

Holiness in the Traffic

The development of Salvationist experiential theology

Chapter 1 THE TRAFFIC OF INTERNAL DISCUSSION

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How the Army perceives itself to be a holiness movement

The latest version of the Army's Salvation Story:98 handbook of doctrine, *Salvation Story*, refers to 'holiness movements, including The Salvation Army'. That comment stirs the discussion that follows. This section, *Holiness in the Traffic*, is inspired by Commissioner Arthur Pitcher's eponymous book and the well-known SASB song, *Mid All The Traffic*.

The issues to be considered are: In what sense is the Army a holiness movement in terms of its teaching, testimony and practice? What have Salvationists understood by the terms 'sanctification' and 'holiness' and how is this expressed in contemporary teaching and testimony? Of course this all hangs on the possibility of defining what might be meant by the term 'holiness movement'.

In experiential terms the distinctive feature of the nineteenth century holiness movement was the emphasis on the 'second blessing'. In ecclesiological terms it was the interpretation of the priesthood of all believers which accommodated the possibility of female ministry, although there is a history of division over the issue. Murdoch:17 In missiological terms the distinctive feature was the close relationship between the message of Christ-like love and the call to social action. Murdoch:16

In *Who are the Evangelicals* Derek Tidball describes the experiential focus of the holiness movement's teaching in the nineteenth century.

It taught that in addition to conversion a secondary blessing, which came to be called baptism in the Holy Spirit, was needed to make one holy, and deal with inbred sin. Holiness came not through struggle but simply by trusting. Tidball:65

Tidball describes the influence that the American holiness teacher Phoebe Palmer had on William and Catherine Booth and others in the mid-19th century. The result of this was that 'The Salvation Army was to become a major holiness sect both in Britain and the United States.'

Palmer spent some years in London in the mid nineteenth century. She held Tuesday afternoon drawing room meetings at which her husband presided in only a nominal sense. It was in fact an opportunity for Palmer to teach Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification as understood in North American holiness circles. The Booths were deeply impressed by her teaching, and also by the fact that as a woman she exercised an almost unique if slightly covert ministry. Palmer also linked her holiness teaching with social action. Female ministry and social work – what Oswald Chambers later called 'holiness socialism' – became integral to the holiness movement as a whole and to The Salvation Army in particular.

The distinctive doctrinal position shared by traditional Wesleyans and mid-nineteenth century American revivalists was, as Norman H Murdoch puts it:

a two-step process of salvation - first, conversion as a remedy for basic human sinfulness, and, second, a perfecting and empowering experience that brought more godliness to human behaviour.

The second experience they termed entire sanctification, holiness, Christian perfection, or (in John Wesley's simple phrase) "perfect love". Murdoch:31

Referring to the brand of Wesleyan teaching imported from the USA, the Anglican academic Dr. Peter Toon has commented that,

the quest for "Christian perfection" has often been misunderstood and minimised through the presentation of "the second blessing" by which one enters into a state of perfect love and wholehearted commitment. Toon:110

Melvin Dieter places some of the responsibility for this on Phoebe Palmer's teaching.

The emphasis that such teaching placed upon the moment of entire consecration and upon the crisis of complete moral adjustment of relationship tended to focus sanctification wholly on that single point of wholehearted commitment and to divorce it from the gradual sanctification of the heart that began in regeneration and from the continuing growth in grace that follows the instant of death to self and perfection in love. Thus the moment of the death to self and the birth to love readily became an end in itself - a goal rather than the establishment of a dynamic new relationship of freedom and love in the hearts of believers as the Holy Spirit led them on from grace to grace in the will of God. Dieter:41

From its very beginning The Salvation Army has been committed to the doctrine of sanctification. William Booth's Methodist background, and the increasingly Arminian bias In 1873 The Christian Mission effectively closed the door on any Calvinist influence by resolving that 'no person shall be allowed to teach in The Christian Mission the doctrine of final Perseverance apart from perseverance in holiness' (Sandall:263) of the early Christian Mission made this almost inevitable. In *Salvation Soldiery* first published in 1880 William Booth wrote:

Holiness to the Lord is to us a fundamental truth; it stands in the front rank of our doctrines. We inscribe it on our banners. It is with us in no shape or form an open debatable question as to whether God can sanctify wholly, or whether Jesus does save his people from their sins. In the estimation of The Salvation Army that is settled for ever'

The current Orders and Regulations for Soldiers, published as *Chosen to be a Soldier*, makes the continuing connection with the historical identity of the Army as a holiness movement. Catherine Booth's teaching that the life and teaching of Jesus established a standard not only to be aimed at, but to be attained. The chapter on *Holiness of Heart and Life* declares the Army's conviction that God's plan of salvation is not confined to forgiveness and justification, 'The Army is both a revival and holiness movement.'

