

Thoughts On The State Of Holiness In The Salvation Army

Earlier in this decade at a congress in USW (now Cadet) Erin Wikle conducted a survey of delegates (you can read the whole thing in JAC81 - Holiness and Other Pertinent Matters by Erin Wikle - <http://www.armybarmy.com/JAC/article3-81.html>). "Of the 160 delegates who participated in an anonymous survey regarding personal understanding of holiness and discipleship, the following were represented: 26% Corps Officers, 11% DHQ/THQ/ARC Command Officers, 53% Soldiers, 3% Adherents, 5% Non-Soldiers, and 2% Non-Specified Participants spanning the age range of 14-49+." With half a decade separation and the perspective that can accompany, we're going to take a run at some of the results of the survey (and a similar survey) and throw out some thoughts...

3% claimed they did not really have a solid understanding of what a "holiness movement" is.

We're a little surprised this number is so low. What IS a holiness movement?

Wikipedia has a lengthy explanation of it at:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holiness_movement

Google spews out 6.24 million links to the inquiry 'what is holiness movement'. But 97% claim to have a solid understanding of what it means for The Salvation Army to be part of the holiness movement. This is encouraging (maybe sales of titles like THE UPRISING, BOSTON COMMON, HOLINESS INCORPORATED, and HOLY! are better than we thought!)

71% truly believe The Salvation Army strives to help individuals achieve "Christian perfection" as expressed and practised through its mission by aid of the Holy Spirit.

Again, this is encouraging. There are some strong expressions here: 'truly believe' connotes conviction; 'strives' connotes intense effort; 'Christian perfection' is no watered-down version of warm fuzzies that often passes these days for holiness; 'aid of the Holy Spirit' puts the focus on the source of our holiness. And still, seven of ten people are convinced that we The Salvation Army exert intense effort in combination with the Holy Spirit to help people experience true holiness. Hallelujah.

The three in ten who don't? Well, this is less surprising. There are probably corps that don't emphasise holiness, meetings that don't promote it, leaders who don't model it. So 30% is understandable.

24% do not believe The Salvation Army of today is representative of its founding position as a holiness movement.

¾ of people surveyed believe that the Army today represents our primitive holiness position and emphasis. ¾ figure we line up in the tradition of Catherine Booth, William Booth, George Scott Railton, Samuel Logan Brengle, T Henry Howard, Booth-Tucker and the rest in unabashedly Wesleyan holiness, promoting instantaneous, expected, supernatural entire sanctification for all believers, now, with an emphasis on the Crisis of the 'processCrisisprocess' continuum (as opposed to the later understanding through Coutts of 'ProcesscrisisProcess' – though, please note, pCp isn't that far different from PcP).

Is it fair to suggest from these numbers that Brengle has come back in the simplistic Brengle v Coutts holiness debate to a point of dominant thought in The Salvation Army? (noting the small survey size)?

79% believe they have been adequately raised up to understand the concept of holiness.

Nearly 4/5 of respondents are satisfied with holiness teaching they have received. Wow. Impressive. This is a higher response than expected. Why?

A few possibilities:

a- small sample size?

b- survey took place at a congress: i. keen salvos would attend such a gathering; ii. they'd be enthusiastic due to the crowds and events?

c- the territory surveyed seems statistically to be excelling; maybe good holiness teaching is a reason for the success?

d- people don't really understand biblical holiness but assume that they do and so figure they've been adequately taught it?

We believe that most weekly holiness meetings no longer teach holiness weekly and that the occasions on which holiness IS taught it may as likely be a non-salvo understanding of it than Coutts OR Brengle (and that on occasions on which salvo holiness is taught it is more likely Coutts than Brengle). Our premise could be wrong. But if we're right, then option 'd' above is a scary possibility.

We believe that most Salvationists do not learn holiness on salvo podcasts or conferences or magazines.

