out in three acts, as it were.

In Act I, the theology of sanctification insured that not only were individuals made holy by God’s grace, but the Army was likewise sanctified—equipped and empowered to do the bidding of God.

The end of the play, Act III, was a glorious millennial kingdom established on earth by God’s holy people. Here was the final vision, the ultimate goal, toward which the Army and the church were marching. Such a vision kept the Army renewed in its motivation for social as well as spiritual ministry.

There remained still the middle act—salvation for both worlds. Preparatory to the final eschatological goal, and functioning as a living and continuing sign of its fulfilling, there had to be social salvation, which would complement soul saving. The holy people would finally and fully usher in the kingdom of God not only through the conversion of sinners and the equipping of saints, but also through the establishment of a justly ordered society. *In Darkest England and the Way Out* was, among other things, the vision of how to “prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.” For the Booths’ sanctified Army, the road to the New Heaven and the New Earth led right through darkest England. **CH**

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