In the nascent Salvation Army the second blessing was firmly tied to the eradication of sin. At a Christian Mission conference in 1876 Railton and Garner successfully moved that:

the following definitions of the doctrines numbered 9 and 10 be printed and issued to all our members. That is to say -

We believe that after conversion there remain in the heart of a believer inclinations, evil or roots of bitterness, which unless overpowered by Divine Grace, produce actual sin, but that these evil tendencies can be entirely taken away by the Spirit of God, and the whole heart thus cleansed from everything contrary to the will of God, or entirely sanctified, will then produce the fruits of the Spirit only. And we believe that persons thus sanctified may by the power of God be kept unblameable and unreprouable before Him. Sandall vol. 1:264

The Salvation Army Act of 1980 has included the eleven articles unchanged from the 1878 Deed Poll. Railton's definition was never given legal status, but can be said to be a statement of Salvation Army orthodoxy on the doctrine of sanctification for the first seventy years of its existence.

Notwithstanding Phoebe Palmer's influence on the young Booths, it is not they who became regarded at the Army's prime exponents of holiness, but the American Samuel Logan Brengle.

In the early decades of the twentieth century Brengle was the Army's most prominent holiness teacher. He first met William Booth in 1886, a year after his own experience of sanctification. As a trainee minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church in Indiana, USA, he was well versed in the Wesleyan tradition, and open to the influences of the American holiness movement. His attitude to the 'second blessing' can be found in *Helps to Holiness*:

Before the converted person has gone very far he will find his patience mixed up with some degree of impatience, his kindness mixed with anger (which is of the heart and may not be seen of the world, but of which he is painfully conscious) his humility mixed with pride, his loyalty to Jesus mixed with a shame of the cross, and, in fact, the fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh, in greater or lesser degree are all mixed up together.

But this will be done away when he gets a clean heart, and it will take a second work of grace, preceded by a wholehearted consecration and as definite an act of faith as preceded his conversion, to get it. Brengle 1923:8

Brengle reckoned that the Apostles received 'the second blessing at Pentecost' For believers in later generations, according to Brengle, the life of holiness began at the moment of complete surrender in faith, a moment of crisis in which the grace and the Spirit of God were poured out upon the seeker. This crisis and the receiving of the Holy Spirit were not, in Brengle's estimation, either validated or necessarily accompanied by any great feeling.

Brengle's clear commitment to the concept of the second blessing did not preclude further infillings with the Holy Spirit, or as he refers to them 'renewings of power.'

What sets the 'second blessing' apart from such 'renewings'? Brengle identified the former with the blessing of a clean heart, that moral and spiritual change which touches the individual at the level of both will and motivation. 'This work is not to be a slow, evolutionary process, but an instantaneous work, wrought in the heart of the humble believer by the Holy Ghost'. It is sin being dealt with 'root and branch'.

According to his biographers Brengle would often ask 'Are the roots of bitterness gone?' Clark:115, and would observe that the clean heart and right spirit were the result of washing rather than growing, making the believer fit to live out his faith and his mission in the world.

Frederick Coutts served as the Army's eighth General from 1963 until 1969, and it was he who supervised the revision of the *Handbook of Doctrine* ready for publication in 1969.

That he fell short of some of the orthodoxies of his own time is expressed almost plaintively in his description of his reception as he went from place to place conducting holiness meetings:

I remembered my own silent bewilderment on Sunday mornings and purposed in my heart to speak of the experience of holiness as honestly and intelligently as God should help me. As with most resolves of that sort, the results were mixed. In every company there are those who are at ease with the familiar. To hear some well-remembered phrase is to be assured that the speaker is "sound". Old wine does not taste the same from a new bottle. Coutts F.1976:59

Coutts was in agreement with Brengle that the ultimate expression of holiness is 'Christ in you', and he concluded from this that 'so long as holiness is equated with growth in Christ-likeness, no seeker will go far astray.' If he was deemed 'unsound', it was because he shifted the emphasis from the crisis of sanctification to the outcome of growth.