We believe that most Salvationists do not learn holiness from salvo books, even though a large number of salvo holiness books exist, both old and new. We believe this because of the sales numbers of the newer books and because of the general ignorance of the older books we encounter (we know this is purely anecdotal). So, salvo books are not a key source of holiness teaching for Salvationists. That leads us to option 'd' above...

If 'd' represents reality, what is the solution? We'd say that salvo holiness teaching, holiness reading, holiness conversations, holiness prayer, holiness testimonies, holiness challenges (invitations/pitches) and an all-'round focus on holiness would help!

93% claim the ministry of The Salvation Army has helped cultivate within them a desire to live a more holy life.

Praise the Lord. Now, we're not sure 'a more holy life' clarifies things. 'More or less' holy is a bit like 'more or less pregnant'. There isn't 'more or less', there is pregnant or not pregnant.

But we guess that 'more holy' in terms of progressive sanctification works (SA terms start with 'initial sanctification' at your conversion and run through 'entire sanctification' at the point you become holy).

And nearly all respondents figure the Army helps cultivate a holy desire. This is encouraging news.

And for the doubters out there (the slang is 'haters' but it is far too strong for us to use), this is an American survey. A lot of salvos outside the States have traditionally looked down on the Army there as a solely social phenomenon. We've argued consistently against such delusion, pointing to six-digit totals of first time seekers of salvation recorded EVERY YEAR in that country, to the officers raised up (the three biggest training colleges in the world are in the USA), in the spiritual influence of Americans on the rest of the Army (off the top, think of the biggest selling SA author of our generation, Henry Gariepy; think of the first soldier on the International Doctrine Council, Roger Green; think of spiritual writers from Agnew to Pepper to Needham to Chesham to Brengle; think of the consistently conservative theological position in a sea of changing winds of doctrine; think of the spiritual life commission commissioned by Rader, etc.). And now, on top of all of this, the survey points to the role of The Salvation Army in cultivating holy desire in American salvos.

When the Army's holiness doctrine was presented in modified terminology (I believe that it is a privilege to be wholly sanctified, and that my whole being (spirit, soul, and body) can be sinless before Jesus Christ returns):

80% claimed this was true.

17% claimed this was false.

3% did not offer a response.

Of particularly interesting note...

9% of those Officers surveyed do not believe in the Holiness Doctrine of The Salvation Army

This one's a little tricky because the 'modified terminology' in place of 1 Thessalonians 5:23's and the official doctrine's 'blameless' is the word 'sinless'. 'Sinless' is one of the

battlefield words historically that we've concluded is no longer helpful to use or defend (like other words and phrases – 'baptised in/by/with the Spirit' being one notable example).

Our suggested alternative is 'sin-free'. But the problem with 'sinless' isn't really solved with our solution. The problem surrounds Wesley's understanding of 'sin properly so-called', which is a voluntary transgression of a known law of God. 'Sinless' or 'sin-free' works in this context. But if we include 'sin improperly so-called' – all those other sins of which we are guilty – then 'sinless' and 'sin-free' aren't accurate.

And so, the 9% of officers who claimed this was false could be reacting to the 'sinless' word, which, without a Wesleyan framework, is inaccurate, and, even within a Wesleyan perspective, is beyond both 1 Thessalonians' and doctrine 10's 'blameless'.

What makes the result even more interesting is that even WITH the tricky terminology four out of five respondents believe the doctrine! 80% believe that we can be wholly sanctified before Jesus returns!

Do you believe that we can be wholly sanctified before Jesus returns?

Are you yet?

If not, why not now?

62% claim they have been/are being disciplined by a more spiritually mature believer and member of The Salvation Army

35% claimed they have not been/are not being disciplined by a more spiritually mature believer and member of The Salvation Army

2% did not offer a response.

Again, that 3/5ths of respondents indicate that they are being disciplined within The Salvation Army is very encouraging.

That said, it is almost too optimistic to believe at face value! We'll tackle this point a few lines down along with the next question and responses, but before we do, are you part of the 3/5ths being disciplined or the 2/5ths not?