The most obvious difference between Coutts and Brengle is that Coutts rejected the earlier root and branch interpretation of sanctification.

Coutts was among those who recommended to General Albert Orsborn in 1949 that Railton and Garner's misleading footnote, based on Hebrews 12: 14 and 15, should be expunged from the Articles of Faith. With it, went much of the language of 'the clean heart', 'complete victory' and 'full salvation'. Notwithstanding the attempts to redefine these expressions in the 1998 handbook, it would be true to say that until recently they had almost completely disappeared from Salvationist preaching and testimony.

As with Wesley, Coutts' doctrine arose from his observation of the human condition, his understanding of human experience in relation to God, and his reading of Scripture. He moved the Army's holiness agenda from 'experience' to 'outcome'.

Coutts' position on the question of a second blessing is equivocal at best. Crisis and process are all of a piece, but one senses he is more drawn to the idea of growth in holiness than instantaneous sanctification.

There can be no experience without a beginning.

In penitent faith I yield up a forgiven life. In faith believing I receive of his Spirit. That is the beginning, but not the end. This is the commencement of the life of holiness, but not its CROWN. Coutts F.1957:36

In *Life in the Spirit* Bramwell Tillsley fully subscribes to the idea that sanctification involves process-crisis-process.

Before the crisis of personal crucifixion, there must be a growing period in which we become aware of our need (a process). Tillsley:21

However there is a further process of maturation or growing into perfection, and in this perfection is the potential for growth.

Tillsley's 'new twist' was an almost charismatic insistence that this growth is not about 'getting more and more of God, but rather God getting more and more of us.' He employs the idea of *receiving* the Holy Spirit to best effect when he invites the hearer to 'open every chamber of the heart to God.' An expression frequently used by Bramwell Tillsley in his 'altar calls'. In this act of acknowledging, welcoming and allowing the Spirit freedom of access to ever greater portions of one's life is the hint that if holiness is the *receiving* of the Spirit, it may be an ongoing process or series of events rather than a 'crisis' or even, in Coutts words 'a beginning'. Tillsley focuses on the Holy Spirit as person, rather than source of power, and thereby he produces a relational model of sanctification rather than a generic second blessing.

What are some of the practical results of this experience? What is the evidence of the fullness of the Spirit? How can we know we are filled?

We face the danger of trying to make everyone fit into a mould by suggesting that, if we don't respond in a certain manner, we are not filled. But that is just not so. The Holy Spirit creates originals. Copies are unknown to him. God has a plan for every life, and the filling of the Spirit is to enable us to accomplish what he would have us do. Tillsley:22

Tillsley regards the 'second blessing' as subsidiary to the growing relationship.

Chick Yuill's book *We Need Saints* represents a broadening Salvationist view of holiness in the 1980's.

The holy life becomes a reality only insofar as we co-operate with the Spirit and reject our own sinful selfish desires. Yuill:25

This realisation of holiness then becomes a matter of continuance; continual co-operation with the Spirit, continuing renewal by the Spirit and continued growth in the Spirit.

Yuill takes Brengle to task 'by a careful examination of the relevant New Testament passages on baptism in the Holy Spirit.' The specific point that Yuill objects to relates to a passage in Brengle's *When the Holy Ghost is Come*:

Every child of God, every truly converted person, has the Holy Spirit in some gracious manner and measure; else he would not be a child of God.

It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin. It is the Holy Spirit who leads us to true repentance and confession. It is he who assures us of the father's favour.

But great and gracious as is this work, it is not the fiery Pentecostal baptism with the Holy Spirit which is promised: it is not the fullness of the Holy Ghost to which we are exhorted.

It is perfect of its kind, but it is preparatory to another and fuller work. Brengle quoted in Yuill:114

The point of Yuill's objection is that if Paul had exhorted his readers to be baptised in the Holy Spirit 'that would be like telling them to become Christians all over again.'

In *Never the Same Again* Shaw Clifton Colonel Shaw Clifton, a British Officer currently serving as Territorial Commander in Pakistan nevertheless defends the concept of a second blessing. He tends to follow the line taken by Frederick Coutts:

It is of vital importance to recognise that every process has a starting point.

So it is that the process of becoming holy must have a starting point. You say "But I started when I was saved". That is true. Nevertheless, it has been, and is, the experience of the vast majority of Christians that their express and conscious desire to make a clear-cut, definite start toward the holy life has arisen subsequent to being saved.

So widespread has this been that some have called this a "second blessing". The Officer September 1997:7

We will return to the phrase 'the vast majority of Christians' in a later chapter. Nevertheless, what Clifton is saying represents the widely accepted Salvationist orthodoxy for much of the movement's history.

As for the 'second blessing':

This is nothing but a convenient term for recognising that most Christians seem to need time, after being saved, to realise just how far-reaching a thing their new commitment is. Those who speak of a "second blessing" do not mean to imply that what God did for them when they were saved was somehow inadequate and in need of enhancement. They simply use the phrase in a natural way to

express the sudden post-conversion awakening to the lovely possibilities for pure living and ongoing victory over temptation that Jesus offers us. *The Officer* September 1997:6

As with Brengle and Coutts he avers that 'holiness is Christ, Christ in you.' In terms of crisis and process he is certainly with Coutts: 'Holiness is both process and a crisis on the simple ground that every process must have a moment when it is begun. There is, in fact, little to debate.'

However, Clifton is probably closer to Brengle than Coutts when he sums up the 'possibility of pragmatic holiness in three pithy sentences' from Bramwell Tripp:

To say 'I must sin' is to deny my Saviour.

To say 'I cannot sin' is to deceive myself.

To say 'I need not sin' is to declare my faith in divine power! Commissioner Bramwell Tripp, Territorial Commander USA Eastern in the 1970's

John Larsson's observations have led him to a completely different conclusion. In lectures to delegates at the International College for Officers he posed the question 'Why a second blessing?' Why not a third, or fourth, or a fifteenth?

In effect Larsson comes to the question of a second blessing by way of the *crisis or process* debate. Noting that 'until 1969 the edition the *Handbook of Doctrine* devoted about 7,000 words to the crisis experience and only about 200 to the process' and that thereafter the proportions are reversed, Larsson gives due credit to Frederick Coutts for the change in emphasis.

However, Larsson's thesis in *Spiritual Breakthrough* seems to be that for many people the 'crisis' is actually a moment of intense religious experience which may or may not have its outcome in the long-term effects of 'sanctification' in the Wesleyan sense. Nevertheless for many people such experience fits into a pattern with which other believers can readily identify.

Larsson also asks the pertinent question as to whether the Wesleyan 'blessing of sanctification' and the charismatic 'Baptism of the Spirit' may actually be windows into the same truth, with a common vocabulary in expressions such as 'liberty', 'infilling', and 'release'. As Larsson concludes:

The way through would seem to be to consider these (post-conversion) experiences as completing in experience the fullness of the experience of "new birth", of which the Scriptures speak in great detail using many and varied metaphors'

If for any reason we have failed to have been filled at the heavenly banquet, we must come again - and if needs be, again and again. Larsson:85

If one were to measure the breadth of the discussion in the past thirty years, it would encompass Coutts and Larsson at its fairly unextreme ends. Chick Yuill and others have done a good job of setting out the archaeology of the Army's holiness teaching, but John Larsson's attempt to draw on both charismatic and traditional sources of testimony marks an outer limit beyond which Army writers seemed loath to go until the rise of 'third wave' Salvationism in the 1990's.

So how does all this debate impact on the worship and everyday life of Salvationists if at all?

The evidence of the song book is that the Army is still a holiness movement, but one whose perceptions have undergone change which has produced a more subtle interpretation of what many see as the Army's most radical article of faith.

Much of the Army's hymnody centres on the challenge of holiness, the cleansing power of Christ, the death of self, consecration to the service of God and purity of heart. Despite the steady exclusion of many of the previously cherished songs of Charles Wesley from successive editions of the Song Book, there remains a strong emphasis on sanctification, but with an increasing interest in the person and work of the Holy Spirit balancing the dominant theme of the atoning work of Jesus as the source of sanctifying power.