11% claim they do not actually know what "being disciplined" really means

86% claim they do understand that "being disciplined" means

3% did not offer a response.

Only 1/10 indicate that they don't know what 'being disciplined' means. This is good. That said, it would be very interesting to have some more information. We'd like to see responses to a multiple choice question that ran something like this:

Which of these sentences define 'being disciplined'?

- a- I have a veteran soldier at my corps who I look up to and who influences me by his/her example.
- b- I listen to our corps officer preach on Sundays and teach our Bible Study on Wednesday nights.
- c- I'm in an accountable relationship with a veteran soldier who is intentional replicating his/her spiritual disciplines and character in me.
- d- I took the senior soldier preparation course at my corps and am active in various sections (Sunday School, Songsters, Home League) weekly.

We're afraid that the 3 out of 5 indicating that they are being disciplined might identify with answers a, b or d their experience and describe THAT as being disciplined. We're suspicious that the nearly 9 out of 10 of respondents who know what it means to be disciplined also understand it to be a, b, or d.

Of particularly interesting note...

36% of those Officers surveyed claimed they have never been disciplined

OUCH. More than 1/3 of officers have never been disciplined (in this survey).
Scandalous.

A few quick comments:

We wonder why we don't advance in the salvation war as we read about in the book of Acts or in the early Salvation Army or as we hope and expect. Only 2/3 of our leaders have been disciplined – that's one reason. The apostolic principle (think Peter at the Gate called Beautiful without silver and gold but with the power to heal) is that you cannot give what you do not have. If you aren't a disciple, then, you cannot make disciples. You replicate what you are. So 1/3 of our leaders are not making disciples. God help the soldiers, recruits, converts (if there are any), and sinners in the districts to which these undisciplined officers are appointed.

OFFICER TRAINING! Yes, officer training has to wear this scandal around its neck. Sure, you can point to the corps and the corps officers from which cadets come and say that they should all be disciplined before college – I totally agree. But we've seen from the survey that 1/3 of the corps are led by NON-disciples so we can't expect their cadets to be disciplined. The training system provides TWO YEARS for cadets to be prepared, and a lot of them need discipling. Whatever else is being taught at the training college is rendered much less useful and powerful if the cadets don't leave as disciples and disciple-makers. God help the training principals to sort out this travesty.

While we're encouraged generally (excepting the NON-disciplined officers) by the survey results, we're a little suspicious about the content of the holiness and discipleship responses. We advocate strong teaching on salvo holiness and discipleship throughout The Salvation Army (and, WE'RE The Salvation Army, folks – we can't wait for HQs and publications and periodicals and curricula to respond – let's do it ourselves).

Another Perspective

Around the same time a different territory performed considerable research was done through the territory. Here are some outtakes:

- About a quarter of the officers are estimated to have a genuine experience of holiness.
- that's quite low for a holiness movement. So, maybe we're NOT a holiness movement anymore? (we have blogged on this, including here - July 31: http://armybarmyblog.blogspot.ca/2012_07_01_archive.html#5415398292250766322).
- Or maybe we are not training our leaders effectively (we have suggestions, including the following leadership books – PROVERBIAL LEADERSHIP with Commissioner Harris, A FIELD FOR EXPLOITS with General Burrows, HIGH COUNSEL with Commissioner Noland, LEADING THE WAR with Commissioner Knaggs, CHARGE! With Commissioner Noland...) – you cannot give what you do not have.
- Or maybe the enemy is deceiving officers that to testify to a genuine experience of holiness is pride, which is sin and which in and of itself kills the experience to which they were testifying!
- Or maybe it is a combination of all of these factors. This is what we guess...

About 30% of local officers evidence fruit of the Spirit.

Again, this is terribly low – embarrassing, in fact. God help us. It suggests that most LOs are struggling to serve out of their own discipline and energy and ability. What is not of the Spirit is of the flesh. So we're looking at the strong majority of officers and local officers leading and serving in the flesh. What does that compose? A flesh army.