The 'second blessing', 'instantaneous sanctification' and 'eradication of the sinful nature' has been replaced in the song book by an altogether less experience-centred theology and a more objective appreciation of the holiness of God. The desired outcome of the work of the Spirit is the Christ-like life. This shift in emphasis may simply be the sign of a maturing theology expressing itself with less hyperbole than the primitive movement might have employed. On the other hand it may signify a more homogenous approach to religion, the product of an Army that is coming to terms with having become a church.

A major problem for the Army as a holiness movement is the relative rarity of people who are able to teach or preach the doctrine in a way that is accessible to Salvationist congregations. The word accessible is here applied in two senses: teaching that is coherent and can be easily understood; and teaching that raises within the hearer the hope or expectation that 'there is something here that God wants me to have, and it can be mine by faith.'

Whilst it is not always possible to make sense of religious experience because by its nature it involves encounter with the transcendent, it must be possible to teach an essentially experiential doctrine that is within reach of the hearer. For example, the debate over the meaning of perfection has largely been shaped by the problems the concept raises for human understanding, and the possibility or impossibility of perfection in relation to the human condition. Any teaching on holiness has to take account of the human condition as well as the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

The relative absence of contemporary testimony, whether expressed in an equivalent to the previous 'Holiness Enjoyed' selection of songs, or in the Army press, or in the public testimony of Salvationists in their meetings, must be a cause for concern to a movement with a strong holiness tradition. If Wesley was drawn to the doctrine of entire sanctification by observing the saintly lives and experience of others, then it must be concluded that absence of such evidence undermines the theological and experiential foundations of the doctrine. It would be difficult to conceive of a holiness movement without a holiness testimony. 'The privilege of all believers' becomes a contradiction when 'few, if any, believers' are willing to lay public claim to it. Could it be that the antique language that is so often used to express the doctrine, or the fear of setting oneself up as 'holier than others,' could be factors in this?

There is another possibility altogether. That is the clear move away from the commodification of spiritual experience. The question 'What is holiness, and have you got it?' that used to appear in UK candidates application forms would probably mystify today's young people. Indeed they are probably more likely to speak of 'becoming a Christian' or 'coming to faith' than 'getting saved.' The language of 'getting' may well have characterised holiness and renewal movements from Wesley, to Pentecostalism and Charismatic renewal to the phenomena such as the Toronto blessing, but I would suggest it is remarkable for its absence in contemporary evangelical Christianity because we have become more relational in our understanding of God. As Tillsley would say, 'you can't get more of a person.'

A third possibility is that we live in an age that puts more value on authenticity than on abstract ideas. The new holiness might well be measured by 'being real' rather than the ability to articulate one's

testimony to a spiritual transaction that is shared in common with others. This was where Wesley began, with people whose lives were an authentic testimony in themselves.

The holiness table may still adorn halls and citadels, but it is seldom referred to in relation to 'the blessing of sanctification' or any other religious experience. The revival of interest in love feasts and fellowship meals occasioned by the Spiritual Life Commission has yet to be consolidated in Army practice. The 'holiness meeting' is fast disappearing from the diet of Army worship. Many of these changes could be put down to the passage of time and changes in language, some of it to the development of a less particular theology, a more objective approach to worship, and the broadening theological agenda of Salvationists themselves as they come into greater contact with the wider church.

The rise of a prominent charismatic constituency is probably due more to external influence rather than internal renewal. Few Army leaders have officially recognised, encouraged or sought to validate the charismatic constituency as a leading influence for renewal or, as some might claim, the heirs of the Army's 'radical' holiness tradition.

However, many would happily acknowledge the influence of the Roots Convention, which could itself fit neatly into the category that R.T. Kendal described as 'the fourth wave.' i.e. the coming together of mildly charismatic worship styles and content with conservative evangelical preaching and teaching.

In terms of the Army's heritage, theology, published teaching, worship and practice, the indications are that the Army is still fundamentally a movement committed to holy living in the power of the Spirit of God, and hence a holiness movement. In terms of written or oral testimony and public preaching there is less evidence to affirm or deny the Army's position.

However, there are a number of issues that hang upon the Army rediscovering its emphasis on holiness. These include the question of the Army's identity which includes its theological distinctives; the danger presented by a loss of focus in the Army's worship, particularly in the content and function of believers' meetings; and the impact of the loss of the holiness motif on the Army's mission as a body of believers sanctified by God and motivated by love.