Our buddy Curtis coined a term that hasn't seemed to catch on (yet?) – to 'flesh out'. That is when we manifest in the flesh instead of the Spirit. It is fair to say from the results that the modus operandi of this territory is 'fleshing out'.

That said, if only a quarter of officers testify to being holy, and one understanding of holiness is being filled with the Spirit, it only follows that just about that number (30% v 25%) evidence Holy Spirit in their lives...

About a quarter of all Salvationists (includes officers, local officers, and senior soldiers, in this research) tithe.

We know of corps at which $\frac{3}{4}$ of this territory's soldiery (including officers) don't qualify to be soldiers. Well, in the spirit of the whole thing, they don't qualify to soldier at ANY CORPS IN THE WORLD if they aren't tithing. But we know some that actually apply this and a higher standard than this – praise God.

Why don't they tithe?

- lack of teaching. Lots of leaders are afraid to teach on money, but it is important – your cartridge is an excellent spiritual barometer).

- bad teaching. This comes back to our old soap box about leaders learning too much from outside the Army and not enough from within. General William Booth sets the standard for soldiers in RELIGION FOR EVERY DAY, vol.1. 1987, p92. “You might work out this rule on a graduated scale, beginning at the bottom with a tenth, and going on increasing as God increases... From a tenth you can rise to an eighth, and then to a fifth, and a fourth, and even further. Make His glory your joy, your conscience, your guide, and the Salvation of men, for time and eternity, the supreme object for which you live and trade and do everything else, and you will not go astray on this subject” (Booth, p95).

The problem is that most leaders don't KNOW this and so they teach something else.

- Bad example. Leaders don't bother tithing so they don't teach others. Again, as Booth notes above, tithing is the bare minimum for soldiers, but it is at least a place to start. This is either straight-up disobedience or spiritual complacency.

- Spirit of poverty. Lots of salvos individually pick up a spirit of poverty that has some sway over the movement in some parts of the world. The deception from the enemy is anticipated – ‘you are the down and out. You can't afford to give money. You can barely pay the bills. You need your money for food and clothes and... God is meant to give money TO YOU. Tithing is for those who are rich...’ etc.

- Sense of entitlement. This is a territorial spirit in some parts of the Army. Corps and the Officer Corps are rife with it in some places. It is a twist on generosity. The Salvation Army generously invested in new corps and poorer corps. Praise God. But over time some of those corps have come to a place of expectation of that generosity. They don't bother to give themselves because ‘the Army’ will pay. Rather than generosity, it is now expected, it is seen as an obligation of the Army.

And this goes for a lot of officers, too, financially and in other ways, too. Insidious.

- They're unhappy. God loves a cheerful giver. And, the Army traditionally has been known for its joy. But lack of tithing is a sign of lack of joy / cheerfulness / happiness.

What's the solution? Well, holiness is the solution to every problem (note that the tithing proportion is similar to the holiness proportion of the troops). But example, teaching, accountability, and deliverance from the spirits of poverty and entitlement will also help.

Half of the corps have a consistent, systematic discipleship programme.

So, of course, half of the corps lack a consistent, systematic discipleship programme. If you happen to soldier at an odd-numbered corps, too bad for you. You'll have to sort out your own discipleship somewhere else. Or, you'll not be discipled (see the stats above from America).

The drag here (well, it is that half our people don't even have ACCESS to a consistent discipleship programme in their corps in this territory) is that The Salvation Army has a great discipleship programme from child to adult all ready to go. We just have to apply it. But that takes a bit of work. And it is easier to just enroll people in a uniform and leave it at that. And discipleship is often messy. And it is easier to show up for band practice or Bible study or home league or some other 'club-like' activity and kid ourselves that we're fighting a war.

Solution? Apply the Army discipleship programmes (e.g. junior soldiers; corps cadets; etc.). And where you are right now, start or join an Infinitum hub – [infinitumlife.com](http://www.infinitumlife.com) (and read a whole JAC issue dedicated to it:

http://www.armybarmy.com/pdf/JAC_Issue_105.pdf).